PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY MEDIA: THREE CASE STUDIES OF THAI COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
the Scripps College of Communication of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2007
This dissertation titled

PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY MEDIA: THREE CASE STUDIES OF THAI COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS

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This dissertation explored practices of participatory communication in three case studies of Thailand’s community radio stations (CRS) and investigated the dynamic relationships between CRSs and their communities. It articulated the theoretical framework of participatory community media developed from the concepts of community media and participatory communication. In Thailand, community radio was categorized differently from mainstream radio because of two features—community ownership and participatory communication practices. Essentially, community ownership made these stations responsive to community demands that differed from station to station due to their varied social contexts and cultural boundaries.

Based on ethnographic methods, which included sixty-four qualitative interviews and participant observation during eight weeks of fieldwork, this study analyzed three Thai CRSs—Doilangtham CRS in the north, Khon Thaiso CRS in the northeast, and Pattani CRS in the south.

This study found public access to CRSs is most assured when local languages are used, physical location is convenient, content is appropriate, and feedback mechanisms are in place. Of particular importance, cell phones played a key role in connecting audiences to the station and vice versa. CRSs used personal relationships to recruit
volunteers. However, using personal contacts for recruitment also caused problems such as contests for power control, factionalism, and disagreements about compensation.

Finally, self-management became an issue in each CRS. Transparency and a shortage of volunteers were common problems. These CRSs were operated by amateurs and because they were amateur broadcasters, the stations suffered from many problems that conventional radio stations would not have. CRSs might have wonderful prospects for community involvement but there was no certainty that they could be realized unless station operators have skills necessary to carry out broadcasting in a professional manner.

Approved:

Drew McDaniel
Professor of Telecommunications
To my family
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is no way to thank all the people who have helped me along the way to this point. First, I would like to thank Phatcharee Jumpa and all the people at Prince of Songkla University where I began my teaching. I must also show my gratitude to the media scholars and activists in Thailand, who advised me and pioneered the country’s community radio stations. And, I would like to acknowledge the wonderful people at the Doilangtham Community Radio Station, the Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station, and especially the Pattani Community Radio Station, who put the idea of community radio into action.

I would like to express my appreciation to Karla Schneider, Assistant Director of the Ohio University Center for International Studies, and the Southeast Asian Studies Program for awarding me a graduate studies grant to help me begin my doctoral studies at Ohio University and for a research grant that helped me carry out my preliminary study. I also would like to thank the Ohio University School of Telecommunications for awarding me a graduate studies grant that allowed me to finish my doctoral studies and for awarding me a research grant to carry out my major fieldwork in Thailand.

High on the list of those I would like to thank are my close friends who supported and cared for me as I carried out my work here—thank you Fernando and Erica. And Micah and Jennifer at the Ohio University’s Student Writing Center, for carefully reading my Thai accented writing.
Prof. David Mould, Prof. Robert Stewart, and Prof. Judith Millesen, for shaping the most basic elements of my dissertation, deserve my gratitude.

Prof. Drew McDaniel, my advisor, helped me from the moment I began my studies in the Ohio University’s School of Telecommunications. His patience, persistence, kindness, and wisdom have sustained me as I struggled toward my goal. Words cannot express the appreciation I feel for all he has done for me and continues to do for other students in his care. He is truly a mentor and a teacher.

Of course my family gave me my start. Their love and support has sustained me through the challenging and rewarding times of my studies here. Telecommunications has been the theme in my many phone calls during which they reassured and comforted me. All that I have accomplished, I have accomplished with them. And they must feel my gratefulness.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .........................................................................................................................................................3  
DEDICATION .......................................................................................................................................................5  
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .........................................................................................................................................6  
LIST OF FIGURES ...............................................................................................................................................11  

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................................12  
  HISTORY OF THAILAND’S COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS .................................................................15  
  REVIEW OF LITERATURE .............................................................................................................................27  
    The community in community radio stations .......................................................................................27  
    The concept of community ......................................................................................................................27  
    Community radio stations around the world .........................................................................................29  
    An exploratory study on community radio .........................................................................................30  
  PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY MEDIA .....................................................................................................32  
    The concept of community media .........................................................................................................32  
    Participatory communication ...............................................................................................................33  
  STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS ....................................................................40  
  DISSERTATION OUTLINE ...........................................................................................................................41  

## CHAPTER 2 THE PRELIMINARY STUDY: AN AUDIENCE SURVEY .......................................................44  
  INTRODUCTION ..............................................................................................................................................44  
  THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND JUSTIFICATIONS FOR THE PRELIMINARY RESEARCH ..................44  
  UNITS OF STUDY ..........................................................................................................................................46  
  SELECTING THE SITES .................................................................................................................................47  
  METHODOLOGY ..........................................................................................................................................48  
  FIELDWORK ..................................................................................................................................................49  
    Fieldwork at Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station .........................................................................49  
    Fieldwork at Khlong Toey Community Radio Station ........................................................................53  
    Fieldwork at Doilangtham Community Radio Station ......................................................................56  
    Fieldwork at Pattani Community Radio Station ................................................................................58  
    Fieldwork at Baanjumrung Community Radio Station ....................................................................60  
  THE FINDINGS ..............................................................................................................................................61  
    The respondent profiles ..........................................................................................................................63  
    Satisfaction with a community radio station .......................................................................................63  
    Functions of a community radio station ...............................................................................................65  
    The prediction of audience involvement in a community radio station .............................................68  
  DISCUSSION ................................................................................................................................................69  
  TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE: THREE MAJOR ADJUSTMENTS ..............................................................72  
    The first adjustment: The sample selection criteria .............................................................................74  
    The second adjustment: The research methods ....................................................................................76  
    The third adjustment: The research participants .................................................................................77  

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .......................................................................................................................80  
  INTRODUCTION ..............................................................................................................................................80  
  PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION .......................................................................................................................80  
    Philosophy and rationale .......................................................................................................................81  
    Challenges ..............................................................................................................................................82  
  QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING ....................................................................................................................84  
    Philosophy and rationale .......................................................................................................................85
CHAPTER 5 DOILANGTHAM COMMUNITY RADIO STATION .................................................144

INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................144
SRITA SUB-DISTRICT AND LAND REFORM PROBLEMS ..................................................146
AN OVERVIEW ................................................................................................................150
PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN DOILANGTHAM COMMUNITY RADIO STATION .........152
Access ..............................................................................................................................153
  Khom Mueang language: The main broadcasting language. ........................................154
Location: The connection between Buddhism and a community radio station ...............154
Radio content: Adjustment to survive ............................................................................156
Feedback mechanism: A comment box and cell phone technology ..........................163
Dedication messages: The use of pseudonyms and listening networks ......................165
Participation ....................................................................................................................168
  Personal persuasion, radio production workshops, and volunteer recruitment ..........169
Radio programming: Active community involvement ...............................................172
Self-management ..........................................................................................................175
Structure and rules .......................................................................................................176
Volunteer system ...........................................................................................................178
Misuse of power and transparency problems ...............................................................180
CONCLUSION ...............................................................................................................184

FIELDWORK: APPLICATION ..........................................................................................87
Positioning: Reading myself ..........................................................................................89
Self disclosure ..................................................................................................................92
Orientation and reentry: Not a complete stranger .........................................................93
Understanding the culture of the settings .....................................................................94
Language issues .............................................................................................................96
Authenticating the data ..................................................................................................97
Selecting the informants ...............................................................................................99
Interviewing: Lessons from the fieldwork .................................................................100
Fieldnotes: The data logging .......................................................................................102

CHAPTER 4 KHON THAISO COMMUNITY RADIO STATION ....................................................104

INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................104
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ..........................................................................................105
AN OVERVIEW ................................................................................................................108
PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN THE KHON THAISO COMMUNITY RADIO STATION .........109
Access ..............................................................................................................................110
  Location. ....................................................................................................................111
  Local language ..........................................................................................................113
Understanding the nature of the audience: The content that fits audience needs ..........114
  Announcement tool ....................................................................................................117
  Feedback mechanisms ...............................................................................................119
Participation ....................................................................................................................121
  Personal invitation: Volunteer recruitment ...............................................................122
  Limited participation: A control over programming ...............................................125
Self-management ..........................................................................................................129
  Unprofessional behavior: Volunteer drop out ..........................................................130
  Lack of management skills ......................................................................................134
Misuse of power and transparency problems ...............................................................136
CONCLUSION ...............................................................................................................140

CHALLENGES ..................................................................................................................87
CHAPTER 6  PATTANI COMMUNITY RADIO STATION ..............................................................186
INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................................................................................186
HISTORY OF PATTANI ........................................................................................................................................................................188
CIVIL SOCIETY: AN EMERGING IDEA OF HAVING A COMMUNITY RADIO STATION IN PATTANI .........................195
AN OVERVIEW ..................................................................................................................................................................................197
PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN PATTANI COMMUNITY RADIO STATION ...................................................198
Access ..............................................................................................................................................................................................200
  Interpersonal relationships: Listening encouragement ......................................................199
  The southern insurgency ...................................................................................................200
  Happy when listening: Content fitting audience needs ................................................203
  Malay Language .............................................................................................................206
  Location ............................................................................................................................208
  Feedback mechanisms .....................................................................................................209
Participation ..................................................................................................................................................................................212
  Why did the volunteers drop out? ..............................................................213
  Religious faith: Participation encouragement ................................................................216
  Community involvement in radio production ..............................................................217
  Volunteer recruitment ...................................................................................................220
Self-management .............................................................................................................................................................................222
  Structural problem: Accountability ...............................................................................222
  Internal conflicts ...........................................................................................................226
  The volunteer system ....................................................................................................229
CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................................................................................231

CHAPTER 7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION ........................................................................233
INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................................................................233
THE QUESTION OF ACCESS ..................................................................................................................................................................236
THE QUESTION OF PARTICIPATION ....................................................................................................................................................237
THE QUESTION OF SELF-MANAGEMENT ........................................................................................................................................240
THE QUESTION OF COMMUNITY AND ITS RELATION TO A COMMUNITY RADIO STATION ..........................242
  A community as a physical location ..............................................................................244
  A community as the sense of belonging ......................................................................244
  A community as bonding and sharing the social values and attributes ......................245
  A community as citizenship and rights .........................................................................247
  A community and its relation to a community radio station ....................................248
DISCUSSION ....................................................................................................................................................................................251
  Language as a consideration of access ....................................................................251
  The location of the station ..........................................................................................256
  Radio content and southern insurgency ....................................................................258
  Cell phone usage, pseudonyms, and listening networks ..........................................260
  Personal contact and volunteer recruitment as a consideration of participation ..........263
  Interpersonal problems as a consequence of using personal contact .........................264
  Self-management .........................................................................................................266
FUTURE RESEARCH .......................................................................................................................................................................272

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................................................................................274
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Map of Thailand and the five community radio stations in the preliminary study</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Locations of the three community radio stations in the study</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Location of Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>The Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Teen listeners and teen radio hosts</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Amporn Yaipangkaew co-hosting the show with Intu-on Monpak</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station’s listeners and donors</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Suwakol Pol-asa, the technical operator for the radio show for Kumpan Chokchana’s</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Location of Doilangtham Community Radio Station</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Sritia village</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Doilangtham Community Radio Station</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Yungyong Kumpira bringing Jodmaikom to the station</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Jodmaikom or a little letter</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>The deejay of Doilangtham reading Jodmaikom to her audience</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Location of Pattani Community Radio Station</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Pattani Community Radio Station</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Suriya Waldolao</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Yah Alee</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>The meeting at Pattani Community Radio Station</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The year 1999 was a crucial time in my academic life. It was the first time that I learned about the concept of community radio. At that time, I was teaching at Prince of Songkla University in Pattani province in the south of Thailand. Pattani is a distinctive province because of its religions and historical background. About 85% of the residents are Muslim whereas 94.6% of the Thai population is Buddhist. According to the census survey of 2000, Muslims amounted to only 4.6% of the population and thus were a small minority group in Thailand (“The World Factbook,” 2007). Historically, Pattani was an independent kingdom dating back to about 1500 until it lost its independence to Siam (the former name of Thailand) in 1786. A series of uprisings took place but none of them succeeded. Religious differences became a key factor that naturally divided Buddhists and Muslims in this region. Deep down, neither Muslims nor Buddhists seem willing to blend. Caused by another factor, socioeconomics, frictions and resentments always appear to play roles in this area. For instance, Buddhist Thais seem to dominate Pattani in all aspects because they tend to have higher education and better jobs. Muslims become inferior and this exacerbates their resentment as they formerly had ruled Pattani.

Centralized mass media such as public and commercial radio stations hardly recognize an Islamic way of living. In the southern region, only a few portions of radio programs were dedicated to Islam. This issue became a frequent discussion in my media classrooms where most of the students were Muslim. A yearning for a Muslim broadcast medium was always mentioned. Outside the classroom, I invited Muslim leaders to host a
radio program at my campus radio station where I was the director. However, even after this the proportion of Muslim programs was small compared with the total program content.

The debut of the concept of community radio in Thailand in 1998 became the focus of my interest and an answer to the media needs of the Muslim community. This concept was also added into my course syllabi to share information with the students. However, the most practical actions were training Muslims to produce radio programs and tutoring them about a concept of community radio and radio station management. This became a routine activity for almost four years until a community radio station (CRS) was built in mid 2003 in Pattani.

The radio experience in Pattani inspired me to further explore community radio around the world. I was very surprised by the fact that some countries had CRSs for a long time before they were established in Thailand. I also noticed that community radio was introduced to several parts of the world perhaps in the late 1920s. It has come to be known by various names: popular or educational radio in Latin America, rural or bush radio in Africa, free or association radio in parts of Europe (Jankowski, 2002, p. 6), public radio in Australia (Girard, 1992, p. ix), and community radio in the United States (Offer, 2002, p. 9) and in Southeast Asia including Thailand. Obviously, the varied names suggest diverse functions and goals.

Lloyd’s definition of community radio as “small low-powered stations that are organized in such a way as to be responsive to the specific needs of the grassroots community” (1991, p. 11) is similar to that of Kierstead and Kierstead (1993, p. 3).
Durlin and Melio (2003), meanwhile, suggested that community radio is a station where communities can access and volunteers can be involved in every aspect of station operations (p. 252). Offer (2002) described the features of community radio as “small-scale, interactive, and participative” (p. 14), while Squier (2003) said that community radio is generally considered “local programming that serves cultural, civic, or information needs of an audience that is either geographically or demographically limited” (p. 285). Kasoma’s (2002) assertion that community radio is “a sound broadcasting station that serves a specific section of society known as a community” (p. 23) was similar to Barbrook’s, who stated that it is a “non-profit-maximizing, democratically-accountable, listener-access station” (1987, p. 82). Generally speaking, community radio is defined by geographic area, local interest, and participation qualities. Also Barlow (1988) has indicated that a CRS is different from a commercial station because of three elements: 1) community involvement, 2) nonprofit status, and 3) democratic structure.

These definitions indicate that a CRS has three underlying attributes. The first one is in its coverage area, which is narrow and specific to a small area or community. The second characteristic pertains to access and participation. A CRS works on volunteerism as it is not only supposedly accessible to everyone; members of its communities must also participate in its operations. This also alludes to its democratic structure and nonprofit business model. The third attribute refers to its main functions which are to 1) respond to the needs, 2) preserve the culture and 3) protect the identity, of its locality. Clearly, these features label a CRS as a participatory community medium. Fardon and
Furniss (2000) suggest that community radio is a tool that brings “broadcast voices closer to the concerns of their audience, ideally merging broadcasters and listenership” (p. 9). In addition, community radio often is known for its expedition of social change and the expression of marginalized groups (Lewis, 2002).

In Thailand, the first CRS went on the air in December 2001. After that, about three thousand stations were built across the country (“Stop 3,000 Community Radio Stations,” 2006). This allowed Thai community members to become acquainted with a new type of radio. The key concept of Thai community radio was that it was a station for, of, and by community members and it was marked as a participatory community medium.

This dissertation explores the attributes of participatory communication through experiences of three CRSs in Thailand. I begin by situating my own research questions in the history of Thai CRSs, the literature on community radio in general, and the theoretical framework of participatory community media.

**History of Thailand’s Community Radio Stations**

At present, Thai broadcasting is undergoing major changes, impelled by political and societal upheavals and realignments. Foremost among these movements was a series of public riots in opposition to the military government in May 1992. In this event, approximately 500,000 civic and grassroots activists participated in a series of demonstrations in Bangkok and other major cities across Thailand. These demonstrations were aimed at overthrowing the military government (“Black May,” 2006). The
demonstrations were called Black May because they were one of the country's most violent political events.

At that time I was a junior student in the department of Communication Arts at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. My university radio was one of the few radio stations that reported on the protest, since all the others feared being closed down. This was because the radioscape in Thailand was a state monopoly at the time. All radio stations were owned by governmental agencies or quasi-government entities. Of the then current number of 538 radio stations nationwide (204 AM and 334 FM), most were owned by one of three major entities. The military owned 265 radio stations (49.3%), the Public Relations Department owned 149 stations (27.7%), and the Mass Communication Organization of Thailand retained 68 stations (12.6%). Fifty six radio stations (10.4%) were owned by other governmental agencies (“Country Reports,” 2004; Sopit, 2005, p. 2).

The state has controlled the radio medium since its inauguration in 1928 (Sumon, 2005, p. 58). Since 1955, when the Radio and Television Broadcast Act was enacted, two state organizations, the Post and Telegraph Department (PTD) and the Public Relations Department (PRD), were authorized to manage all radio and television services. The PTD, supervised by the Ministry of Transport and Communications, assigns and manages radio frequencies and regulates and coordinates domestic communication via satellite through integrated ground stations. The PRD, supervised by the Deputy Prime Minister Office, grants licenses to radio and television stations, supervises the operation of all radio and television stations, and arbitrates codes of conduct among practitioners.
In 1959, the governmental agencies began to grant competitive concessions to private sectors (Ubonrat, Worapot, Wisanu, & Mukmethin, 1996, pp. 29-30). This was to reduce the burden of production and expenses. In addition, the concession brought a huge annual revenue to all state agencies. For instance, a concession for a radio station in capital city and major cities could possibly be USD$300,000-480,000 per year and even a station in a small and remote town might be as much as USD$25,000-40,000. By this practice, the radio stations were still in control of state agencies. News was fed from the PRD’s central studios twice a day at 7:00-7:30 a.m. and 7:00-7:30 p.m. and air through all radio stations in Thailand. This concession practice has been carried forward to the time of this writing.

One of my classmates was among those who reported the events of Black May for the university radio station. While other classmates and I were not directly involved, we discussed ways that government distorted information about Black May and how Thai broadcasters withheld news reports on this crisis. Another mass medium like radio that was rigorously controlled by the government was television. Regular programs were interrupted whenever the government wanted to disseminate a message about the event. The riots started about April 8, 1992. However, the most critical period occurred during May 17 to 20, 1992 (“Black May,” 2006).

It was obvious to us that the absence of accurate news and information occurred mainly because of the state control of radio and television stations. A similar situation occurred once again in the coup of September 19, 2006. In that event, the royal Thai army controlled television stations. All regular programs were preempted and replaced by
a documentary about the King and accompanied by the music authored by the King.

Television and radio stations were not allowed to report news about former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Suwanna Uyanan, vice president of the Thai Broadcasting Journalists Association, said on October 12, 2006, almost a month after the coup, that “soldiers are still occupying Channel 11 (The PRD’s television station)” (“The 2006 Thailand Coup D'état,” 2006). On a regular basis, mainstream radio and television stations reported news and information about government and state agencies. The movements of civic sectors were hardly reported to the public.

Another example of news management occurred in December 2001. A few radio stations in Bangkok reported the story when the Pattani Community Radio Group and other CRSs across Thailand organized a rally in Bangkok in order to announce the Thailand’s Community Radio Day. None of government controlled television stations reported this activity. Those who involved in the event, including me felt very disappointed with the mainstream media.

Fortunately, newspapers in Thailand receive greater freedom. Because newspapers were not state controlled, they were able to provide more accurate account of national events. However, this creates a large difference in access to accurate information in the city and in the countryside. In rural areas, people either have less access to newspapers or are unable to read them. As a result, citizens in the countryside developed a different perception of the events of Black May, the 2006 coup, and the Thai politics in general.
The massacre in 1992 was a turning point that led to social and political reform in Thailand. The new constitution was enacted in 1997. It was called the *Popular Constitution* because civic groups widely took action in the process of lawmaking. The suppression of media freedom during the massacre created a backlash that led to a revision of Thai communications policy, which later evolved into four proclamations: Sections 39, 40, 41, and 78. These four were included in the 1997 constitution.

In other words, reforms in this system of state ownership were among those that resulted from the events of Black May. Five years after Black May, the 1997 constitution was enacted with its guarantee of media democratization and the right to communicate. Of the four sections that concern these freedoms, section 40 is the most important because it calls for the reallocation of frequencies and the redefinition of frequencies as a national, rather than governmental, resource. Section 40 led to the birth of community radio in Thailand.

In 1998, soon after the proclamation of the Constitution, allied groups started working on the Frequency Allocation Act to implement Section 40 and to expedite media democratization. They also initiated a series of campaigns to encourage the change in media structures. Later that year, some of them invited me to join meetings, seminars, and other activities to support reform of Thai media. I was particularly interested in working with them because I was teaching in Pattani, then experiencing political and social unrest initiated by Muslim separatists. Among the topics in media reform that attracted me was the concept of community radio, which I saw as a way 1) to help the marginalized Muslim people to build their identify, 2) to improve relationships between
them and local and national governments, and 3) to enhance understanding between Buddhist and Muslim communities. Thus, as previously mentioned, in 1999, I started to help Muslim leaders and villagers in Pattani to set up a community radio station.

The following year, in 2000, the Frequency Allocation Act (FAA) was promulgated after much negotiation between governmental agencies and the civic groups that had initiated its drafting. The FAA was premised on Section 40, which provided that there must be an independent regulatory body to supervise radio and television broadcasts and to allocate broadcast frequencies among the public. In effect, Section 40 took authority over the broadcast media away from the PTD and PRD by calling for the establishment of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC).

Naturally, this development was resisted by the PRD and the government because it impinged upon their licensing powers. Indeed, the NBC has yet to be realized as the PRD and other government agencies have successfully delayed selection of NBC membership. Ultimately, the selection process was taken to the court where an initial selection was invalidated (“What checks and balances?,” 2005). Unfortunately, before the new search started, the 2006 coup caused the process to a complete haul.

The main tasks of NBC will be to develop a master plan for the Thai broadcast industry, restructure types of broadcast operations, supervise frequency allocation and management regulations, and approve radio and television operations. Section 40 states that the NBC will be the only agency authorized to draft an ownership act that would initiate media reform in Thailand. However, since the NBC has not been established, the
PRD has claimed that the 1955 Radio and Television Broadcast Act is still in force. In this way, the PRD has never yielded its authority over the broadcast industry.

However, many civic and grassroots groups have decided not to concern themselves with the PRD and have established their CRSs without government authorization. The CRS operators instead claimed their rights directly from the 1997 constitution. Their actions were also supported by three prominent non-profit organizations—the Campaign for Popular Media Reform (CPMR), CivicNet, and the Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI).

Initially, Supinya Klangnarong, Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, other media scholars, and NGOs lunched the media reform agenda in 1998. The Campaign for Popular Democracy (CPD) was established and mainly worked to energize the media lawmaking process through which the Frequency Allocation Act was enacted in March 2000. After this success, the CPD changed its name to the CPMR and expanded its activities such as ones to expedite the NBC selection process, to propose the drafts of the Ownership Act, and to open public hearings so as to obtain public opinion about media reform (“The People’s network,” 2004).

CivitNet, a nonprofit organization which was established in 1997 to serve as a network coordinator and civil society information support center, got involved in media reform in about 1998 by co-working with Uajit Virojtrairat, a media professor of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, to launch several forums and seminars on community radio. Later on Uajit resigned from the university and to take the position of Chairperson of the Civil Development Institute.
In 2001, Uajit received grants from the Social Investment Funds (SIF) and CODI to promote the concept of community radio in Thailand. SIF was a nonprofit organization that aimed to help communities recover from the 1997 Asia economic collapse. CODI was set up to help the government to support the activities of civil groups. Both SIF and CODI aided Uajit in her grassroots community radio project by providing a budget for community radio broadcasting equipment.

During 2001 and 2002, Uajit offered workshops throughout Thailand to help grassroots organizations and communities understand the concept of community radio and the processes required to set up a radio station, including funding their establishment. Her project was successful. Over one hundred CRSs were founded nationwide (personal communication, July 20, 2006).


On February 12, 2002, the PRD ordered the first CRS, Mueang Kan, and the second CRS, Innburi, to stop their operations, creating tension and worry among CRS operators (Ubonrat, 2002). The two stations appealed to the PRD and the government against this closure. Two weeks after the warning, Mueang Kan CRS held a public meeting. Over a thousand people, including some scholars and activists, participated in it (Mathurot, 2005, pp. 13-14). Although the meeting gained little public attention and did not change the fact that PRD was able to temporarily force an end to broadcasts by the
two stations, the meeting led to the formation of regional community radio networks, specifically those interested in the establishment of CRS.

Later, several organizations such as the Senate Committee on Public Participation (SCPP) and the Human Rights Commission (HRC) got involved and tried to help CRS operators regain their rights to operate a radio station. They each set up an inquiry committee and met with the representatives of CRS operators, PRD, and PTD to resolve the conflict. However, the bargaining failed. The clash between PRD and CRS operators continued. Finally, under strong public pressure, on July 16, 2002 the Cabinet agreed to set up a sub-committee under the Office Attached to the Prime Minister’s Office to lay out an ad hoc arrangement for the unlicensed community radio stations. In the end the Cabinet permitted each CRS to operate for a trial period without any license and ordered CRSs to be called “community radio learning center(s)” (Ubonrat, 2002).

The conflict between the state and CRS operators arose again in September 2002. During that period, there was a big flood in Chiyo district, Anthong province. Chaiyo CRS helped broadcast information and became a center to help flood victims. The station denounced the local government for its ineffective action. As a result, PTD sued Chiyo CRS for its illegal use of a radio frequency and accused the operators of libeling the local government. On September 30, 2002 the police raided the station and confiscated radio equipment and transmitters (Mathurot, 2005, p. 15).

Responding to severe pressure from the state, CRS operators arranged a national meeting on October 10, 2002. As a result of the meeting, Thailand Community Radio Federation (TCRF) was established. TCRF became a shield for CRS operators opposing
the PRD’s attempts to block the emergence of CRSs. On that occasion, over 4,000 CRS operators rallied at the Democracy Monument demanding PRD to allow them to continue operating their radio stations (“Operators Fight,” 2002).

In January 2003, PRD, PTD, and TCRF reached an agreement on temporary operating measures. Ten guidelines were drafted to facilitate the learning process of CRS and to serve as central guides for a CRS. The details were: 1) A community radio learning center is a participatory management oriented which allows everybody in the community to engage. 2) It is owned by the community as it is a public resource. 3) The operation is based on volunteers. 4) It is a nonprofit station. 5) It has a democratic structure, which allows the station to be free from the interference and influence of any group. 6) It promotes the public sphere, as it is a channel for public interest. Therefore, community residents are both message senders and receivers. 7) It concentrates on community needs and interests. 8) It is an information center that helps support community learning and empowers the community. 9) It operates within a radius not exceeding 15 kilometers using the FM band. And 10) Broadcast content must benefit and respond to the needs of the community (“Community Radio,” 2003).

Obviously, the guidelines intended to emphasize Thai CRS as a participatory community radio stations for, of, and by community members. As a result, most CRSs use local languages in their broadcasting. The issue of broadcasting language is very interesting. For instance, although, Ministerial Regulation NO. 14 (1994) issued under the Broadcasting Act 1955 stated that broadcasting service shall be in Thai, including Thai dialect, in practice all mainstream radio stations broadcast in Thai rather than a local
language. This was because Clause 10 of this Ministerial Regulation stated that program producers should read, speak, and voice Thai properly and clearly, and be recipients of the Certificate of Announcer from the Public Relations Department (Vitit, 1998, pp. 131-132). In practice, because there was no radio announcement test in any local language, no one has ever been granted such a certificate. Therefore, mainstream radio stations were forced to limits themselves to broadcast in the national Thai language. Since CRS operators do not follow PRD regulations, they tend to not comply with the language rule. CRSs broadcast in both Thai and their local dialect and claim their right to this practice from the constitution of 1997.

On licensure issues, for those licensed mainstream radio stations, a frequency had to be assigned. It was dictated by internationally licensing agreements. Since these CRSs were not licensed, a radio frequency was simply selected by checking the availability of the FM frequencies within the community.

On technical aspects, all Thai CRSs must abide by the contemporary broadcasting rules of 30-30-15. This stands for the transmission power of 30 watts, the height of the tower of 30 meters, and the coverage area of 15 kilometers (about 8-10 miles). Perhaps because of tight budget, most CRSs used only basic broadcasting equipment which consisted of a home-made transmitter, two or three microphones and headphones, an 8 or 12 channel control mixer, a compact disc player, and a cassette tape player. Some stations had a computer with software programs to play MP3. Most stations had a limited library of CDs and cassettes. Pirate MP3s and CDs were widely used because they were cheap and readily available.
In Thailand, although the copyright law was in force, most public and commercial radio stations did not pay for the right to use songs. To avoid that, these stations played promotion recordings sent from the music companies. In case of CRSs, they did not pay for the right to use music either. Up to the time of this writing, none of music companies had filed a complaint against CRSs for using their music. By this method, CRSs did not have any expense for the right to use songs. This helps explain why CRSs could refrain from carrying advertisement even though most of their programs relied heavily on music rather than information and content. In most cases, the main station expense was fixing equipment, electricity, and phone bills. Some CRSs tried to persuade a local technician to volunteer at the station in order to get free or reduced fee on technical services.

The Cabinet’s agreement on July 16, 2002 served to inspire an expansion of CRSs. By late 2002, there were about 145 unlicensed small stations preparing to broadcast from home-made transmitters (Ubonrat, 2002). In 2006, there were estimated to be about 3,000 unlicensed CRSs (“Stop 3,000 Community Radio Stations,” 2006). However, according to the TCRF’s guidelines, Thai CRSs were prohibited from carrying advertisements and so were dependent on community subsidies. The PRD then demanded Thai CRSs to register with it by the end of 2004 to allow the PRD to supervise Thai CRSs in the absence of the NBC. By doing so, the PRD permitted a registered station to air commercials for six minutes after every hour of broadcasting which contradicted TCRF’s guidelines. Unfortunately, thousands of Thai CRSs registered with the PRD for these benefits. According to Vichain Kutawatra, a coordinator of the TCRF, only 300 CRSs remained as members of the TCRF (Personal Communication, August 30, 2006).
The mushrooming growth of CRSs in Thailand underscores the need to study it, especially as an aspect of Thai media reform—for, of, and by the grassroots community. The raw number of CRSs in Thailand might convey the impression that establishing and managing a CRS is an easy task. In fact, its foundation and operations are complex, as shown by many studies of CRSs, by my own direct experience in helping Muslims set up a CRS in Pattani, and by the fact that at the time of this writing, over 90% of Thai CRSs have been transformed into small commercial radio stations.

**Review of Literature**

Studies on community radio locate the station within communities. Thus, it is important to explore the different conceptualizations of community itself. I do this first by looking at the concept of community and the entry of radio stations into various communities around the world. Then, I discuss my exploratory study on four community radio stations in the United States. I conclude the section by linking these topics to the concepts of access, participation, and self-management based on my analysis of community radio stations in different localities around the world.

*The community in community radio stations*

The discussion of community radio must begin with the different conceptualizations of community itself, given the importance of the experiences of various localities in establishing their own radio stations.

*The concept of community.*

Generally speaking, the term community is complex, so it is important to review its possible meanings before taking up the term community radio. Ahmed and Fortier
(2003, p. 253) pointed out that the term community varies depending upon the context in which it is found. For example, within a political context, it refers to citizenship and rights. However, from a sociological perspective, it focuses on how social change influences the experiences of community life. To sociologists, the term is judged either mainly by the modes of “being together,” which refers to common grounds of sameness, mutual responsibility, connectedness, and attachment, or by the sense of belonging.

Anderson, meanwhile, viewed community from two basic dimensions. One is the space where people live and interact with each other. A community is then viewed as spatial element. The second view is the recognition of insiders who share common interests, values, and allegiances (1983, pp. 15-16). Anderson’s notion seems associated with Kneafsey's, who proposed that a community was not physical, but a discursive construction that reminded us of our shared locality (Kneafsey, 1995, pp. 135-136, 149-151). Hummon added that community identified a range of spatial attachments: rootedness, alienation, or placelessness. That is, individuals perhaps defined themselves through their sense of communal membership and place rootedness, or alienated themselves from a specific place and also independently convinced themselves to not attach with any place (1992, pp. 256-258). Finally, Ahmed and Fortier argued that there was a range of different forms of community: we may view it as an effect of power, consider it as a historical aspect of community formation, or articulate its “grammars” of collective belonging—the multi(culture), the queers, the diasporic, the virtual, or the cosmopolitan (2003, p. 256). They proposed an interesting idea that community can be a nation, city, or small town. Likewise, within the community, there were alternative
communities that provided “safe spaces” for queers, outsiders, and others (2003, p. 225). Here, they discussed the binary meanings of community: the interaction of dominant and alternative grouping leads to a negotiation of the public space.

*Community radio stations around the world.*

The definitions of community imply a collective sense of identity in a spatial context. Thus, discussions of CRSs necessarily introduce consideration of the localities within which they have emerged and continued to operate. Indeed, many studies have revealed that the emergence of a CRS is mainly to help minority or marginalized peoples in gaining recognition from general society.

For example, Barlow (1988) found that in the United States, ethnic community radio originated in about 1960s by ethnic broadcasters such as German, Polish, and Italian migrants who bought blocks of airtime from urban commercial stations to broadcast shows in their native languages. Likewise, aboriginal and local communities were the first ones to establish CRSs in Canada (Rodriguez, 2001; Fairchild, 1998), New Zealand (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 31), and Australia (Barlow, 2002, pp. 133, 150) as a way of providing alternatives to mainstream radio stations.

Groups that share the same ideology, identity, and occupations were also the ones to establish CRSs for political purposes. The Netherlands’ Marconi Radio Taster Café was proud of its illegal status, which allowed it to maintain its ideology as a public forum having a non-hierarchical structure (Laureys, 1992, pp. 15, 19). Bolivia’s mining workers started their own station, Radios Miner, to empower the miners when the country was under military rule (Dagron, 2001, pp. 43-46). El Salvador’s guerrilla radio station
Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) used radio as a tool to broadcast messages to oppose the ARENA government—Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Vigil, 1992, pp. 60-61).

CRSs were also established for economic development. Mali’s Kayes Rural Radio was founded as a tool for development and as an alternative radio station to commercial and state stations (Berque, 1992, p. 127), while Zaire’s Radio Candip was set up to help promote development in the agricultural sector (Aw, 1992, p. 40).

Thus, community radio emerged in response to a crisis of an imbalance of information. Disparities in communication resources such as the consolidation of media ownership in the hands of government and private interests which affect the free flow of information and become obstacles of the process of communication were then lessened. A CRS helps expand accessibility to and enhance the participation of citizens in the community medium (Balow, 1988, p. 81). A CRS is therefore viewed as a community-centric station type that aims to provide a voice to the voiceless (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 5), to empower the politically disenfranchised and to engage the community members in public communication via the community medium (Jankowski, 2002, p. 7).

An exploratory study on community radio.

In 2004, I sent an electronic survey to the managers and program directors of 20 randomly selected CRSs in the US to investigate how they manage discourse about their community and CRSs. Five people from four stations replied. They were KDHX, St. Louis, MO; KFAI, Minneapolis, MN; KGNU, Boulder, CO; and KXCI, Tucson, AZ.
When asked to give a definition of the term community, the respondents gave various meanings. One respondent said “it means the town or immediate area in which you live.” From this perspective, the community refers to a residential area which is a physical location. Another respondent said it refers to “a group of people, residing relatively close to one another, with a sense of security stemming from solidarity.” The word community in this definition connotes the promise of living together or being together, of care and responsibility. The third respondent gave a combined definition, saying “it is defined either by geography or interest.” This definition was similar to Anderson’s definition in which he posited that the term community implied two dimensions—both physical space and space of habituation as well as groups of insiders who share common interests (1983, pp. 15-16). The other two respondents stated that community could be groups of race or ethnicity such as the black community, Latin community, Asian community, or maybe even a world community, who believed in or shared the same goals.

The survey also revealed the different definitions of community radio. One respondent said “community radio means open access radio, where the community is invited in and taught to do radio.” This definition referred to the social practice of the station offering their airwaves as a public space, where people could join in and work together. Other respondents mentioned the term “volunteer participatory,” “media outlet for under-represented music, culture, and thought,” and “democratization of media.” These definitions affirmed the imagined community where people shared responsibility
to the society and used community radio as a tool to improve the quality of their community.

The respondents claimed their radio station played an active role in building the community. One respondent stated, “Absolutely, our station is all about building and sharing the strengths of our community by promotion of events, arts, and culture.” Another said the station “encourages diversity by actively seeking out voices that are seldom heard on media” whereas a third said proudly, “the station has folks on air from different countries and has 13 different languages on the air.” From the viewpoints of the operators, a CRS was described as a participatory community medium.

**Participatory Community Media**

This dissertation attempts to describe an ongoing relation between Thai CRSs and their community members. However, it would be merely a descriptive field report if there is no theoretical framework. In this dissertation, the theoretical framework was developed from the combined concepts of community media and participatory communication which I label as *participatory community media*. This framework highlights the best characteristic of Thai CRSs of being a radio for, of, and by a grassroots community. *The concept of community media*

Hollander, Stappers, and Jankowski (2002) stated that a size or a scale of community media is the first sign that separates them from mass media. However, the most important and distinctive attribute is that community media heighten the level of participation in which public expression is the main concern (p. 25). Rennie (2006) asserted that, “Community media is generally defined as media that allow for access and
participation” (p. 22). Certainly, participatory qualities of community media are very significant because they provide the community a chance to control community communications. Community media, according to Berrigan, were not a form of mass media. According to Berrigan,

Community media are adaptations of media for use by the community, for whatever purposes the community decides. They are media to which members of the community have access, for information, education, [and] entertainment, when they want to access. They are media in which the community participates, as planners, producers, performers (Berrigan, 1981, p. 8).

Noticeably, the way community media are constructed by the community and where they are located make community media aware of their function. In addition, this relationship might result in two possibilities, that 1) community media play a crucial role in shaping discourse within their community, and 2) the community members are the key factor in designating the function of community media. This is to say that there is a dynamic relationship between community media and community members.

Participatory communication

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s 1981 publication was a key and seminal document in defining the concept of participatory communication and community media. In it, Berrigan laid out the basic concept of community media which was based upon the three features—access, participation, and self-management. UNESCO’s document gave a distinctive and new definition of community media. For 26 years, most references after that were influenced by his
contribution; the three attributes were almost always mentioned in the literature of community media and CRSs. In the following, I discuss each of these elements—access, participation, and self-management—together with their applications in different CRSs.

Access.

Access refers to the ability of community members to listen to and provide feedback about the programs broadcast by the radio station (Berrigan, 1981, p. 18). Listening in this case means not only having a radio to receive signals, but also the ability to understand the content when programs are broadcast in local rather than national languages. Providing feedback, meanwhile, pertains to the freedom to keep in touch, give comments and criticism, and engage in dialogue with producers, administrators, and the managers of communication organizations. This can be done through letters to the editors or phone-in radio shows (O’Connor, 2004, p. 5). According to previous studies, access to most community radio stations is high because of the following:

1) The use of local languages, as shown by radio stations in Mali (Berque, 1992), Zaire (Aw, 1992), Australia (Browne, 1990), Canada (Foy, L’oiseau, Barette, & Boivin, 1992);

2) The fit between program content and audiences’ needs, as shown by CRSs in Colorado for community events in Telluride (Barlow, 1988, p. 82), in Ohio for country and bluegrass music for Yellow Springs (p. 92), and in Australia for dialogues between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples (Barlow, 2002, p. 151).

3) The location of the CRS, which facilitated frequent contact between the CRS
operators and the audience. Jankowski (2002) stated that most CRSs were “predominantly located within a relatively small, clearly defined geographical region, although some community networks attract large and physically dispersed audience” (p. 7). This is the case in the Mahaweli Community Radio in Sri Lanka and its two branches (David, 1992, p. 134) and the Marconi Radio Taster Café in Netherlands which is located in a small old school just outside the city center (Laureys, 1992, pp. 19, 21).

4) The mechanism for feedback. For instance, WYSO-FM in Yellow Springs, Ohio offered daily call-in shows on community events (Barlow, 1988, p. 92), KOTO-FM had a call-in policy to facilitate community dialog and feedback in Telluride, Colorado (p. 82), WBAI-FM in New York focused on commentary and cultural features for marginalized groups in particular (p. 82), and KRAB-FM in Seattle, Washington offered call-in shows and debates (p. 93).

In sum, the use of local languages, the content, the location, and the feedback mechanisms are key elements that promote access to a CRS.

Participation.

Participation refers to the ability of community members to produce radio programs and get involved in programming decisions. Participation seems limited among those CRSs that are mostly supported or initiated by organizations outside the community. For example, 8KIN, the first exclusively Aboriginal station in Australia, was initiated by and relied heavily on the federal funding through the Aboriginal radio and the department of Aboriginal Affairs (Browne, 1990, p. 115). The key problem was that
Aborigines who were not inherently representative of their community seemed to see their participation as an opportunity to build up their fame within their communities, or beyond them. Participation in the station was used as a path to a higher social position. Some had a desire for entering the political arena and hoped to use broadcasting to support their political mobilization (Michael, 1986 as cited in Browne, 1990, p. 118).

Both Mahaweli Community Radio of Sri Lanka and Tambuli Community Radio Project of the Philippines were initiated by UNESCO and Danish International Development Agency (Librero, 2004, p. 8). Their key problem was that participation was limited to well-educated people, not grassroots community members (Librero, 2004, p. 8). Sustainability became their major problem when funding was reduced (David, 1992, p. 136). Consequently, the project’s primary goal becoming professionalized prevents ordinary community members from engaging in program operations. Some stations restrict training programs to staff members, excluding volunteers in the process. Two issues relevant to participation are:

1) Opportunity to produce a program. Most stations initiated or supported by an outside community organization tend to limit the involvement of the community residents in the production process, as with the case of ICR-FM in Australia (Barlow, 2002, pp. 150-151). In Mahaweli, Sri Lanka, the programs of the community radio were produced mainly by professionals, with community members mainly involved in the selection of which pre-produced segments were to be broadcast (Librero, 2004, p. 7). This hierarchical process was not sustainable without international funding (Librero, 2004, p. 8; David, 1992, p. 135). In Zaire,
Radio Candip established many radio clubs and mini-studio activities where community members were encouraged to listen to the radio together and subsequently discuss the show’s topic as a way of developing corresponding community projects (Aw, 1992, pp. 41-42). Although this practice was very successful, it indicated a limited role of participants. A less extreme example is Argentina’s FM Sur, which was established by civic and grassroots groups and professional broadcasters. Not only was it open to village leaders to discuss local problems, but it also offered training for correspondents from local organizations (Bregaglio & Tagle, 1992, pp. 184-186).

2) A chance for the public to be involved in radio programming. Australia’s SHB-FM is run by all unpaid community volunteers and provides ad-hoc production training prospective volunteers (Barlow, 2002, p. 150). Canada’s Radio Centre-Ville, which was established by seven ethnic groups, had a daily meeting to discuss programming (Foy, L’oiseau, Barette, & Boivin, 1992, pp. 49, 53). The Netherlands’ Marconi Radio Taster Café hosted public meetings discussing its finances, current operations, technical problems, and programming, among others. These three radio stations all provided ad-hoc training (Laureys, 1992, pp. 21-22).

Obviously, the degree of participation differed from place to place. Lessons learned from these case studies were that 1) participation might be more controllable by the community if the station was generated by the grassroots community rather than an outside organization, 2) it is necessary to reaffirm the missions and aims of having a CRS in the community in order to prevent personal corruption, and 3) a number of
stakeholders or representatives, rather than a single stakeholder, helped generate a clear mission, goal, and a variety of radio programming as they tended to negotiate benefits, share responsibilities, and make their group known through radio programming.

_Self-management._

Self-management refers to the way community members can determine the policies of their CRS (O’Connor, 2004; Berrigan, 1981). A CRS which is funded through listenership fees and community fundraising seems to have extensive participation and high degree of self-management while a station that relies heavily on government subsidies seems to have less democratic management style. Self-management seems to intertwine with funding, and with the influence of other factors such as class and race relations.

Australia’s non-profit station MCB-FM used a federated organization in which the management committee was elected annually (Barlow, 2002, p. 150). Since it received funding through membership fees, subscriptions, grants, and fundraising, no single individual or group controlled its operations. Meanwhile, Ohio’s WYSO-FM had two committees elected by the community to oversee the station’s fundraising and to supervise programming respectively (Barlow, 1988, p. 92). Finally, the Philippines’ Tambuli Community Radio Project was highly subsidized by a foreign organization that designed it to be managed by a multi-sector community media council. Representatives such as teachers and government officials were invited to the council rather than grassroots community members (Librero, 2004, p. 8).
Race relations influence management styles, too. Washington’s KRAB-FM incorporated diversity. But this resulted in too many differences within the station, which made its management less successful (Barlow, 1988, p. 93). In California, KPOO-FM had an imbalanced distribution of personnel, with the management being predominantly white and the volunteers mostly African-Americans. As a result, a series of conflicts between them resulted in protests leading to a change in the composition of the board of directors (Barlow, 1988, p. 94).

Finally, the motivations of volunteers affect management. Some volunteers of 8KIN of Australia, for instance, joined the station primarily to build their own popularity or expedite political mobilization rather than to serve the aborigine community (Browne, 1990, p. 118).

In conclusion, several samples of CRSs mentioned earlier revealed that CRSs would perform well if they are initiated by the community rather than an outside organization. Consequently, professionalization and other barriers to access, participation, and self-management would be lessened because there is no control or pressure from the outside. True participatory communication is a crucial qualification to the survival and growth of community media. Participatory community media thus is a term that emphasizes a participatory qualification that centers on the self-expression. In addition, Rennie (2006) suggested that being participatory community media should not only carry on through its non-profit status and non-professional focus, but its lack of hierarchy (p. 22). In this realm, Matta’s ideal concept of “communication as a social good” (1981, p. 80) seemed possible through participatory community media where “. . .
participation in and access to the communication process leads to the recovery of the right to information” (1981, p. 86).

**Statement of Research Problem and Questions**

Previous research on community radio stations regards them as alternatives to mainstream media. Rodriguez (2001), who did an extensive study on non-mainstream radio, television, video, newspapers, and theater in many parts of the world, proposed that such an approach leads to dichotomies between mass media and community media as powerful/powerless or dominant/subordinate. In the process, alternative media are further marginalized and that no real theoretical perspectives to understand them are developed.

Therefore, it is more valuable to debate community media from the viewpoint of “a new conceptual framework that can capture how democratic communication happens within alternative media” in order to develop alternative media theory that can help “capture the essence of alternative media and/or explain the importance of these media as processes of communication and democracy” (Rodriguez, 2001, pp. 10-11). In this dissertation, I seek to address this lack of theorization in community media by looking at the nature of access, participation, and self-management in three community radio stations in Thailand. I explore each of these attributes from the perspectives of media academics, station operators, volunteers, and listeners in general.

RQ1: How is access promoted to the CRS?

RQ1a: How accessible is the CRS’ language to the audience?

RQ1b: How congruent is the radio content to the needs of the community?
RQ1c: How does the proximity of the station to the community affect access?

RQ1d: How does the station promote dialogue between it and the community?

RQ2: How does the community participate in the CRS?

RQ2a: How are community members involved in the radio production?

RQ2b: How do they participate in programming decisions?

RQ3: How is self-management practiced by the CRS? What issues relate to self-management and what are its management decisions?

RQ4: How do community members consider their community in the relation to the CRS in their locale?

**Dissertation Outline**

This dissertation is composed of seven chapters. In this chapter, I introduce the statement of problem. The history of Thai community radio is also presented. The literature on the concept of community, community radio, as well as samples of community radio across the world are developed. Finally, I propose “participatory community media” as the theoretical framework of the study by discussing the concepts of community media and participatory communication.

Chapter 2 presents the details of a preliminary study I conducted in December 2005—an audience survey of five CRSs in Thailand. This chapter offers an explanation of my choices of methodology and sample selection. All interviews and conversations in this dissertation were conducted in the Thai language and translated from Thai into
English by me. In this dissertation, three Thai CRSs, Khon Thaiso, Doilangtham, and Pattani, were chosen as the case studies.

Chapter 3 focuses on methodological perspectives. The use of ethnographic fieldwork through participant observation and qualitative interviewing is discussed. This chapter also includes a comprehensive self-reflexive report pertinent to my field observation experience.

Chapter 4 presents the participatory communication elements of Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station. This chapter gives details of the way the station was founded and discusses how its historical background impacted on its practice of participatory communication. Details of access, participation, and self-management in this radio station are elaborated.

Chapter 5 presents the participatory communication elements of Doilangtham Community Radio Station. Based on its historical background, I consider this station a citizens’ medium or an activist medium. The details of access, participation, and self-management are included.

Chapter 6 presents the participatory communication elements of Pattani Community Radio Station. Likewise, the details of access, participation, and self-management are presented. This chapter highlights an operation of a CRS amidst a violent insurgency.

Chapter 7 presents the findings pertinent to the practice of participatory communication found in the three CRSs. This chapter also provides an answer to the fourth research question: how community members consider their community in relation
to the CRS in their locale, and discusses the ongoing relation between community members and their CRS in their locale. A discussion section focuses on special points pertinent to access, participation, and self-management. The section provides lessons learned and theoretical possibilities for a successful CRS based on the experiences of the three Thai CRSs. Suggestions for future study are also provided.

Finally, I provide some pictures about the three CRSs which I took during the field observations to support visual understanding. The map of Thailand was used with the permission from the Asianventure Tours.
CHAPTER 2

THE PRELIMINARY STUDY: AN AUDIENCE SURVEY

Introduction

When I left Thailand to study in the School of Telecommunications at Ohio University in 2003, only one hundred community radio stations (CRSs) had been established in Thailand. Incredibly, the number of CRSs increased to over 3,000 during my study (“Stop 3,000 Community Radio Stations,” 2006). Likewise, several crucial political movements regarding Thai CRSs have taken place. The enormous number of Thai CRSs made it difficult to decide which CRSs I should select for my current research. Moreover, during my study, I lost contact with some media activists and scholars. As a result, I had limited information about the current state of Thai CRSs. The situation made me feel uncertain about how to proceed. I consulted with my advisor about my concerns. We found the solution in the preliminary study that took place during November and December 2005.

The Research Questions and Justifications for the Preliminary Research

The focus of this preliminary research was to explore what Thai audiences thought of a CRS in their community. In fact, this interest developed a few years ago as I started to review the literature on community radio. At that time, I did not find research on the audience and so there was no way to know whether the audience liked a CRS and whether they would like to get involved and support the survival of the station. Therefore, the audience became my primary interest for the preliminary research.
The central research questions of the preliminary study were: although there were thousands of Thai CRSs, 1) did these CRSs satisfy the audiences, 2) how did they function differently from mainstream radio stations such as commercial and public stations in their community, and 3) how much would the audiences like to get involved in a CRS and therefore what factors could predict their involvement?

The first research question arose from my firsthand knowledge gained from the experience as a consultant for the Pattani Community Radio Group (PCRG) in southern Thailand. We tended to believe that having a CRS would bring several good things to society, such as the development of the community, a stronger community identity, and the empowerment of the community members. Therefore, there was always a large motive to build a radio station in the community and train radio producers by recruiting people from that community. The key question was whether a CRS supported those expectations from the community members’ viewpoint.

Back in 1999, I introduced a concept of a community radio to Muslim people in Pattani province where I taught for Prince of Songkla University. My activity at the early stage was to help set up a radio station and train the community members. Muslim villagers and I worked very hard to recruit volunteers from several villages so that, when the station opened, there would be enough people to operate it. After the station was set up, funding and volunteer recruitment became the next factor necessary for its survival. Clearly, the audience was not yet an immediate focus, neither the survey of the audience's role, its behavior, nor its attitude toward a CRS in their community. Since there was no literature on Thai CRS audiences, a study of this element became a primary concern.
which was also suggested by the research of Dunaway, (2002) and Lewis (2002). In a sense, the first research question was developed to fill the gap in the literature.

Since Thai CRSs were established to better serve community interests, the second research question considered the role of CRSs in relation to commercial and public broadcasting. Therefore, it was crucial to find out whether the CRSs functioned differently from mainstream commercial and public stations in their community as well as whether they functioned as stated in the guidelines of the Thailand Community Radio Federation (TCRF). Finally, the third research question arose from the noncommercial nature of a CRS and the fact that its survival was primarily dependent on community support and involvement. Therefore, it was important to find out the factors that could predict community involvement in a CRS, factors which would be useful for CRS operators and media policymakers.

**Units of Study**

Because of time constraints I had only four weeks to complete my fieldwork. I decided to study one CRS of each of the six regions in Thailand—the north, northeast, central, east, west, and south. The reason for using this criterion was that each region of Thailand is different in both local culture and language, the two key aspects that media scholars and social activists pointed out as the justification for establishing a CRS as a community channel in Thailand. The supporting evidence lay in the statement of Uajit Virojtrairat, Chairperson of Civil Development Institute and pioneer community radio activist who helped set up over a hundred CRSs nationwide: “A group of Karen villagers in Trat was quite excited when they learned that they could broadcast programs in their
own language. They came to me and said they thought they could raise the funds in a very short time” (“On the same,” 2002). Likewise, Moring and Salmi pointed out that native language was an essential motive for bilingual people to listen to the radio (1998, pp. 336-337).

Selecting the Sites

The sample selection for the preliminary study started from my requests to scholars and activists in Thailand who were involved in media reform and the advent of Thai CRS. I contacted five people and received replies from two. These were Sopit Wangvivatana, Secretary of the Thai Broadcast Journalists Association and Supinya Klangnarong, Secretary General for the Campaign for Popular Media Reform. They helped identify the CRSs that met the guidelines of the TCRF and gave me contact information.

Based on their suggestions, I got three nominee CRSs—Doilangtham CRS in the north, Khon Thaiso CRS in the northeast and Baanjumrung CRS in the east. From research about Thai CRSs on the Lexis-Nexis database, I found that the Khlong Toey CRS of Bangkok was very interesting because the station was located in the nation's biggest slum area where immigrants from all over the country settled down and worked in the capital city. Moreover, the news coverage reported that the station was established to deal with slum problems such as drugs, prostitution, and gambling. I added Pattani CRS of the south because it was the station that I took part in setting up in 2003.

From the United States, I contacted the station representatives by phone to inform them about my research plan and request permission to conduct research at their station. I
asked about such crucial details as broadcasting hours, language, numbers of staff and volunteers, management style, funding, location, audience, history of the station, and nature of the community to estimate the possibility of doing research there. During the preliminary research, I visited five CRSs between November 21 and December 17, 2005.

Figure 2.1 Map of Thailand and the five community radio stations in the preliminary study

Methodology

The primary research method in this preliminary study was a survey technique. I did questionnaire interviews of 25 residents of each station's broadcast coverage area,
resulting in a total of 125 respondents. Because systematical gathering of data from CRS listeners was fairly difficult due to the lack of a comprehensive listing from which a sampling frame could be drawn, I decided to select a sample on the assumption that people listened to community radio due to its closeness. Therefore, I targeted respondents based on the location of their housing.

**Fieldwork**

During the data collection, I also spent time observing the field sites and talking with the station’s staff and listeners. The following section contains details of my activities and my interaction with people at each field site. The narratives concerning each field site are presented in chronological order for each visit. After the narratives of the fieldwork, I present the findings and discussion of the audience survey taken in the preliminary research.

*Fieldwork at Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station*

Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station is located in the Kusumal sub-district of Sakolnakorn province which was 647 kilometers (404 miles) or about nine hours from Bangkok by bus. This station was established by Thai So people who are one of the seven minorities of the northeastern region. These people speak So dialect and have unique customs and traditions. The station aimed to preserve So culture and language. Therefore, the main broadcasting language was So. In this field site, I stayed at the house of the head of station management committee, Plern Yaipangkaew. On the first two days there, I joined a regional seminar on the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the draft on the Broadcasting Operating Act in Mahasarakram province. There, I updated
information about CRSs and met several CRSs operators of the northeastern region. I visited the station on the second night of my stay when Plern invited me to participate in his radio show. I had a chance to introduce myself to the audiences and declare my research project. Plern told his audience to expect my visits, to participate in my questionnaire interviewing.

Although Plern was an amateur radio host, his show was very good. He spoke So language to his audience. In the show, he introduced me to his listeners in So and translated into Thai for me. He told his audiences that I did not speak So and used this opportunity to affirm his audiences that So language was Thaiso’s heritage and needed to be preserved. I recalled the experience vividly. It was a surprising experience hearing Plern announce that I was a Thai doctoral student from the U.S. who came to visit the station. He told his listeners that they should be proud that I chose to visit Khon Thaiso CRS. It was also very nice to hear my story in a different language.

The Khon Thaiso CRS had two active listeners who called in and asked me several questions about my life in the U.S., including requesting me to share my knowledge about the CRS movement in Bangkok and also in the U.S. Their questions were easy to answer, and it appeared, to them and other listeners, my answers were meaningful to their knowledge. I realized that a CRS was crucial; especially, when it played a role as a channel to share experience and information. Interestingly, at the end of the radio show, Plern told his audiences that he and I would visit them. He announced some listeners’ names and asked them to be home to welcome us. I was impressed to see
that Plern made a CRS different from mainstream radio stations. It was very informal and friendly.

On the following day, Plern and I went into a community near the station, Koksomhong village. Plern introduced me to the head of the village. It is a Thai tradition that a newcomer pays a visit and shows respect to the community leader. After the greeting, Plern took me to some houses of his listeners. He told me that he came here often to visit his listeners and to pick up husked rice that some villagers donated to the station. My questionnaire interviewing started very smoothly because these people had learned about my visit from Plern’s radio show. Some talked to me eagerly, but some were very shy. One woman said reluctantly that she could not read but she would like to answer my questions. I read the questions and wrote the answers for her. In fact, I did the same for several of my respondents because they could not read and write well. Although this approach consumed time, it gave me a chance to interact with the respondents and to look for the respondents who would be able to join me in intensive interviewing.

Most listeners told me that they liked the station. They also liked the local language, So, used in the station. They listened to this station because of their loyalty; in a sense that the station belonged to them. One of them said that listening to the station or donating husked rice were the ways to say that they support the station. Their expressions affirmed some level of community involvement. Therefore, Khon Thaiso CRS was a good place to investigate the community’s participatory communication.

On the last day, I went to the market. I noticed from the other day that some tradespersons listen to radio. I was curious how many of them listened to Khon Thaiso
CRS. I talked to two to three tradespersons. They seemed shy and pointed me to one tradeswoman—Jutarat Kummuang. Jutarat told that she listened to Khon Thaiso CRS because of Kumpun Chokchana who was her grandfather and also a radio host. She also liked one of the radio shows of this CRS very much because the host spoke four languages in her program—So, Phuthai, Esarn, and Thai languages. Jutarat added she had lived in Bangkok and other places for some years. Her So language was not as good as before. She listened to the station to practice the language and receive local information. Jutarat admitted that she also listened to the other stations to get news and information outside Kusumal sub-district and hear music (personal communication, November 25, 2005).

I left Kusumal that afternoon. Although I completed a survey interviews, I could do only one in depth interview with a listener because I did not have time. This field site gave me some lessons. First, doing field research requires a flexible timetable. I made my schedule too tight; as a result, I was exhausted by many unexpected activities and did not have time to do intensive interviewing. Second, the ability to handle obstructions was important. I had to adjust myself to the situations and accept unexpected events as well as some changes. For example, I had to accompany Plern’s wife to another province to pick up Plern from the army camp instead of observing the radio station. I wasted all day with her. Finally, the capability to get along with the community provided the completion of the data collection. During my study, I listened to and saw many things that I disagreed with or did not like. I had to bear in mind that my ultimate goal was to get along well
with the people there in order to complete the data collection as much as I could. I was not in the position to get involved unless requested.

*Fieldwork at Khlong Toey Community Radio Station*

Khlong Toey Community Radio Station is located in the Khlong Toey slum in Bangkok. This station was established by the Doungprateep foundation, a nonprofit organization which aimed to stop drug use and violence in slum areas. Most residents of the slum came from other regions of Thailand to work in Bangkok. The biggest group was those who migrated from the northeastern region; therefore, the station’s main broadcast languages were Official Thai and Esarn language—a central language for northeasterners used in 17 provinces in the northeastern region. This CRS aimed to improve the image of slum dwellers. One of the station volunteers, Seri Iam-nuch, stated, “The typical stereotypes of Khlong Toey presented in [mainstream] media are as dens of criminals and gamblers. . . . But we want to tell others that there are also a lot of good things here” (“Air power,” 2003).

On the first day of my visit, I investigated the slum areas and talked to some cart-vendors who sold their goods in front of the radio station and at the schools near the station. Some said that they did not know anything about Klong Toey CRS. The others said they did not listen to the station very often so they could not say whether they liked the station. I found that collecting the data without the accompaniment of the station’s staff allowed me to see a different picture of the station. At Khon Thaiso CRS, Plern took me to the houses of his listeners. Here, at Klong Toey CRS, I was alone and was free to
talk to anyone. The fact was that I did not find any listeners of the station even though they were selling food in front of the radio station or walking past the station.

The benefit of working without the supervision of the station’s staff was that I got the real image of the radio station. For instance, one vendor said she knew that the station is located here but she did not know what the inside would be like. I asked why she did not pay a visit to the station. She replied that the dark glass window made the place look very official so she did not dare to walk in. In another example, I talked to an elderly man who walked his nephew to the kindergarten school adjacent to the radio station. After sending his nephew into the school, he sat and leaned on the radio station’s wall and waved to his nephew. I asked whether he listened to Klong Toey CRS. He said he did not know this station. I told him that he was sitting next to the station. He was very surprised and laughed at himself. There were many people who did not know about this CRS even though they walked past it every day.

These findings made me curious to know more so I walked into the community in order to find someone who may be a listener of this radio station. Klong Toey slum was very big. It was my first time visiting this slum. The community was crowded with small wooden shelters and there were many narrow alleys. There were many passersby. I did not stop them for an interview. They looked in a hurry to go to work. In fact, I felt uncomfortable to start a conversation with them. This feeling came across because I did not know anyone here and I did not know the place well. On that day, I found some listeners and some of them participated in my research.
I walked back to the station and found that the station was open. Terdsak Jumnongsin, the station manager, came to the station late and it was already past his radio show hour. Unlike Plern, Terdsak seemed to be aware of my visit. The situation triggered my thoughts that I needed to adjust myself to this setting and behave less like an investigator or inspector.

On the last day at the station, I walked inside the community and had breakfast where I had lunch with the station’s technician on the other day. I planned to interview the restaurant owner, Jutamas Sri-intarasit, who told me that she started listening to the station two years ago. She added that two of her customers hosted the radio program at the station and asked her to listen to them. She liked this CRS because it was a station that did not carry advertisement (personal communication, November 30, 2006). After the interview, Jutamas introduced me to her customers who came to buy food. I got some people to participate in my questionnaire interviewing. Obviously, the experience from Khon Thaiso and Khlong Toey CRSs suggested that interpersonal relationships were important for a field research.

The field site at Klong Toey CRS provided me with some new lessons. For instance, I had to be patient with the station manager’s suspicion of my visit. Terdsak thought that I came to evaluate his radio station. He also accused me of listening to and believing the slum residents too easily. Unlike me, he had worked there for several years and knew the slum people well. Many could not be trusted (personal communication, November 30, 2006). Probably, Terdsak’s attitude was the obstacle that prevented the station from recruiting new people. Throughout the three days at this CRS, I saw only
one volunteer come to host a radio show and he was not a resident of the slum. The rest were the employees of the foundation. Perhaps, trust was most important to this station because it is located in the slum area. The station manager did not trust the residents; therefore, the station was short of volunteers. Consequently, access and participation were limited.

The nice image of Klong Toey CRS that I drew from reading the news coverage and from the telephone conversation with the station manager prior to the data collection was very much different from the reality. Methodologically speaking, ethnography was a good empirical approach for a social scientist. It allows a researcher to, according to Lofland and Lofland’s words, “look and listen, and watch and ask” (1995, p. 19) which were crucial approaches to gain knowledge and to capture a real picture of the field site. The experience gained from this radio station convinced me to use participant observation and intensive interviewing for my field research.

Fieldwork at Doilangtham Community Radio Station

Doilangtham Community Radio Station is located in the periphery of Doilangtham temple in the Sritia sub-district of Lamphun province. The station was founded by Sritia villagers to strengthen the village’s position on a land reform problem. The land problem started in 1966, when the state authorized the Land Department to allocate land equally to villagers. In the process of this land allocation, land that belonged to one family was sometimes allocated to another family. In 1984, the state launched a national land reform suggested by the World Bank. The same problem reoccurred. Up to
the present time, the villagers have continued to fight against land reform (Komgrit, 2006).

Doilangtham CRS uses *Khom Mueang* as its main broadcasting language. Khom Mueang is a local language spoken in the northern region. This language is close to official Thai. At this field site, I stayed with Chutinan Suwan-aksorn who is a radio host of the station. Chutinan was very excited about my visit. She invited me to her radio show. She introduced me to her audiences in Khom Mueang language. I understood this language pretty well but I could not speak it. Chutinan encouraged her listeners to call in and talk to me. Therefore, many people called in and some dedicated a song to me. During the show, Chutunan encouraged me to speak in Khom Mueang language. She was very proud of her local language.

I got generous help from Chutinan and her close friend, Muk. They took me to Doilangtham temple to greet the priest who was also the station’s consultant. They took me to visit the communities near the station and helped find participants for my questionnaire interviewing. Similarly to Plern at Khon Thaiso CRS, Chutinan and Muk took me to meet their listeners. Their audiences were those who worked at red onion packing houses. Chutunan told me that Sritia district grew longan fruits. Outside the longan season, the residents packed red onions or went to work at the construction sites in other provinces. Normally, people in the packing house earned about USD$2-4 dollar a day. From my observation, there were about 20-80 people working in each packing house. These people sat together in a big group and turned a radio on. They listened to Doilangtham CRS and some recognized me from Chutinan’s radio show.
During my observation, I met several teenagers who came to host their program. I also noticed that the station received many calls each hour. This station was popular in the community. In addition, there were many people who paid a visit at the station, especially on the weekend. The visitors said that they came to visit the monks at the temple. They made a stop at the radio station because it was directly on the route. Some donated to the station and some requested music.

I helped Chutinan and some hosts answer the phone. I took a chance to ask the listeners a few questions. However, the conversation did not go smoothly because I could not speak Khom Mueang language and many listeners were not comfortable speaking Thai to me. During my visit, the station manager was busy. He was running for the head of Tambon or the district Administrative Office (TAO) election. The station committee asked him to stop doing radio show during the election period.

Fieldwork at Pattani Community Radio Station

Pattani Community Radio Station is located in Muang district of Pattani in the south of Thailand where the majority of population is Muslim. I know this radio station well because I took part in establishing the station with the Muslim volunteers. The station was founded to serve Muslim people who are the majority of the three farthest south provinces of Thailand (but at the same time considered as a minority of the Thai population who are mainly Buddhist). Due to the difference of religion and way of life, the station served as a tool to promote Islam and the Islamic way of life. The main language used in the broadcasting was Yawi, a distinct local version of Malayu or Malay language which is spoken within the Muslim communities.
At the time, the southern region, in particular, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces were facing deadly threats. Bombings and other attacks took place daily in these Muslim Malay provinces. The insurgency was centered in the Malay Pattani region. The terrorism was complex. Some claimed that the threats occurred in response to historical grievances as Pattani lost its independence to Siam or Thailand in 1786. Some stated that the threats were supported by radical Islamist ideologies or jihadist groups (International Crisis Group, 2005). Unfortunately, the government could not remedy the issues and the terrorism became severe (see more details in Pattani CRS chapter).

I visited the station on the first day of my arrival. The station was quiet. It was raining all day long. On the following day and the rest of my stay, the city was flooded. As a result, I did not visit the radio station often. It was also difficult to visit communities near the station. Some of the station’s staff did not come to host their shows because of the flood. It was not a good time for field observation. Fortunately, Nirapong Sukmuang, President of PCRG, Narong Maseng, Station Manager, and Yah Alee, Assistant Manager, helped me find some participants in their community to complete the questionnaire interviewing.

Nirapong told me that he was busy with other activities and rarely came to the station. Also, there were no regular meetings because many volunteers left the station since the terrorism began. Likewise, the station did not allow teenagers to host the shows in the evenings for their safety. As a result, the station lost many volunteers. It became too dangerous to travel after dark so the station stopped operation at 6 p.m. I was disappointed with the situation. However, there was nothing the station’s staff could do
about the changes since terrorist problems were beyond their control. Narong and Yah complained that they were pretty tired of hosting so many shows a day. Yah’s house was close to the station but Narong’s house was far away. Fortunately, Suriya Wadolao, a religious radio host, decided to take care of the station during the morning including hosting all morning shows. Narong came to the station in the afternoon and stayed until 6 p.m. The unrest in the southern Malay region affected the operation of Pattani CRS very much.

Fieldwork at Baanjumrung Community Radio Station

Baanjumrung Community Radio Station is located in Baanjumrung village in Rayong province in eastern Thailand. This village received grants from several organizations for aspects of community development, including establishing the radio station. The station is located at the community co-op market which was also the village’s meeting center.

Chatchai Liangchareon, the village leader and the station manager, told me that the station had more than 20 community organizations hosting radio shows. However, from my observation, several shows were not very interesting because the program hosts focused on their group’s activities rather than what listeners liked to hear. On my visit, there were over a hundred people coming to the station. They participated in the village meeting about the poverty problem. Most of them listened to this station; therefore, they helped complete the questionnaire.

I did not spend much time at this station because I fell ill with dengue fever. However, I noticed that this station was similar to Doilangtham CRS in the north. In a
sense that a station was a tool for community development and the strength of the station resulted from the understanding of the community members that a CRS was important to their life. I believed that the station would survive due to the strong support from the community members.

The Findings

The following section is the findings of the audience survey of the five CRSs—Khon Thaiso, Khlong Toey, Doilangtham, Pattani, and Baanjumrung. The total of 125 participants answered 1) whether the CRS in their community satisfied them, 2) whether their CRS functioned differently from mainstream radio stations in their community, 3) how much they would like to be involved in the CRS, and 4) what factors could predict their involvement.

There are six terms that need to be defined before presenting the findings. First, the involvement in the CRS referred to the willingness of the respondents to be involved in the CRS. The respondents were asked to select at least one role, but were allowed to choose more than one of the following: listener, donor, station committee member, program host, volunteer, and station caretaker such as a key-keeper or cleaner. Second, CRS listening referred to the frequency of the respondents’ listening to a CRS in their community. The respondents may indicate from never listen to the station, listen to the station one to three days a week, listen four to six days a week, or listen every day.

Third, regarding the usefulness of the station, the respondents were asked to state what benefit they thought a CRS provided to their community. They were allowed to select all or any of the following six statements or not select any. These were 1)
encourage residents to work together; 2) strengthen relationships among residents; 3) produce better understanding among residents; 4) produce greater tolerance among residents; 5) be a center for information exchange; and 6) be an informal education center.

Fourth, the general functions of the station were compiled from eleven statements set up on a 5-scale basis. These were 1) provide information; 2) entertain people; 3) function as a communication channel of the community such as encouraging people to express and/or exchange ideas and share information; 4) function as a warning or surveillance tool of the community; 5) monitor and alert the community to social problems; 6) create a participatory atmosphere; 7) conserve local culture and tradition; 8) promote local identity; 9) promote local minority groups; 10) become involved in and support community affairs; and 11) function as a channel for discussion of local politics.

Fifth, the functions of a CRS as a public sphere were described in six statements. These were 1) allow the community to express and/or exchange ideas and share information; 2) support local diversity; 3) promote local identity; 4) promote minority groups; 5) promote local business; and 6) function as a channel for discussion of local issues.

Finally, concerning the understanding of constitutional rights, the respondents were asked three questions: 1) who owns a CRS, 2) who manages a CRS, and 3) who produces the programs?
The respondent profiles

A majority (58.4%) of the respondents were female. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 68 years old. The biggest group came from the 36 to 46 year old-age group. About 90% of the respondents were Buddhists, while the remainder were Muslims. The biggest group (53.6%) of respondents had an education level of 6th grade or lower, followed by 7-12th graders (25.8%). About a half of the respondents (51.2%) spoke a local language at home and about 37% spoke Thai. But 12% spoke both Thai and one or more local languages. A majority of the respondents (42.4%) were farmers. Twenty-eight percent were employees. A little over twenty nine percent were traders, teachers, and students. Finally, about 45% had an average household income lower than USD$125 a month. About 28% had income between USD$126 and USD$250 a month. And about one fourth had income higher than USD$251.

Satisfaction with a community radio station

The findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between community radio listening and newspaper reading, $\chi^2(4, N = 125) = 14.345, df = 4, p = .006$, in that the majority of those who listened to CRS every day did not read newspapers at all. This finding seemed to support the fact that people who could read gathered news and information from a newspaper while those who were less literate got information from a CRS.

In addition, there was an association between community radio listening and public/commercial radio listening, $\chi^2(4, N = 125) = 35.785, p = .000$. The data showed three interesting cases: 1) the respondents who did not listen to public/commercial radio,
did not listen to a CRS either (n = 15). 2) The biggest group of listeners were those who listened to both public/commercial radio and CRS every day (n = 39). These people probably liked to listen to the radio no matter what type of a station it is. And 3) those who listened to a CRS did not listen to public/commercial radio (n = 14). This group was very interesting because it supported the belief that public/commercial radio and a CRS were different in content and programming.

The socio-demographics such as gender, age, religion, education, language spoken in the family, occupation, and family income were tested. Across all these sub variables, gender was the only factor that had no association with community radio listening. For instance, lower educated respondents seemed to listen to CRSs more than higher educated respondents, $\chi^2 (4, N = 125) = 15.577, p = .004$. The biggest group who listened to CRSs were those who spoke a local dialect or both Thai and a local dialect, $\chi^2 (4, N = 125) = 16.468, p = .002$. This finding ratified the respondents’ broadcasting language preference (that 62% preferred a CRS to be broadcast in their local dialect). It also suggested that local dialect was a key factor in attracting CRS listeners. Finally, farmers and low income people were those who listened to a CRS the most ($\chi^2 (4, N = 125) = 19.832, p = .001$, $\chi^2 (4, N = 125) = 18.556, p = .001$ respectively). This finding suggested that CRSs should provide content about agriculture more frequently for farmers.

There was a significant association between frequency of CRS listening and a favorable attitude towards CRS listening, $\chi^2 (2, N = 99) = 6.372, p = .041$. The respondents who liked programs very much were those who listened to CRSs either
almost every day or every day. However, there was no relationship between the amount of hours and a favorable attitude towards CRS listening.

Descriptive statistics showed that television was the main source of information about politics and economics whereas a CRS was the main source for religious and community affairs. This finding affirmed that a CRS should focus its content more on local issues for instance, local politics and economics. It was not reasonable for a CRS to focus the content on a national scale because media like television has already done so and was recognized for that as well. Goodness-of-fit chi square was employed to check whether the observed media usage to gather each type of information was random or more likely represented actual population differences. The $\chi^2$ values asserted that the way the residents selected media differently depended on the type of information.

*Functions of a community radio station*

Analysis of Variance was performed to test the performance of a CRS as a public sphere. The term “public sphere” introduced by Habermas (1989) referred to the sphere of those who joined to form a “public.” In other words, individuals used a CRS as a place to post or announce their public opinions. However, this would occur if CRSs positioned themselves as a public space for localities and persuaded the residents to participate, both as listeners and volunteers.

The finding displayed that the respondents in the five provinces viewed the performance of a CRS in their community as a public sphere differently, $F(4,120) = 7.111, p = .000$. The post hoc tests—a Tukey Procedure—revealed that the performance of Khlong Toey CRS in Bangkok was rated as a public sphere lower than Khon Thiso
CRS in Sakolnakorn ($M_{diff} = -2.68$, $p = .019$) and Doilangtham CRS in Lamphun ($M_{diff} = -4.36$, $p = .000$). Likewise, the performance of Pattani CRS in the south was rated as a public sphere lower than Doilangtham CRS ($M_{diff} = -3.04$, $p = .005$). The results suggested that Khlong Toey and Pattani CRSs should improve their performance, for instance, provide itself as a communication channel for the community and support or promote local diversity or minority groups more.

According to descriptive statistics, 51% of the respondents knew their constitutional rights to own and manage a CRS and to participate in a radio production well. Twenty three percent knew it partly. One fourth (25.6%) did not know that the community or grassroots groups could own and operate CRSs. The highest number of residents who did not know their rights came from those of the Khlong Toey CRS. This indicated that Khlong Toey CRS should give more information to their listeners. The respondents of Doilangtham CRS and Baanjumrun CRS were those who know their rights very well. It implied that CRSs of the two provinces provided good information to their community.

Of the respondents, 72.8% reported that they preferred an inactive role as a listener and 15% said they would donate to the station. I categorized these involvements as a low level. The rest, 12%, stated that they would like to be involved in an operational or managerial level for instance on a station’s committee, or as a program host, volunteer, or station’s caretaker. These types were categorized as high level of involvement. Across all provinces, high level of involvement was rare except at Baanjumrun CRS in Rayong. According to my observation, most stations had a staffing problem, so this finding
suggested that CRSs should communicate with their listeners more when they were looking for volunteers at an operational or managerial level.

On a wider view, Analysis of Variance revealed that the respondents had different satisfaction on overall functions of a CRS in their community, $F(4,117) = 6.511, p = .000$. The post hoc tests—a Games-Howell Procedure—displayed statistically significant differences between 1) Khlong Toey CRS and Doilangtham CRS, $p = .001, \alpha = .05$, 2) Baanjumrung CRS and Doilangtham CRS, $p = .000, \alpha = .05$, and 3) Pattani CRS and Doilangtham CRS ($p = .012, \alpha = .05$).

Among the five provinces, the participants of Lamphun and Sakolnakorn rated their satisfaction on the functions of their CRSs higher than the other, $M$(Doilangtham in Lamphun) = 53.42, $SD = 1.86$; $M$(Khon Thaiso in Sakolnakorn) = 51.21, $SD = 3.49$ respectively. The post hoc tests indicated that the Khlong Toey CRS in Bangkok needed to improve its performance when compared to the Doilangtham CRS in Lamphun. The respondents in Bangkok reported the lowest scores, which indicated that they were not highly satisfied with the functions of their CRS, $M$(Khlong Toey) = 47.40, $SD = 6.28$. Likewise, Pattani and Baanjumrung CRSs needed to improve their performance, $M$(Pattani) = 49.88, $SD = 2.69$; $M$(Baanjumrung) = 49.32, $SD = 5.51$ respectively.

Interestingly, increased frequency of CRS listening is associated with higher involvement in a CRS, $r = .211, p = .05$. Satisfaction with the functions of a CRS is also correlated with a higher involvement in a CRS, $r = .199, p = .05$. Likewise, there is a positive association between satisfaction with the functions of a CRS and understanding of the constitutional rights to own, manage, and produce programs, $r = .237, p = .01$. 
Moreover, the more the respondents understand of their constitutional rights, the more they tend to get involved in the station, \( r = .216, p = .05 \), and tend to listen to the station, \( r = .189, p = .05 \). Finally, the community members’ perception on usefulness of a CRS was not associated with any factor.

*The prediction of audience involvement in a community radio station*

Multiple regression was employed to find the best predictor for community members’ involvement in CRSs. The three variables—*CRS listening, satisfaction with the functions of a station, and their understanding of their constitutional rights*—were treated as variables of prediction. Community members’ perception of the usefulness of a CRS to the community was excluded because it was not correlated with any other factors.

The findings showed that the three predictors accounted for 8% of community members’ involvement in their CRS (\( R^2 = .081 \)). In other words, community involvement could be encouraged by other multiple factors which need to be further investigated. However, the coefficient value revealed that CRS listening was the strongest predictor for community members’ involvement (\( t[CRS \text{ listening}] = .031 \)). A zero-order value of .235 indicated that this factor alone accounted for 24% of community involvement but this factor was weakened when it was combined with the other two factors (part correlation = .193 or about 19%). Satisfaction on functions of the station was not significant (\( p = .184 \)). A part correlation value of .118 suggested that when combined with the other two factors, this variable, satisfaction about the functions of a station, predicted community involvement of about 12%. In other words, satisfaction with a CRS accounted for community involvement in only a small manner.
Likewise, community members’ understanding of constitutional rights was not significant ($p = .356$). A part correlation value of .082 indicated that with the combination of the other two factors, this variable, understanding their constitutional rights, predicted community involvement of about 8%. Even though this predictor was not significant, it is reasonable to assume that community members who have better understanding of their rights are more likely to become involved in the station because a zero-order value is .145 or about 15%.

**Discussion**

The findings from the preliminary study support the assumption that the emergence of a CRS in the community provides new options for community communication among the residents because, while they are exposed to mainstream media, they are also exposed to a CRS. Some did not listen to commercial/public radio but listened to a CRS because of the local information and music the station provides, as well as the station's use of the local language. This finding suggested the importance of a CRS having local identity, presenting local information, and broadcasting in a local dialect.

Data from the respondent profiles suggest that CRS operators should provide radio content that is not too difficult to understand. A majority of listeners have a low level of education and work in the agriculture sector. Therefore, radio content should be relevant to the occupation of the audience. Moreover, CRS operators should continue to use local language as the main broadcast language. Two thirds of the audiences speak primarily either their local language or both their local language and Thai language.
Likewise, policy makers should note these points in order to differentiate the roles and characteristics of CRSs from mainstream radio stations.

This study displayed that at least two CRS audiences—Khon Thaiso and Doilangtham—agreed that their CRSs helped expand the public sphere. The rest of the CRSs studied needed to improve their role in order to support their existence, as suggested by section 40 of the Thai Constitution. This study recommends that CRSs develop the access mechanisms that allow or facilitate higher participation of the community members such as encouraging local organizations to share opinions on social issues, offering several feedback options, and allocating air time to individuals or community-based organizations to produce programs.

The study also revealed that most people preferred to be a listener than become involved in the station’s managerial activities. This is a challenge for CRS managers and personnel to persuade their audiences to take an active role and realize the benefits of a CRS to their community. The study suggests that a CRS should inform their audiences about their constitutional rights to own and operate CRS and to participate in radio production. According to Rodriguez and many other scholars such as Offer (2002), Kasoma (2002), Dagron (2001), and Fairchild (2001), a CRS is a symbol of a democratic and decentralized society. The involvement of the community members in the operation of a CRS is a strong indicator of how well they understood their role as a citizen in a democratic society. In fact, an association between CRS listening and program enjoyment suggests to CRS operators that the improvement in radio quality will encourage more listeners, which would result in higher support and involvement from listeners as well.
The comparison of satisfaction with the functions of a CRS showed that the Doilangtham CRS performed the best, whereas the Khlong Toey CRS needed to improve its functions. According to field observation, Khlong Toey CRS was mainly operated by Doungprateep foundation. Access and participation might be limited to the community members at some point. The other CRSs were owned, operated, and managed by the community members, which fortunately resulted in a higher degree of satisfaction. Therefore, this study suggests that CRS operators should promote the practice of participatory communication to secure the station’s survival. Likewise, policymakers need to emphasize participatory communication to prevent a CRS from transformation into a commercial station.

The findings of correlation confirmed that if the station could get community members to listen to the station more frequently, the listeners might want to participate in the station in the role of donor, station committee or radio host. Moreover, this study supports literature that argued that: a greater understanding of constitutional rights results in higher involvement in a CRS. In addition, higher satisfaction with CRS performance would lead to higher involvement. Therefore, CRS operators should promote the idea that a CRS belongs to everyone and the residents have the right to become involved in the station. Also, CRS operators should often remind their audience about the important status of a CRS as a symbol of Thai media democratization that freed radio from the state and business institutions. Their support is meaningful to the expansion of a democratic atmosphere as well as the variety of choices of radio programs and content.
Although this research did not support the literature that presented a correlation between the usefulness of a CRS and community involvement, it does not mean that this study contradicts the literature. However, it might suggest that these CRSs have not performed well enough for the residents to see the usefulness of having these stations in their community. If so, this study suggests that CRS operators should be more involved in the activities of the community. In other words, the station should promote access and participation more often. Moreover, descriptive statistics also revealed that some audience expectations, such as the station’s ability to help produce greater tolerance among residents and to be an informal education center of the community, were rated with low scores; therefore, the stations should improve their performance.

Multiple regression suggests that CRS operators should try to find ways to increase audiences as well as encouraging the current audience to listen to the station more often. This is because CRS listening is the strongest predictor for community involvement. In fact, the survival of the station should not be beyond the station’s ability, since several respondents listened to the station because they liked local information and music. If the station improves radio quality to meet the audience’s needs, broadcasts more in local languages, and focuses more on the age group of 30 year old listeners and up, the station could expect higher support from the community members.

**Transforming Experience: Three Major Adjustments**

The preliminary study is useful for many reasons. First, it allowed me to visit and observe the prospective CRSs that I aimed to explore in my subsequent field research. I was able to observe day-to-day tasks of the station’s staff as well as talk with them about
the station’s activities and their attitudes toward volunteering at the station. Second, during data collection, I had a chance to talk with the community members and investigate their perceptions toward the CRS in their community. This allowed me to practice qualitative interviewing.

Third, I had a chance to observe the residential way of living as well as become acquainted with the community members. Fourth, it provided an opportunity to make a logistic arrangement for my current fieldwork which resulted in a more convenient reentry to the community. Fifth, the data and the field experience became main sources for the adjustment of my current field research. Moreover, the data from the preliminary study was later used for data triangulation when analyzing the findings of the current research. Lastly, being back in Thailand provided me an opportunity to reconnect with media activists and scholars. I learned the inside news of the CRS movements from some of them as well as requesting permission to interview them for my fieldwork.

Fundamentally, the preliminary study was an essential starting point for my current fieldwork. I had a chance to investigate the field site, make connections, and create trust with prospective participants and other community members. From a methodological viewpoint, I had an opportunity to practice qualitative interviewing and observation and I found that both methods were a good choice to employ in my current fieldwork. Moreover, the total experience allowed me to foresee the possibility to conduct the current fieldwork. In other words, a preliminary study became the groundwork for my current ethnographic research because it encouraged me to think thoroughly on the topic of my current field research. It also suggested I select the proper
sample, helped me shape the research questions and foresaw the findings, as well as improved the research design. Finally, a preliminary study suggested three major adjustments to apply in order to make my current field research feasible.

*The first adjustment: The sample selection criteria*

The first adjustment lay in the changed criteria about how to select the radio stations. In the preliminary study, I focused on culture and language differences. Therefore, I recruited a CRS from each region of Thailand. However, the preliminary study suggested that another important factor was how the station I planned to study met the performance standards outlines in the guidelines of TCRF. In other words, it was appropriate to select a station that adopted practices of participatory communication. Therefore, Khlong Toey CRS in Bangkok was eliminated because of a lack of public participation.

In fact, there were some additional explanations about why I decided not to include Khlong Toey CRS. This station was not a pleasant place to work due to two reasons. First, neither public access nor participation was adopted at the station. An in depth interview with the station manager, Terdsak Jumnongsin, revealed that this problem was caused by his attitude in not trusting the slum dwellers. For example, I asked Terdsak how he would solve volunteer problems. He said he invited some residents who used to participate in the activities of the foundation. I argued that I did not see any people hosting the shows except the employees of the foundation. Terdsak replied that many volunteers had already given up. He did not have time to recruit new people. I told him that I talked to some motorcycle taxi riders. They had some ideas about the programming
such as adding a sports show. These listeners knew a lot about football and boxing and might be able to help produce the show. Terdsak refused and said that he did not trust unknown residents. This slum was full of bad people. They might steal the station’s equipment. He preferred those who used to join the foundation’s activities. Obviously, the station created a barrier to entry by setting up the rule that only the community residents who used to work with Doungprateep foundation could be involved in the station production. As a result, most radio hosts were employees of the foundation or the residents who were invited by the station to participate (personal communication, November 30, 2005).

Secondly, the concept of community radio was distorted. Terdsak stated that he was trying to make the station professional in order to compete with metropolitan commercial stations in Bangkok. The target audience of the station was not those who lived in the slum community. Instead, he aimed to reach listeners outside the Khlong Toey slum (personal communication, November 28, 2005). This station abandoned the heart of a CRS. The participatory democratic structure of a station and the active role of individuals in community media were not supported. If I continued to study this station, I would not get anything out of it or could learn anything about community participation since there was no participation at all.

In addition, the preliminary study suggested that there was no need to study a CRS that performed similarly to another CRS. Therefore, I decided to drop Baanjumrung CRS since its performance and objectives to strengthen the community seemed similar to Doilangtham CRS. For example, among the CRS listeners, the respondents of
Doilangtham CRS and Baanjumrung CRS were those who well knew their constitutional rights to own, operate and manage a CRS. It indicated that the two CRSs provided good information for their community members.

The second adjustment: The research methods

The preliminary research suggested a change in the research methods from a questionnaire interview to participant observation and qualitative interviewing. I found that an audience survey provided statistical findings, which was good but there was no need to replicate it in the current research. What I would like to have was a chance to talk with the community members to perceive their feelings, thoughts, and experiences in descriptive detail. Therefore, intensive interviewing would be an appropriate choice of methodology.

Moreover, I found that a survey technique placed a burden on the respondents who were not fluent in both reading and writing. Less educated respondents seemed hesitant to participate. On the other hand, I had to spend a lot of time reading and writing the questionnaire for respondents. Personally, I did not feel comfortable using a survey technique that required a lot of effort to estimate whether the prospective respondent would like to answer the questionnaire. The worst experience was at Klong Toey slum where I saw many passersby but I did not dare to stop them for the interview. I felt very uncomfortable to start a conversation with them. Moreover, this research method was somehow a burden for me when I had to ask for permission from each respondent and read my project objectives to over a hundred people. Furthermore, the questionnaire
interviewing in this preliminary research often took place on the street or in the middle of nowhere which was quite uncomfortable.

On the contrary, some qualitative interviews that I practiced during the preliminary study provided a lot of details which were very useful to explicate the topic in depth. It helped me learn more from the station’s staff and audience perspectives which I did not gain from a survey technique. However, I noticed that this technique had a drawback in that it was difficult to know whether the respondents told the truth or made up a story to impress me. More interviews with other participants would solve this problem. Including an additional method—participant observation—to triangulate the data and research methodology would allow me to gain knowledge and to capture a real picture of the field site.

*The third adjustment: The research participants*

The last adjustment is the way to recruit participants by including a telephone interview. First, the preliminary research suggested that several audiences listen to a CRS together and some formed a listening network. For instance, at Doilangtham CRS, the workers in the red onion packing houses listened to the radio together. I did not see any individuals listen to the radio alone. They enjoyed the music and encouraged each other to call the station. At the same radio station, there were several people who paid a visit to the station. Moreover, I noticed that there were several listeners who always called in. Interestingly, these listeners used a pseudonym and dedicated a song to other listeners who also used a pseudonym. I did not have a chance to meet these listeners. But their
listening practice seemed interesting to study. The radio host told me that it was like this since the station began.

At Pattani CRS, no one visited the station. The listeners called the station instead of coming to the station. It seemed important to investigate the different behavior of the listeners. Finally, at Khon Thaiso CRS, several tradespersons in the market listened to the radio station because Jutarat Kummuang, a tradeswoman, listened to her grandfather’s radio show and played the radio loudly. This was similar to the behavior of the listeners in the red onion packing houses in Lamphun. These observations suggested that I should perform qualitative interviewing both with an individual listener and a group of listeners which might result in an explanation of group listening interaction.

Second, the qualitative interviewing should take place with several staff of the radio station, including former volunteers who stopped their service. This practice would help explicate the station problem from other perspectives as well as strengthen the data triangulation and lead to validity and reliability of the research.

In addition, the interviewees should include media activists and scholars who were involved in the emergence and development of a CRS. Their opinions might help explain points that the CRS operators and listeners could not. In short, the participants in the current fieldwork could be listeners, station operators, media activists, and scholars. Research of this type demands a preliminary study to evaluate the approach and the techniques. My experience as a consultant to the Pattani CRS raised some of the research questions dealing with community communication. The chapter defined six operationalized terms—involvement in a CRS, CRS listening, the usefulness of a CRS,
the general function of a CRS, the specific function of a CRS as a public sphere, and the understanding of constitutional rights toward a CRS. Evaluation factors were established and functions were elucidated to predict and explain factors leading to community involvement. Field work at five looked was presented.

The major outcome of the preliminary study was the adjustment of the research design. The TCRF guidelines became a more important selector and aspects of culture followed naturally. An ethnographic approach proved to be a better way of acquiring data than a questionnaire approach in these cultural settings. The preliminary research showed that three sites would present sufficient data and simplify the study (See Figure 2.2). Methodology will be described in detail in the following chapter.

Figure 2.2 Locations of the three community radio stations in the study
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The current research aims to investigate participatory communication practices in three geographically diverse community radio stations (CRSs). I explored how access, participation, and self-management were promoted and carried out in these radio stations. The method was ethnographic fieldwork through participant observation and qualitative interviewing.

In this chapter I explain these two main research methods, discussing their rationales and challenges. In a later section, I provide the application of the fieldwork approach through nine sub-topics to give details about my responses and thoughts from doing the ethnographic fieldwork and the data collection. The sub-topics are 1) positioning: reading myself, 2) self disclosure, 3) orientation and reentry: not a complete stranger, 4) understanding the culture of the settings, 5) language issues, 6) authenticating the data, 7) selecting the informants, 8) interviewing: lessons from the fieldwork, and 9) field notes: the data logging.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is the foundation of my data collecting. It involves getting inside the three communities in Sritia sub-district in the north, Kusumal sub-district in the northeast, and Muang district in the south to observe or witness how the community members managed their radio stations, as well as to investigate how the other community members interacted with this community channel.
Philosophy and rationale

Participant observation has been a prominent social scientific approach widely used in community field research (Janes, 1961, p. 446). According to Dewalt and Dewalt, participant observation uses “all of the observation and formal and informal interviewing” (2002, p. 2) to generate the data which Bernard termed as “the kind of experiential knowledge” (2002, p. 322).

Lofland and Lofland pointed out the main reason for using participant observation fieldwork was because “the researcher strives to be a participant in and a witness to lives of others” (1995, p. 3). Owing to the fact that during the fieldwork, a researcher tends to take various roles from a complete participant to an observer, depending on the situations, participant observation then goes by many names such as field observation, qualitative observation, or direct observation (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 18).

Dewalt and Dewalt stated that participant observation “is a way of approaching the fieldwork experience, gaining understanding of the most fundamental processes of social life” (2002, p. 2). In a sense, participant observation is part of positivist philosophy as it is the method that bases knowledge on “observation through the five senses rather than on belief or logic alone” (Babbie, 2004, p. 35).

Castellanet and Jordan pointed out that a social setting or locale is as complex as the topic that a social scientist aimed to study; therefore, social scientists must recognize the need to get into the setting in order to have a chance to interact with the participants and be exposed to the environment there (2002, p. 11). Janes added that participant observation could help enrich data collection and also eliminate the estrangement of the...
researcher’s presence because “the subject observed is not aware that the investigator is using his behavior as a source of information” (1961, p. 447). In other words, participant observation was a practice that allowed a researcher to be her own instrument of the study who encouraged participants to share their collective experience of the observed topic (Bernard, 2000, p. 167). Finally, Cornwall and Jewkes added that participant observation inspires a researcher to respect local knowledge and perspectives (1995, p. 1667) as the data were gathered from community members involved in the topic rather than ignoring their existence or involvement in the research (Castellanet & Jordan, 2002, p. 12). Therefore, a researcher bears in mind that participant observation is the practice of being “people-centered” in which the respondents are encouraged to share their experience with the community stakeholders and the insiders who know their place and tradition more than a social scientist (Finn, 1994, pp. 26-27).

**Challenges**

The biggest challenge of participant observation lies in maintaining impartiality. Babbie stated that although field research received credit for its validity, a researcher has to face a problem with reliability because the nature of its practice requires a researcher to personally engage in the process more than a quantitative approach does (2004, pp. 307-308). Babbie then recommended a researcher use conscious observation and a well designed measurement device. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater recommended a social scientist use multiple sources of data (2002, p. 119). Likewise, Cornwall and Jewkes suggested a triangulation or cross examination such as using more than one research method (1995, p. 1670).
Another challenge of conducting participant observation fieldwork is the fact that a researcher is a stranger in the field site. This fact is not easily avoided. The best way is when a researcher learns to be both an observer and a participant in the community. DeWalt and DeWalt added that behavioral and social skills are important to help a researcher adjust to a new situation and understand the community’s way of life (2002, p. 17). Personally, I was a stranger at Doilangham CRS because the station had just changed its managerial board. I had to spend time making friends with the committee members and volunteers. I decided to stay at the radio station until it closed every day to make myself visible and to show that I was interested in their activities.

The situations were friendlier at Pattani and Khon Thaiso CRSs, as the community was familiar with me because I have been there earlier; I was still perceived as an outsider, so the station’s staff did not trust me enough to reveal their problems at first. For instance, at Khon Thaiso CRS, the Station Manager and Head of Station Management Committee said that the station had not changed at all since my previous visit. They did not disclose management problems until several days later. Similarly, the station’s staff of Pattani CRS withheld their problems at first but shared with me little by little. The longer I stayed the more information I received. Unfortunately, I had limited time to spend at each field site.

Another challenge was that I sometimes suspected that the collected data might have been contaminated by my behavior. For instance, I might unintentionally intimidate the respondents by using inappropriate levels of formality inherent in the Thai language or behaving formally, or I might unconsciously disapprove them or unwittingly
encourage participants to respond in ways I wanted to see or hear. This concern arose often during my observations. I provide greater detail on this in sections later this chapter.

Finally, the biggest difficulty in practicing participant observation lies in determining how to handle the conflicts within myself. During the fieldwork, I tried to keep my attitudes neutral towards respondents, the community’s way of life, or the observed activities as much as I could. Unfortunately, there were some behaviors and attitudes of the participants that I disagreed with such as the ethnic discrimination at Khon Thaiso CRS. Agar said importantly that, “Ethnography is neither subjective nor objective. It is interpretive, mediating two worlds through a third” (1986, p. 19) and therefore it is important to recognize the inner self-conflicts since negative attitudes might determine how a researcher conceptualizes the data and analyzes the findings.

**Qualitative Interviewing**

In this current fieldwork, qualitative interviewing occurred at many places and times such as at home during meals with my host family, at the restaurant with some customers or the owner, as well as at the radio station with the station’s visitors, radio hosts, and the stations’ staff. In other words, qualitative interviewing in my research happened through conversations or informal interviewing, unstructured interviewing, and semi-structured interviewing. The art of qualitative interviewing lies in the practice of the researcher in introducing a conversation or an interview and ending it (Bernard, 2002, p. 204).
Philosophy and rationale

Similar to participant observation, qualitative interviewing is a research technique that is widely used in social sciences. Maccoby and Maccoby (1954) state that interviewing is “a face-to-face verbal interchange, in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons” (p. 449). In other words, a researcher employs qualitative interviewing to gather a set of realities defined and constituted by the respondents through their experiences and narrations (Maso, 1996, p. 29).

One of the most prominent attributes of qualitative interviewing is that it allows a researcher to perceive participants’ feelings, thoughts, and experiences (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 2). Mishler used Gumperz’ term, “speech activities,” to describe the nature of interviewing as a discourse between speakers in which an interview serves as a set of research data (1986, pp. 36-36). Gilchrist notes that interviewing is a sort of formal discourse wherein a researcher and a respondent negotiate an understanding of the research topic (1992, p. 71).

Metzler said that qualitative interviewing is a “multidimensional human conversation” where the dialogue runs on both conscious and unconscious as well as both verbal and nonverbal levels (1997, p. 9). According to Ely and her colleagues, the main purpose of an interview is “to learn to see the world from the eyes of the person being interviewed . . . to understand people’s meanings . . . to discover how they organize their behavior” (1991, p. 58). However, it needs to be pointed out here that in conversation, the roles of the partners are not equal. It is most likely that the researcher controls the
situation, introduces the topic, and follows up on the interviewee’s answers (Kvale, 1996, p. 6).

Bernard discussed three forms of qualitative interviewing based on the degree of control by the researcher and respondents. First, informal interviewing is conducted with “a total lack of structure or control” through conversations that are heard during observations or through general conversations with the respondents (2002, p. 204). Unstructured interviewing, on the other hand, was “based on a clear plan that you keep constantly in mind, but are also characterized by a minimum of control over people’s response. . . . Unstructured interviewing is excellent for building initial rapport with people before moving to more formal interviews, and it is perfect for talking to informants who would not tolerate a more formal interview” (pp. 204-205). Lastly, semi-structured interviewing was used when a researcher would have a chance to meet with the respondents only once. The interviewing was based on an interview guide. Bernard writes, “Semi-structured interviewing works very well in projects where you are dealing with high-level bureaucrats and elite members of a community—people who are accustomed to efficient use of their time. . . . You are fully in control of what you want from an interview but [this method] leaves both you and your respondent free to follow new leads” (2002, p. 205).

Finally, Mason (2002) discusses, from several perspectives, the rationale for using the qualitative interviewing method. For instance, he suggests that a researcher should consider the goal of the research. Basically, qualitative interviewing is best for exploring people’s opinions, perceptions, interpretations, and interactions. Secondly, a researcher
has to keep in mind that knowledge received from an interview is contextual, so a researcher needs to encourage a respondent to share relevant facts, events, and experiences. And lastly, if a researcher believes that social reality or a social phenomenon needs to be discussed with deep and complex explanations and arguments, qualitative interviewing is then a good approach (pp. 62-67).

Challenges

Qualitative interviewing is a matter of two people who come to converse purposely in order to reach their goals. As a result, an interview can never be a purely objective method. In fact, the issue of the subjectivity of qualitative interviewing is the most discussed in the literature. Rubin and Rubin’s concept of “two human beings” suggests that as human beings, neither the interviewer nor the participant is expected to be neutral, because their feelings, attitudes, and experiences will influence their thoughts continuously (2003, p. 30).

Many scholars such as Gubrium and Holstein (2002), Gilchrist (1992), and Mishler (1986) use the term “discourse” to describe the dynamic and negotiated atmosphere of an interview. In addition, the term discourse indicates the interwoven relationships between power and truth—the power to control a dialogue and an attempt to create a set of truths. However, the nature of human beings should not be used as an excuse but rather be a warning for a researcher to be self-aware of the importance of objectivity.

Another challenge lies in the justifications of constructions of dialogue and the use of language to encourage and facilitate conversations. According to Dewalt and
Dewalt, the researcher should constantly provide some feedback prompts such as “yes,” “OK,” “really,” or “uh-huh” to encourage the conversation and to notify that the researcher was listening actively (2002, p. 128). In some cases, I used probes when my respondents had difficulty in answering questions, that is, offered something that was not relevant to the question when I would like to get greater detail. In addition, I sometimes paraphrased a question when the informants did not understand my inquiry.

However, if problems caused by the respondents’ limited capacity to express his/her opinion due to lack of education, self-esteem, or knowledge, I tended to cut the interview short. It was not fair to push the respondent to uncomfortable feelings. Across the three field sites, I found that respondents who were the station’s listeners often had difficulty in answering, “As a listener, are you aware of how the management makes decisions?” or “How should the station promote dialogue between the station and the community?” I sensed that some listeners were not very engaged in the station and then felt embarrassed for their ignorance. In these cases, I ended the interviews quickly and looked for additional informants.

Unfortunately, sometimes, the interview went smoothly but the participants did not have time to complete the entire interview so I had to shorten the interview. I found that it was difficult to cut off questions. The criterion was that I skipped the questions where I could get information from other participants and from documents, such as questions about the community’s profile, resident population, main occupations in the community, and religion.
Fieldwork: Application

Between June 18 and August 16, 2006, I traveled back to Thailand to observe the three CRSs—Khon Thaiso CRS in Kusumal sub-district in Sakolnakorn province in the northeast, Doilangtham CRS in Sritia sub-district in Lamphun in the north, and Pattani CRS in Muang district in Pattani in the south.

Based on my experience, fieldwork was the methodology that excited me very much. I had a chance to play several roles. I was an investigator who sought evidence about the culture of a community radio staff and what the community members thought of the radio station. I was a stranger who tried to adjust myself to the community members by accepting them for what they were in such a way that they would trust me and reveal their opinions frankly in the interview. I was a cultural observer who tried to learn and understand the community’s way of living by staying with the local family so I would be sensitive to their attitudes and behaviors. Unfortunately, I sometimes had to suffer the intensity of rage and conflict among the station’s volunteers such as the conflicts at Khon Thaiso CRS where I was accused of causing a confrontation between former and current station’s volunteers. Realizing that these hard feelings were caused by the differences between my worldview and the participants’ worldview, I then tried to adjust to their behaviors or attitudes in order to continue my fieldwork.

Positioning: Reading myself

Blain (1998) states well the issue of subjectivity when writing, “What we see and how we see it is, necessarily, subjectively constructed” (p. 204). Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2002) asserted that subjectivity is very difficult to avoid in fieldwork, since “the
observer is part of the person or culture observed,” hence a fieldworker needs to be conscious of her background and her positions as these positions affect the fieldwork (p. 119). Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater show that during the research process, a fieldworker has to handle her own three positions—fixed positions, subjective positions, and textual positions. Fixed positions refer to personal attributes of a fieldworker such as age, gender, class, race, and education among others that could affect the fieldwork (p. 119). For instance, as a female Buddhist and a former director of a university radio station, I was frustrated to listen to one of my participants who was a female Muslim belittle herself and opine that male volunteers should hold the stations’ leading positions. However, my six years of living in a Muslim society restrained me from arguing with her, and instead I tried to understand her position. I tried to be conscious of the difference between me and that participant and also control my own fixed positions from influencing what I saw in the field site. Since fieldworkers are a key instrument of the fieldwork, a social scientist should not take fixed positions for granted and not let them dominate data collection.

Subjective positions, such as a fieldworker’s life history and personal experience can affect the research (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, 2002, p. 120). For instance, the staff at Pattani community radio station where I took part in its establishment as well as being their consultant thought that I came to inspect their performance; therefore, they seemed to hesitate to tell me about internal management problems. From my side, when I heard about management problems, I held presumptions about who caused the problems since I have worked with most of them and knew them well. Therefore, I had to check myself from prejudgments and strive to retain neutral attitudes towards everyone at the station.
Another example: the volunteers and staff of the Khon Thaiso radio station knew that I was a friend of Uajit Virojtrairat—a scholar who gave a radio workshop and budget to set up this station. Therefore, one of them asked me to be a witness at the station meeting. This meeting was intended to identify a money theft and resolve the station’s internal conflicts. In a sense, I thought that the accusation was correct and believed that the suspect behaved improperly as I observed him closely during the preliminary study. I hesitated to get involved in their problems because it might contaminate my field observation. Eventually, I joined the meeting but I kept my presence passive and only shared my opinion when requested.

There are textual positions, that is, how a fieldworker chooses to present the field study. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater write, “Textual positions—the language choices you make to represent what you see—affect the writing of field notes as well as the final ethnographic report” (2002, p. 120). During my observation, I normally took field notes exactly as I perceived them, including personal notes. Later, I found it difficult to report several of them, especially when these stories were relevant to people’s reputations. However, abandoning these stories was not possible as well, because they are the key events that relate to what took place at the settings. Blain (1998) nicely stated that when encountering this difficulty, a researcher should try to “understand what is happening from the point of view of [the] informants” (p. 204). I finally followed the suggestion of Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997): “Thinking about your positions makes you conscious of the ways you come to know the way you know” (p. 59). Therefore, when I wrote the report, I tried to be conscious of my own positions, pursue intersubjectivity by pulling in
several viewpoints and engaging in a self-reflexive process by writing these perspectives into my study.

*Self disclosure*

Babbie (2004) stated that participating in fieldwork must be voluntary (p. 62). Through observation and interviewing, a social scientist unintentionally intrudes into participants’ lives, minds, and emotions; therefore, these participants should be fully informed about the research in order to correctly make their decision and grant access to a researcher (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 39). In doing fieldwork, sincerity is a characteristic that Prus (1998) recommends. He also suggests that a fieldworker strive for “open-ended understandings of the life worlds of the others” (p. 27).

Considering my ethical viewpoint, I chose to declare myself as a researcher to every field site I visited. I did not want to deceive people and at the same time I tried to be honest with the participants as much as I could. However, I also agree with Julius Roth that, “All research is secret in some ways and to some degree” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 36).

During the fieldwork process, all informants received a standard disclosure statement. However, additional information was provided if they requested it. I told the respondents that I was a doctoral student who came to observe the radio station for my dissertation. Normally, this information satisfied informants. Most participants did not ask further information but a few asked what kind of topic or issue I focused on. In that case, I explained in more detail about the research questions and reasons for selection of their radio station. I found that most participants seemed not to care much about what I
was studying partly because my research topic was not sensitive. Most agreed to help me and participate in the interview upon my request.

To me, self disclosure was a positive approach. It avoided any deception. However, as a known researcher, I received a different degree of recognition from different field sites. For example, I was a good listener at Pattani radio station when the staff complained about volunteer and management problems. I became their consultant and helped them write funding grants for the station. I was a mediator between the station operators and former volunteers at the Khon Thaiso station. The friction was caused by the head of station management committee who also was suspected of embezzling the station’s money. My presence catalyzed the confrontation between the station’s staff and those who were excluded from the station. Finally, I was a passive observer at Doilangtham station where I was not requested to be involved in the station’s activities because the station's staff seemed to perceive me purely as a researcher. My roles in the fieldwork were partly determined by the perception of the stations’ staff towards my presence.

*Orientation and reentry: Not a complete stranger*

Preliminary research let me become oriented to the three CRSs and to people at the settings. Therefore, my reentry for the current fieldwork was not difficult. To most station staff, I was not a stranger as we had met before. Even for those whom I had not met, I was not a complete stranger to them. This was because several times, the station staff who knew me helped introduce me to the others. I sometimes introduced myself to those whom I did not know and broke the ice by saying that I knew someone there and I
had visited the station before. This introduction helped me avoid suspicion or a simple question like, "Who sent you?"

However, I have to admit that preliminary research was not an answer for everything. For instance, it did not help me know a lot about the culture of the settings; I found myself encountering unexpected situations like the conflicts between two ethnic groups—Thaiso and Phuthai—at Khon Thaiso station. In the field site at Khon Thaiso radio station, I was a complete outsider as I did not belong to either of the ethnic groups. Because I was not sensitive to the ethnic issues I did not notice this conflict in my previous visit. Reentry improved my observations as I became sensitive to the conflicts. I also gained trust for my reentry, as some decided to reveal problems to me. Once I learned about conflicts, I attempted to understand them by talking to people involved. Consequently, I became a mediator of confrontations between the two groups. After talking with several informants and observing their situations, I concluded that the ethnic issue was used as a means to get rid of some volunteers who tended to be better than others. Jealousy and ambition to control the station were the main reasons behind the clashes.

*Understanding the culture of the settings*

Understanding the culture of the settings is important because it helps a fieldworker to observe, perceive, and interpret things through the eyes of community members. In other words, it is always good to see “things from the actor’s point of view” (Geertz, 1973, p. 307). Among the three CRSs, I was most familiar with the field site at the Pattani CRS. I lived and worked in a Muslim community for some years where I
witnessed actions and beliefs that were different from those of Buddhists. This trained me, as a Buddhist, to interpret the work culture of Pattani CRS as a Muslim might.

Because I was not familiar with the culture of the Northerners or the Northeasterners, I tried to determine patterns of things such as the way people talked, thought, and behaved. Sometimes, the comments of informants helped me to clarify their culture. For instance, at Khon Thaiso station, I asked one of the informants whether he knew what caused a volunteer drop out. He replied that it was the nature of Thaiso people that they were not strong fighters. They tended to abandon their will easily and often lose their intention to accomplish something.

Another example was in physical evidence—the numerous Buddhist temples at the field setting. When I first visited Doilangtham CRS, I remembered that I started to count temples when the car entered Lamphun province because there were about four to five temples already. The distance from Lamphun to the station in Sritia sub-district was about 20 miles. Interestingly, there were more than 30 temples along the way. I knew Northerners had a strong faith in Buddhism and believed in life after death but I did not connect this phenomenon to the radio station. I came to realize the significance of Buddhism for the radio station’s management when I arrived at the radio station located on the periphery of Doilangtham temple. A story that the former station manager and the staff used a religious event to encourage donations from villagers affirmed my assumption of religious devotion. Since several CRSs did the same, including the Khon Thaiso station of the Northeastern region which also dunned villagers at temple events, that assumption had to be confirmed.
The assumption was supported when I heard that the governing board of Doilangtham CRS expelled two radio hosts from the station because of a love affair. In Buddhism, the most spiritual path involved the five precepts which were: no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, and no intoxication through alcohol or drugs. Unfortunately, one of the hosts accused another of having an affair with the former station manager. They quarreled at the station and the accuser intentionally let the conversation go on the air. Audiences heard the story from their radio receivers. This story shocked the community. The former manager resigned before being fired. The governing board took the air time away from the two hosts. Although the governing board suspected that the accused and the former station manager might have stolen donation money several times in the past year, they did not investigate this issue. The assistant station manager said if they did so they would suffer for this when they died because of bad karma. One of the listeners said that if the governing board would allow the two women to host at the station again, he and his friends would not listen to this station anymore. Cultural setting plays a major role in this portion of the research.

Language issues

One of my difficulties for this current fieldwork was the language issue. People at each of the three field sites speak local languages in addition to the Thai national language. People at the Doilangtham station, Northerners, spoke Khom Mueang, people at the Pattani station, Muslim Southerners, spoke Malay, and people at the Khon Thaiso station, Northeasterners, spoke So. Among the three settings, the Northerners spoke Khom Mueang all the time, including when they talked to me. Khom Mueang was not
difficult to understand. Most words were similar to the official Thai language. Malay and So are completely different from Thai. I had no knowledge of these languages. I did not have problems with language during the interviews because the informants spoke Thai to me. On the other hand, some informants seemed to have problems looking for the right Thai words to express their thoughts. However, the biggest problem came when I observed radio hosts who used a local language in their programs. Most of the time, I did not know what they were talking about, including not understanding the on-air conversation when the audience called in.

Therefore, I had to guess from the radio hosts’ nonverbal communication such as smiles, intonation, and gestures. I also spoke with hosts when they were free such as during the music or after their program.

*Authenticating the data*

Doing ethnographic research required careful thought about what would be primary data for the research and whether access would be possible. The research data for the field study mainly come from naturalistic investigations, interviews, conversations, observations, and documentation. Smith (1989) states that a primary source can be “a person or thing (tape recorder, camera) present at the events” (p. 321). In general, the nature of a case study leads a fieldworker to the kind of primary participants to be recruited. For that reason, a fieldworker often locates the respondents even before framing the research question. In an early stage of this current research, I determined that respondents would be anyone who worked at the three radio stations, the audiences, and
the community members. Later, the research questions helped shape the criteria for data selection.

For my fieldwork, I planned to interview station committees and founders because they could best reveal the history of their stations and management practices. Likewise, I aimed to interview the station’s operators to gain information about the current movement of the station as well as the station’s day-to-day activities. One of the selection criteria was that the informants should have been working at the station for a minimum period of time and that they should be active in their role. For listeners, I aimed to interview those who paid a visit to the radio station because their visit represented their loyalty to the station as well as their active role as audience members. Finally, the community members could be anyone who knew a little bit about the station even through they did not listen to the station regularly. Therefore, I planned to look for them within the community such as in markets, restaurants, and temples. To some extent, these criteria helped authenticate the data and the findings of my fieldwork.

I completely agreed with Stebbins (1998) that “the task of locating respondents was largely mechanical, requiring minimal skill and imagination . . . the real challenge lies in gaining access and securing cooperation for the research” (p. 53). Before entering the setting, I thought I would not have any difficulty to access the respondents. However, at the field site, I found it was not easy to approach people and persuade them to participate in the research. Moreover, I found that I used my intuition as much as I used the criteria for the data selection to get good informants. These discoveries corresponded
with Babbie’s suggestion that “you must rely on your understanding of the situation and your own good judgment” (2004, pp. 278-279).

*Selecting the informants*

Although the selection criteria were crucial, I relied heavily on my intuition as I made decisions about whom to talk to. Generally, the decision was based on the impression received when I introduced myself and my research to the participants and how they responded to me. I normally tended to recruit those whom I thought could best provide information. At the same time, I tended not to cut off anyone because there was always an advantage to obtaining multiple perspectives for a holistic understanding of the fieldwork.

I also paid attention to the issue of representativeness because it helped the fieldwork be more valid and reliable. Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) warned, “If we wish to go beyond the most general and superficial generalization about the setting or community, it is necessary to understand the range of variation of experience and perspective” (p. 103). During my field study, it took me some time to acquaint myself with people and to learn who was who in the radio station and the community.

Interestingly, I found that the titles of people at the station did not always mean much in relation to their responsibility. For instance, the station manager of Doilangtham radio station did not play a key role in the station decision making and was rather inactive in the station’s operation. Instead, the head of the community who was also the president of Land Reform Group was the most important person in the station’s management. This was because the community head took part in founding the radio station as well as
playing a large role in leading community members to fight with the government about their land reform problems. He received a lot of respect from the station’s staff and community members. This knowledge shifted my attention from the station manager to the county head. Likewise, I did not interview passive committee members because some had not been to the station for several months. In other words, this fieldwork made to an attempt to access to the respondents who played an active role and showed responsibility rather than an attempt to contact everyone involved.

Interviewing: Lessons from the fieldwork

I did not prepare for who should be my first interviewee at each field site. The choice simply depended on chance. At the three field sites, I started by going to the station and observing people for a while. After that I started to look for those whom I could talk with and introduced myself. If the person showed interest, I would provide more information. I used the introduction process to test people’s communication skills as well. Practically, it was better to interview those who were outgoing rather than those who were introverted.

There were some important lessons that I learned from the field. First, a failure of prompt judgment could lead to the loss of good informants. I recalled that I did not pay attention to one listener who visited the station during my observation. It was the way he dressed and spoke that I disliked, so I did not introduce myself. Instead, he introduced himself and asked me about my visit. He insisted I tell more about my dissertation. I then changed my attitudes and started to ask him some questions about as his listening habits and attitude towards the station. Later I interviewed him and got good information. He
explained about radio listening networks and how he and the other listeners became friends and created those networks. I had never heard of this new form of listening group. Impressively, the following day, six listeners came to the station and introduced themselves to me. They told me that the man had asked them to visit me.

Second, active listening was an approach that encouraged people to talk more. Several times, I found that people tended to reveal more details if they noticed my active listening. During the interview, I asked and listened patiently. I also encouraged them by showing some nonverbal cues such as nodding my head or remaining silent. Those who had conflicts or problems were always eager when they saw that I was interested to hear the story from their viewpoint. For instance, each of the two excluded volunteers at the Khon Thaiso station talked with me for more than an hour. One of them offered me lunch. One provided many details and revealed personal feelings. Likewise, at the Doilangtham station, the woman who was excluded gave me a call when she learned that I had returned to the community. She invited me to her house and talked for over an hour expressing her thoughts.

Some forms of data recording might intimidate the interviewee. I noticed that many interviewees were uncomfortable when I jotted notes during their talks. I would explain and show them my notes. Some were frightened when they saw my small sound recorder. They seemed relieved after my explanation.

Lastly, keeping the interview informal made the informants feel more relaxed. It was always nice to be sensitive to the informants’ feelings and there was no reason to
scare them by formal language or to try to force them to speak. Most of the informants could not talk well under stress or pressure.

*Fieldnotes: The data logging*

In my fieldwork, I produced three types of field notes—daily logs, jotted notes, and full field notes. At all sites, I wrote daily logs of what I did from morning to bedtime. I sometimes wrote these notes at the station when I was free. However, I normally spent a couple of minutes to wrap up what I did during the day when I got back to my lodging. I also wrote at least one or two sentences for the day on which I did not perform my fieldwork and explained the reason. I found daily logs very useful. I reviewed them very often, especially when I needed to recall some events and some people I met during the fieldwork.

I took jotted notes sometimes, though not every day. I produced jotted notes when I encountered some strange or uncomfortable feelings. It was more like mental notes. I also noted some key words that I found interesting. I took these notes during various places, times, and situations. For instance, while I was interviewing the informants, I jotted notes about their reactions. While I was observing the radio host, I also took jotted notes about the phrases that I liked.

Lastly, I produced full field notes in my computer by collecting information from daily logs and jotted notes. Normally, I wrote daily logs and jotted notes in my paper notebook. Full notes were useful because they contained more details about the fieldwork. Importantly, they were in an electronic form ready to be copied, cut, and pasted for the field reports.
When my fieldwork finished in August, 2006, I had spent 40 days in the three field sites and interviewed 64 people.

In conclusion, this chapter evaluates the rationales and challenges of participant observation and qualitative interviewing. It looks at the question from a number of points of view. Positioning, self-discovery, and orientation are discussed. The chapter deals with selecting informants, interviewing, and data logging with authenticating data in mind. The questions of cultural settings and language are also raised.
CHAPTER 4
KHON THAISO COMMUNITY RADIO STATION

Introduction

When I first heard of Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station in Sakolnakorn province, I was fascinated with the story that my contact, Sopit Wangvivatana, Secretary of the Thai Broadcast Journalists Association, told me. I was touched by the idea that a minority group of the northeastern region, Thaiso, used a community radio station (CRS) to preserve its own local language.

The initiative of Thaiso community to establish their own CRS was a big challenge. Moreover, maintaining the radio station was even harder, especially for non radio practitioners. I admired the Thaiso community members for their efforts to establish their own CRS and to nurture the radio station.

This chapter presents an analysis of participatory communication practices in the Khon Thaiso CRS and details what the station members did to maintain their station’s sustainability. It outlines the problems they were facing as well as the feedback they got from the audiences. The first section of the chapter provides a historical background followed by details about participatory communication here discussed through three attributes—access, participation, and self-management.
The idea for setting up Khon Thaiso CRS was inspired by Uajit Virojtrairat, a former media scholar and Chairperson of Civil Development Institute. Satien Muangsong, a former volunteer at Khon Thaiso, said that in 2002 he was the Head of Kusumal Municipality and Vice President of Kusumal Cultural Committee. He received a contact from an informal organization called the Northeastern Community Radio Network requesting three representatives of the Kusumal sub-district to participate in Uajit’s CRS workshop. Satien said the following:

I remembered those days. The community was excited by the new radio station.

In the beginning, there were about 50 people who got involved. We invited...
representatives from each village to serve on several committees such as programming, governing, fundraising, and public relations. . . . The main goal of the station was to promote So language and culture. What we didn’t expect was that the station would become a tool to deliver information and announcements. It happened that way because our community had only few telephones (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Suwakol Pol-asa was one of the three representatives who attended Uajit’s CRS workshop. He said that previously he did not know anything about a CRS. He was a local technician. He was interested in shortwave radio and thought that they were the same. After the workshop, he and the two other representatives, Suthipong Promhakul and Supawadee Pol-asa, contacted other friends and neighbors in the community to do a fundraiser and to volunteer at the radio station. Mainly, they contacted those who were working on So language and cultural preservation. The station’s trial broadcast was on December 15, 2002. Officially, the station went on the air on December 27, 2002. At present, Suwakol is the station manager (personal communication, June 23, 2006).

In the time of writing, Khon Thaiso CRS broadcast about 50 hours a week on FM 99.75 with 30 watts. The station was unlicensed and had about 8-12 radio hosts, two of whom were teenagers. Most programs were music-based. The station used three languages in their transmissions including Thai (the national language), Esarn (Northeastern regional language), and So (language of Thaiso minority).
The main objective of Khon Thaiso was to serve Thaiso people who belong to one of the seven minorities of the northeastern region of Thailand. Historically, the Thaiso migrated to Thailand from the opposite side of the Mekong River during the regime of King Rama I, around 1779. They settled in the Kusumal sub-district. Later Phuthai people migrated from the Mekong River to the northeastern region during the rule of King Rama III, around 1842. Some Phuthai settled in the Kusumal sub-district as well (Kusumal Cultural Institute, 2006, pp. 7-9). Because So is a spoken language with no
written scripts it might not be possible to preserve it if a new generation refuses to use it. This was why the Thaiso people were concerned the language might die.

According to Jomsri Napong, the current Head of Kusumal Municipality, the population of the Kusumal sub-district is about 10,500 (personal communication, June 22, 2006). Prasong Nieungthong, a Phuthai who used to volunteer his services at Khon Thaiso CRS, said that at present, the majority of the population in the Kusumal sub-district was Thaiso. About 4% were Phuthai. Thaiso and Phuthai had different customs and traditions. They also had their own local dialects—So and Phuthai respectively. Both of them spoke the Esarn language—a common language for northeasterners used in 17 provinces in this region. Esarn was a spoken language and there was no written scripts. Thai is used as an official language (personal communication, June 25, 2006).

**An Overview**

In June 2006, I revisited Khon Thaiso CRS and its staff. Interestingly, the second visit revealed more stories about the administration of this radio station as well as the influence of the two key station operators, Suwakol Pol-asa and Plern Yaipangkaew. I also came to realize that what I observed from my previous visit in December 2005 was filtered by Plern Yaipangkaew, the head of the station management board and the host family where I stayed with during my first visit. On this second visit, I was familiar enough with the community to explore the village and observe the station without Plern’s accompaniment; as a result, I had a chance to look for those who left the radio station as well as current volunteers. They revealed another set of realities about the practice of
participatory communication of this radio station which is presented in the following section.

**Participatory Communication in the Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station**

Among the three CRSs, Khon Thaiso was the only station that was not initiated by the community members themselves. Instead, the community followed Uajit Virojtrairat’s CRS development plan. Three representatives attended the workshops and followed the instructions set by Uajit. They spent only a few months preparing for the establishment of the radio station. They were in a hurry to gather volunteers and collected names of their neighbors because they did not want to miss the chance for the funding from Uajit’s project. Obviously, the administrative structure of the radio station was not designed by the station founders, but imitated Uajit’s protocol. Moreover, the participation of community members in the beginning took place by appointing representatives from each village. This is an important fact that needs to be mentioned here because it affected the station’s operation and management as well as its sustainability. Station manager Suwakol Pol-asa, stated the following:

Teacher Uajit’s workshop was good but it was only a few days. It was hard to understand the concept of community radio in a short time. It was even harder to deliver the concept to community members and into practice. As a result, some volunteers did not understand the concept of a CRS and the mission of Khon Thaiso’s. At present, the station is less active. It runs out of funding and manpower. Broadcast hours were shortened to reduce electric consumption and
broadcast hours became irregular (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Suwakol’s remark displayed the fact that the concept of CRSs that Uajit introduced to them was good so they decided to adopt it. The community was excited to have a radio station. However, in practice there were many factors that community members had to cope with in order to make the station sustainable. Unfortunately, at the time this radio station was facing problems arising from frictions and unprofessional decision making. The problems accumulated over a long time and were severe enough to cause several volunteers to stop their service at the radio station, including setting up a new CRS next door. With this circumstance, it is important to investigate the practice of participatory communication in this radio station. It may be an opportunity for other CRSs to learn ways of preventing similar problems.

Access

Generally speaking, one of the most prominent attributes of a CRS is its closeness to the community both in location and sense of community ownership. Short distance leads to broader access for community members to the station which helps create a sense of belonging. In addition, the closeness of a CRS to the community makes the station aware of the importance of selecting proper content highly relevant to the lives of community members. Often a CRS uses the local language in order to make listeners comfortable hearing and understanding the messages. At Khon Thaiso, I explored what the station operators did in order to widen access to the radio station and what the audiences thought about this issue. From the observation and interviews, I found five
factors that encouraged access: the closeness of the station’s location, the use of local language, understanding the nature of the audiences, the station as an announcement tool, and the feedback mechanisms.

Location.

I met Anuwat Tiphalad and Suthitpong Hadsung at the radio station. The two teen listeners came to request a song. They told me that their houses were very close to the station so they came here very often. In addition, they were the friends of the two girls, Metawadee Sirikaet and Wasana Butrahung, who hosted the shows. So they stopped by the station to greet them. Anuwat and Suthitpong told me that they had listened to this station for a long time. They even took part in the station’s opening ceremony (personal communication, June 22, 2006).
A day after I walked around the village, I met Tadsanee Napong and her aunt, Lae Napong. They were standing beside their vending carts in front of the Kusumal Elementary School. They were listening to Khon Thaiso CRS from their transistor radio. I stopped and chatted with them. Tadsanee said that she listened to this radio station from the first day. She liked So language and the way the station presented information and news about the community and province. She often told her friends the information that she heard from the station so they would not miss it. Tadsanee also joined the station’s opening ceremony. She said, “I dressed up in Thaiso costume. It was very fun. They
showed an outdoor movie and there was a band from the Kusumal High School” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Lae, a 63 year-old-widow, stated that she started listening to this station in the preceding year. One night, she could not sleep so she turned on the radio. That night, Bao Ang was hosting his show, *Phudja Phasa So* or Let’s Chat in So Language. He used So language in his show and played folk music. His program got her attention. She added the following:

> I like the content. I learn a lot from Bao Ang. I never get out of the village but I learn many things from his show. . . . The station is not far from my house so I have visited the station several times but I don’t dare go inside. I look from the outside. . . . I know that this station belongs to our community so we have to donate. I don’t want the station to die (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

What emerged from the conversations with Tadsanee and Lae Napong was that the audiences listened to the Khon Thaiso CRS because of the local language, content, and music. In addition, they visited the station because it was not far from their houses. This was the combination that gave listeners access to Khon Thaiso CRS. These elements seemed to create a sense of belonging as the community members donated to the station.

*Local language.*

The main reason for the establishment of Khon Thaiso CRS was to use it as a tool to preserve So language and culture. According to Plern Yaipangkaew, the head of the station management committee and a radio host, using So as its broadcast language was
very meaningful. He explained, “The reason we broadcast in So is that we’d like to use it as a tool to connect people in the community and at the same time to preserve the language” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 19, 2006). However, the station has a strategy for selecting other languages for its broadcasting. As Suwakol Pol-asstated, the station operators realized that many listeners wanted to listen to other languages used in the community as well. Therefore, the station selected So as its main broadcast language. Esarn and the official Thai languages were supplementary (personal communication, June 23, 2006).

Plern did an informal survey by talking with the community. He found that adults listened to the station at night whereas teenagers listened to the station in the evening. Owing to the fact that elderly people speak So the most, and teenagers speak Esarn and Thai, the station broadcast in Esarn and Thai languages in the evening and in So at night. Plern added, “The station used So as a strategy to attract listeners because none of the other radio stations in this province broadcast in that language” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 19, 2006).

*Understanding the nature of the audience: The content that fits audience needs.*

What I noticed from my fieldwork at this radio station was that most radio hosts mentioned the nature of Thaiso people. For instance, Kumpan Chokchana, an 80 year-old-radio host said, “I know the nature of Thaiso. They aren’t lazy but they aren’t diligent. They aren’t serious and they like amusement” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 21, 2006). Sao Chaisaen, another radio host, said similarly, “So people like something light, not too serious. You know why, because we’re
poor. We’re farmers. Our family income is only USD$80 a month” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Knowing the nature of the audience is important because it helps the radio hosts locate what they should present to their listeners. Amporn Yaipangkaew, a radio host of the evening show, said the following:

I know that So people are not serious. They like entertaining content. They don’t like information such as about dengue fever. They said that they knew it already. They want to hear music, not difficult information. I understand them. You know, it’s very hot in the rice field so it’s unbearable to listen to serious content. I’m a farmer too (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Kumpan Chokchana, a radio host, said that he had a lot of listeners. Everywhere he went, there were always several people who greeted him. This was because Kumpan was aware of the content that his audiences wanted to hear and he satisfied them. He said the following:

Most of my listeners are much younger than I am. I am 80 years old this year and I am a veteran farmer. I thought of my audiences as my children or grandchildren. I always warn them to behave well. I often talk about Buddhism and karma. It is necessary to repeat this issue to them. I encourage my listeners to work hard for their family so their children won’t be poor like them or me. . . . During the rice season, I talk about rice planting and harvesting. I warn them to take care of the rice field and prepare soil soon. Don’t be lazy. Decorate the rice field and fix the
trails to the rice field (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 21, 2006).

Similarly, Plern Yaipangkaew, a radio host, talked about So beliefs and content relevant to the season. For instance, during the rainy season, he presented content about rice planting. After harvesting, there were several charities and religious festivals so he persuaded his audiences to come out and celebrate. Plern added that he tried not to make his program serious. He said, “I’d like my audiences to notice that we’re friends. I announce that if you can’t sleep, visit the radio station. You can come and talk at the station. And they came!” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 19, 2006).

Metawadee Sirikaet and her co-host, Wasana Butrahung had a radio program in the evening. They came to the station after they finished school. They were the youngest hosts in this station. Most of their listeners were their friends at school. Metawadee said the following:

Most of our school friends like our program. They listen to us every day. Some bring us information to read in the show. . . . Our audiences are teenagers and some are in their twenties. They call to request music and tell us what song is trendy. Mostly, we don’t have those albums and the station doesn’t have budget to buy them so they come to the station and lend us the CDs. Several of our school friends lend us their CDs too (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 19, 2006).
Obviously, the Khon Thaiso CRS succeeded in creating a good relationship with the community. The radio hosts made efforts to connect with their audiences by providing content and music that they preferred. Sharing CDs was very unusual. It was a good example for other CRSs because not only it helped the station save some money on buying albums, and it also strengthened the community’s bond with the station’s business.

*Announcement tool.*

Suwakol Pol-asa, the station manager, stated that Khon Thaiso CRS became an announce tool and an information center for the community. Mainly, community members contacted the station when they lost or found something. In addition, during the election period, the station discussed local politics. He added, “We encourage listeners to check their local politicians. We also arouse local politicians to work hard for the community” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006). Similarly, Plern Yaipangkeaw, the head of the station management committee, said, “Personally, I hope to use this station as a tool to alert people to their role in the community development” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 19, 2006).

Intu-on Monpak, a radio host, seemed satisfied with her role in the station as well as the role of the station in the community. She said the following:

Last month (June 2006), there was a missing person. We announced it and found him. You see, our radio station is very useful. We announce lost property for farmers such as a water buffalo. Some listeners ask us to read their dedication
messages. Some request the station to announce their ceremonies. Some send a letter or call me. I know that the station becomes a place community members rely on for news and information announcements. They call during the show so I often let them announce their information on the air. It is better than me speaking for them (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Figure 4.4 Amporn Yaipangkaew co-hosting the show with Intu-on Monpak
Sao Chaisaen, a radio host, told a similar story about how he often announced news within the community such as lost and found. He stated, “Sometimes listeners bring a letter to the station or call me. Those who go to work in Bangkok during the off-rice season call me and request a song for their parents, wives, or girlfriends. They miss their family” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

*Feedback mechanisms.*

Like Doilangtham and Pattani CRSs, radio hosts of the Khon Thaiso CRS encouraged their audiences to provide feedback. Metawadee Sirikaet and Wasana Butrahung said, “We always announce the station’s mission at the beginning of the show and invite listeners to visit the station or send us information or feedback. Some call us and give suggestions to improve the program” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 19, 2006). Amporn Yaipangkaew, a radio host, also welcomed audience feedback. She said the following:

I announce the station’s phone number and also my cell phone so they can call me. Some listeners visit me at the radio station. They bring food or drinks for me. They also donate some money for electricity and phone bills (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Intu-on Monpak did more than the other hosts. She visited listeners at their houses. When she went to the market or temples, she always asked them for their feedback. She stated the following:

Some listeners were excited when they knew that I visited them. They said that my show was fun because I laughed a lot in my show. They like my show because
I speak many languages (So, Esarn, and Thai). I go out at least twice a month (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Figure 4.5 Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station’s listeners and donors.

These farmers donated a basket of rice to the station once a year.

In conclusion, the staff of Khon Thaiso CRS seemed to realize the important role of access for gaining support from the community. They made the station close to the audiences by broadcasting in So language as well as Esarn and Thai and providing content highly related to audiences’ lives. The station was lucky that it was located near
the community; as a result, many listeners visited to the station. In addition, the endeavors of the radio hosts to seek feedback from their listeners or let their audiences share their thoughts indicated that they understood the practice of participatory communication. This was because they realized that a CRS required community involvement in order to survive and to be part of the community.

**Participation**

For every CRS, participation is a key element that helps maintain participatory communication within the community. The greater the participation, the higher the potential of community members to use this community medium to the fullest extent. Generally speaking, participation is considered a higher level of a station’s involvement because community members accelerate from an access stage as a listener to a radio producer. In the participation level, community members can be involved in radio production and programming which are the roles that require more responsibility.

Like the two other stations, the Khon Thaiso CRS did not get much participation in its preparation period because community members were afraid of the station’s illegal status. Suthipong Promhakul, one of three persons who started this radio station, said the following:

We joined teacher Uajit’s workshops and followed the instructions. Finally, we received USD$5,300 as a start-up fund. The problem was that there were only ten people who helped set up the station. Most people didn’t want to get involved. It takes time to make them understand that we can do the radio station because the
constitution gives us the right to do so (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

By the time the station went on the air, more people volunteered. The way the station recruited volunteers was by using a personal invitation. However, unlike the two other CRSs, the Khon Thaiso CRS did not use a radio workshop as a strategy to recruit volunteers because they were not ready to do so. In addition, participation in Khon Thaiso was limited to the radio production level because radio programming was under the control of the station manager and the head of the station management board.

**Personal invitation: Volunteer recruitment.**

Because the CRS is a new medium in Thailand, most people do not understand how the station works and how much energy and manpower are needed in order to make a station operate with regular broadcast hours. Mostly, people volunteer at the station because radio work seems interesting. Once they learn that they have to come to the station on schedule to produce a show or take care of other tasks on a regular basis, they tend to give up. Some leave the station shortly after. This makes the reliable volunteers become an important element for the station’s sustainability. The Khon Thaiso operators experienced this problem. Therefore, the most convenient way to know that the station would get the right person was to invite those whom they knew well. For instance, Kumpan Chokchana said that he was invited by Suwakol Pol-as, the station manager. Kumpan accepted this job because Suwapol pointed out that the station needed someone with local wisdom who knew a lot about the community’s past and present and had good skill to deliver knowledge to the audiences. He shared the following thoughts:
If I stay at home, I’ll be useless. If I talk at the station, I can help many listeners to learn how to have a good life. I’m an old man. I saw many things and went through many changes. My experience is helpful for my listeners. I use my experience to teach them. Those who already knew, then listen again, those who don’t know, then learn from me (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 21, 2006).

Figure 4.6 Suwakol Pol-asa, the technical operator for the radio show for Kumpan Chokchana’s
Similarly, Sao Chaisaen started at this station two years ago. He said, “Bao Jong persuaded me. I was not sure whether I could do it myself, so I co-hosted with him for a year. Now I have my own show” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006). Amporn Yaipangkaew also started two years before the interview. She co-hosted with Intu-orn Monpak who was her close friend and neighbor (personal communication, June 23, 2006). Metawadee Sirikaet, a teen radio host, said that she was invited by Pang who was a 12th grade student in her school. At first, Metawadee came to the station and help answer the phone for a week.

We got along well so Pang invited me to co-host her program. We hosted the show together for a few months. Then Pang stopped her service to prepare for the national entrance examination to pursue her college study. I was very nervous and scared so I asked my friend, Wasana (Butrahung), to help me (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Wasana Butrahung said that Suwakol Pol-asa, the station manager, trained them and told them the station’s rules. Wasana liked her job at the station. She said that: “Metawadee and I take turns for the radio preparation. For instance, today I prepared the songs. She prepared the information. Tomorrow, I will prepare the information and she will prepare the songs. It’s fun” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Prasong Niengthong, a former volunteer, participated voluntarily from the beginning. He said the following:
When I heard that the community would have a CRS, I was excited. At that time I didn’t understand how a CRS worked. I had been a deejay at a commercial station for eight years. I know a lot about commercial radio so I wanted to devote myself and share my experience to this CRS. I helped monitor the programs and served as a programming committee member (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 25, 2006).

Prasong revealed that a personal invitation was an effective technique to recruit volunteers.

*Limited participation: A control over programming.*

The volunteers at Khon Thaiso CRS seemed happy with their opportunities to do a radio show. However, the conversations with them indicated that they suffered from the control of the station manager and the head of station management committee as well. At that time, the Khon Thaiso CRS broadcasts from 12.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. However, the broadcasting was not reliable.

Suwakol Pol-asa, the station manager and technician, was the only person who took care of the operation. Daily, he warmed up that station by playing music from 12.00 to 1.00 p.m. in order to attract the audiences. Kumpan Chokchana aired his show from 1.00 to 2.00 p.m. However, if Suwakol went out of town or was busy, the station would be closed. Kumpan did not know how to operate the equipment so he could not do the show without Suwakol.

During my observation, Suwakol had to be outside the community several times; as a result, Kumpan could not do his show and the station then closed. Unfortunately,
Suwakol did not trust any volunteer enough to give them a key to the station and to operate the broadcasting equipment while he was out of the community.

After 2 p.m. there was no programming until 5 p.m. because the station could not find any volunteers to host the show during these hours. People were working in the rice fields. Sometimes, Suwakol played music, but often, he turned off the station to reduce electricity consumption. These irregular hours made it difficult for the audiences to stay tuned. Satien Muangsong, a former radio host, said, “The problem was that the station broadcasts went on and off at least three times a day. Listeners don’t remember the program log so they tend to listen to other radio stations and forget to tune back” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006). The station might have lost some listeners to other stations.

At 5 p.m. Metawadee Sirikaet and Wasana Butrahung hosted the program. Their program was in Thai language. Most of their listeners were school friends. After that, there was no program from 6 to 7 p.m. Intu-orn and Amporm came to host their show at 7 p.m. In their shows, they used both So and Esarn languages. At 8 p.m., there were several volunteers such as Bao Ang, Sao Chaisaen, Bao Jong, and Plern Yaipangkaew hosting. The programs were broadcast in So language. The station closed at 10 p.m.

The programming at the Khon Thaiso CRS was not very good because there were some empty hours when the station was not on the air. In addition, there was a problem caused by the decision of Suwakol, the station manager. For instance, when Intu-on complained about a programming problem that Suwakol took away her air time. Previously, Amporn and she hosted the show from 6 to 8 p.m. Their program was very
popular. However, Suwakol told them that it consumed a lot of electricity to do two hours so he reduced their time slot. She said the following:

It’s so weird that he plays music for that hour (6-7 p.m.) instead of allowing us to host the show. I don’t know whether he realizes how many listeners we lost to other radio stations. It made me resent his action (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

When I asked Suwakol about this problem, he said that he needed the air time because someone requested it. Unfortunately, that person decided not to do the show (personal communication, June 23, 2006).

A similar situation occurred with Suthipong Promhakul, a former radio host, when Plern Yaipangkaew, the head of station management committee, took away his time slot. Suthipong said the following:

Previously my radio show was at 8 p.m. I missed my show for a half month because I had problems with my business. Plern replaced my show with Suwakol’s brother’s program. Then I requested the morning time slot. Suwakol said it cost a lot of money to open morning hours. I understand that. Unfortunately, I can’t do a radio show in the afternoon so I had to stop at the station. I was upset with the administrative system. There is no clear plan or rule at all. It is so personal. Several volunteers dropped off because they didn’t feel like they could participate fully in this station. . . . Plern is unbelievable. Sometimes he hosts the show from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. because he was not able to sleep. That’s what he told his audiences but the station is supposed to stop
broadcasting at 10 p.m. When other volunteers complained, he said that he would pay for the electric bills. He didn’t understand that the station has regulations and certain broadcasting times. The problem is that Suwakol didn’t know how to stop Plern. It makes people disappointed. In fact, there are only two persons who have voice in this station—Suwakol and Plern (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

It was so unfortunate that the station had to rely on both Plern and Suwakol. Plern was very good at public relations. He always represented the station at workshops, seminars, and meeting about community radio. Suwakol was not good at this public work. However, he was important because he was the only technician in this station. He knew that the station needed his service. He made other volunteers realize that he was ready to quit if they were not satisfied with his service. According to Intu-on:

The problem is that the station manager [Suwakol] is so self-centered. For instance, if we complain much he would say that he won’t help at the station. I know that his service is more important than mine. He is a technician and we need him. He also devotes more time for the station than other volunteers do. I see why he wants to control the station (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Obviously, the participation at the Khon Thaiso CRS in neither the radio production nor programming level was promising. They seemed to be under the control of the station manager and the head of station management committee rather than the
programming committee. This disappointed volunteers because the decisions seemed to diminish the involvement of the volunteers and not to be professional.

**Self-management**

Self-management is the highest form of participatory communication. At the local level, it refers to the ability of community radio operators to manage and administer their own radio station with little assistance or intrusion from outside organizations. In practice, self-management refers to the way the station operators make decision and set up the station policies and plans to facilitate their operation. The only clear cut rule of the Khon Thaiso CRS was that the station did not carry any advertisements to keep its not-for-profit status. However, tight budgets made some volunteers to argue against this rule. Intu-on Monpak, a radio host, said the following:

I would like the station to carry advertisements. We need some money. The donation money is not enough for the development of the station. Many shops contacted me for advertisements. They understand that we are a CRS. They want to support us but they also want us to promote their shop too. The station manager didn’t accept this idea (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

According to Sao Chaisaen, a radio host, in the past, the station solved a budget problem by asking radio hosts to donate USD$1.25 a month to cover the electric bills. It became a burden as volunteers had to pay for their own travel expense to the station. Finally, the station did fundraising by asking community members to donate rice. The station did it once a year after the harvesting season.
Apart from this issue, I found that self-management of this radio station was not very strong as a result of three factors: 1) unprofessional behavior, 2) lack of management skills, and 3) misuse of power and transparency problems.

*Unprofessional behavior: Volunteer drop out.*

According to the interviews and observation, many blamed Plern Yaipangkaew, the head of station management committee. Plern was a good speaker. Outside the station, he could persuade community members or outside organizations to support the radio station. However, inside the station, volunteers appeared concerned that he distorted rules for his personal benefit. Suwakol Pol-asaw, the station manager, complained that the station faced management problems because of Plern.

There is no conflict, politics, or friction in this station, except between Plern and the other volunteers. I believe Plern always creates problems. Volunteers left because Plern intrudes on them. He criticizes everyone until they can’t bear it and leave the station. Plern behaves like he is the real boss here. But people don’t respect him. They all said that they would return if this person left. I think they left because they wanted to let Plern know that they didn’t want to work with him. Unfortunately, Plern didn’t recognize this point yet. I think he needs more time to learn this problem. Then he may leave the station (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Suthipong Promhakul, a former radio host, said that he resigned from the station because Plern took away his air time and hurt his feelings many times. Suthipong was an amateur local singer. Previously, he and other radio hosts at the radio station had an idea
to write the songs in Thaiso language in order to play at the station. He produced his songs with the support from a local businessman. He played his music in his program at Khon Thaiso CRS, and the songs became very popular. No one was offended, but Plern told him to stop playing them. Plern accused Suthipong of using the station to promote his album; Suthipong replied that Plern got rid of the albums that Suthipong had donated to the station. Finally, Suthipong decided to resign from the station complaining that Plern was very competitive. Plern did not want to see anyone get better than him, and he got rid of the volunteers because he wanted to push his people inside the station.

Suthipong offered the following:

At present, only Plern’s people could host a program there. Plern would like to control the station. He created friction between Thaiso and Phuthai. He said that Phuthai should not host because this is a Thaiso station. Therefore, Prasong Niengthong, a Phuthai representative, decided to stop his service. I felt sorry. Prasong is a radio professional. We shouldn’t let him go. Suwakol didn’t do anything. When Prasong set up a new CRS for the Phuthai community, Plern criticized him for wanting to use radio to create personal popularity. I am a friend of Prasong so I was angry when I heard his statement (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

The conversations with Suwakol and Suthipong revealed that Plern had a lot of influence in this radio station. Unfortunately, Suwakol seemed not willing to confront Plern. The new Phuthai CRS was more evidence of the self-management problem at Khon Thaiso. There appeared to be a widely held impression that the unprofessional behavior of Plern
had caused much of the discord with the Phuthai minority group and had led to the establishment of the separate CRS.

Plern was furious when talking about the Phuthai CRS in Napo community. This radio station was established by Prasong Nieunthong, a former volunteer of Khon Thaiso CRS. Plern accused this station of not being a pure CRS because the operator, Prasong, was a member of “Tambon” or the District Administrative Office of Napo village. This membership, Plern maintained, violated the Thailand Community Radio Federation’s rules which stated that a CRS should not be operated by any politician. He also complained that the Napo CRS was located too close to the Khon Thaiso CRS (about 3 miles away). As a result, the coverage area of radio signal overlapped with that of Khon Thaiso CRS (personal communication, June 19, 2006).

I talked to Suwakol Pol-asa, the station manager, about this issue. Suwakol said he had similar thoughts. “Prasong left because he wanted to have his own radio station. He came here to learn about a CRS system and left. See, after he established the station he became a local politician” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Interviews with Prasong revealed that the main reason he left was what he believed was the unfair treatment of his ethnic group. Because Prasong was a profession deejay, his station was popular. This status might cause jealousy, negative attitudes, and competitive feelings toward this radio station. I asked Prasong for his opinion about the management at Khon Thaiso.
I believe this station will survive. I mean if they let the station stay like this, it
won’t grow, won’t die, but won’t develop either. If they change a governing
committee, it’ll be better. . . . If this person (Plern Yaipangkaew) stays here, they
(former volunteers) won’t come back. This person always uses bad language to
blame deejays and shows some power that he was not satisfied with their
performance. It was terrible that we volunteer and then we have to listen to this
negative attitude all the time (personal communication, author translation, original
in Thai, June 25, 2006).

It was not an easy problem to solve because no one really wanted to get involved.
Many of them were invited by either Plern or Suwakol. They seemed not willing to
contradict them. Satien Muangsong, a former volunteer:

I think several volunteers could not get along with Plern so they dropped off one
by one. Prasong resigned and set up a new CRS at Napo village. Maek
Muangnakorn and Sompong Nakummul followed him. Listeners followed them
too. They were the best deejays. It was a big loss for Khon Thaiso CRS. Plern
caused this trouble. Later, Suthipong Promhakul followed them because he had
problems with Plern too. Since then, there has been no meetings and no clear
structure at this station (personal communication, author translation, original in
Thai, June 23, 2006).

Satien revealed that several volunteers left the station because of Plern. This
showed a broad pattern of how personal conflict could cause a management problem. The
case of the Khon Thaiso CRS suggested that a volunteer system was good for a non profit
entity because it was a free labor; however, the station needed to have a strategy to maintain the system.

*Lack of management skills.*

When I talked with Suwakol Pol-asa, the station manager, about the station's development plan, he said that he would like to improve the radio signal and recruit volunteers. “We need to recruit more people, especially those who have knowledge. Quantity is not important but the quality that counts. We need to give a radio workshop so people will join. But I don’t know when we can do one” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

It appeared that Suwakol may not have had the management skills, especially ones necessary to retain and develop current volunteers. He may not have been able to allocate station work to the others; as a result, current volunteers did not have a chance to help. For instance, Intu-on Monpak and Amporn Yaipangkaew who were deeply committed to hosting their program were never encouraged to participate in the station management. Interviews showed that they hoped to develop the station by using a computer to facilitate broadcasting, doing underwriting to reduce budget problem, providing some compensation to radio hosts to show that the station cares for their goodwill, and filling the empty time slots during daytime hours. Amporn complained about the management problems:

The station manager always listens only to himself and doesn’t respect the other ideas. I and other radio hosts would like to share our thoughts but it is impossible. He didn’t listen. His thought is the best. For example, I think that the station
should carry some advertisements so we have money to pay for gas. Some
volunteers decided not to come because they did not want to bear the expense.
Donations are not enough to cover these expenses. See, we can’t grow without
development. . . . I am worried that the station has not had a meeting for a long
time, but what can I do? I’m only a general volunteer. I can’t ask the station
manager to host the meeting. Everyone thinks the same. We don’t have that
power to suggest to him. I never say “no.” I always say “yes.” I don’t what to
contradict with him because he always says that he does the best. We are small
people. It is not good to argue. At least we have a chance to host the radio shows
(personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).
Amporn seemed to tolerate the unfavorable working situation at the station. Suwakol
was not very positive about the governing committee, stating in interviews that he
believed it existed in name only. In fact, this problem was caused by its establishment
history. The station founders were in a rush to collect names of volunteers in order to
qualify for the funding from Uajit Virojtrairat, Chairperson of Civil Development
Institute.

Prasong Niengthong, former radio host and former program monitor committee
member, said, “The problem with this station is that it was administrated by few people.
This group doesn’t trust anyone and they don’t allocate work to anyone. As a result, the
station doesn’t grow” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June
25, 2006).
An outside observer might assert that the fault did not lie with Suwakol’s alone. The station was not originated in or designed by the community. Instead, they followed the plan of Uajit Virojtrairat. The main motive to construct this radio station was the funding that Uajit offered them. At that time, Thaiso minority were working on preserving their local language and culture. Funding for setting up a CRS became their interest.

A drawback of using Uajit’s plan was that it did not fit the community’s needs and it was not met with high involvement by the community. For instance, the representatives had to find several community members to participate in the station. In such a short time and with limited understanding of community radio, they got only names to fill the chart of station management structure rather than actual enthusiastic potential participants. In reality, these community members who were selected did not show up or participate in the station activity. In addition, the station operators did not really know about the radio management until they had to do it. Several managerial problems were the consequences. The Khon Thaiso CRS was an example of how grassroots community managed their newly built community broadcast medium when they were not ready.

*Misuse of power and transparency problems.*

Considering the fact that the Khon Thaiso CRS did not carry any advertisements, volunteers had no chance to have monetary benefit. However, occasionally, the station received funding from outside organizations. Unfortunately, this caused a problem because the station did not have clear guidelines for using the money. For instance, in late
2005, Khon Thaiso received USD$1,200 to promote the government’s health project from the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (THPF). Plern Yaipangkaew was the person who signed the contract and kept all the money.

Plern spent the money to buy a VHS video camcorder, a digital sound recorder, and a digital camera. He said that the station needed to have a camcorder to record the station activities. He used a digital camera to take pictures to give to community members. In return, they would donate money to the station. Finally, he needed a digital sound recorder to record community voices when he visited them so he could play their voices on the air. Suwakol Pol-asad, the station manager, felt terrible about this situation because Plern bought everything without the permission from the station:

He bought these items and used them for himself. He kept them at home. The station needs a computer but he did not give money. The station needs to improve the radio signal because several villages could not hear us well. They called and complained and warned that next year they won’t donate. He refused again. And look, what did he buy? I felt regret so this year I didn’t do a fundraiser. I told Plern to use that money to pay for electric bills. You know, it is better than letting him waste money on something that is not for the benefit of the station (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

Suwakol seemed angry with Plern’s decision. However, he could not do anything to make Plern return money. In an interview, Plern explained, “I was the one who signed the contract. I put one of my legs in jail. If we do wrong from the contract, I’m the one who
goes to jail. Therefore, I can use this money to do anything” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 19, 2006).

Plern did not seem to realize the consequence of his actions to the volunteers at the station:

I am a coordinator. I don’t have any important position in this station. I normally volunteer to go for the training and summarize what I learned to the station members. . . . We have problems that the station lost volunteers and current volunteers lost their eagerness to work at the station. I don’t know why (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 23, 2006).

The field observation revealed that while community members mainly donate some rice or money to the station, they did not get involved in the station management. Most did not know about the station’s problems.

The station had its first station meeting in two years in the evening of June 25, 2006. This meeting was inspired by my presence when I interviewed some former volunteers. They stated that they would like to get back to the station. They would like to use this meeting to update the situation inside the station. They proposed having a meeting and invited me to observe. Suwakol seemed not willing to have the meeting as he was afraid that it would cause confrontation between former volunteers and Plern.

On the preparation, Plern Yaipangkaew and Suthipong Promhakul volunteered to send out the invitation letters to 50 station committee members and villages’ representatives door-to-door. Unfortunately, only half of them came to the meeting. Noticeably, those who came were invited by Suthipong. The other half did not show up
because Plern did not send out the letters. He simply said that he was not the station messenger. His behavior added another example of the management difficulty of this radio station and his unwillingness to let community members get involved in the meeting in order to learn about the business of the station. The community members’ involvement seemed limited to donations, but did not include personal participation in the meeting or sharing their thoughts.

In the meeting, Suwakol reported on the current operation of the station. One participant asked Plern to report the money from THPF. Plern replied that he did not have time to summarize the budget and promised to report to the meeting next time. In the end, the meeting closed with no clear plan or direction for the station’s future activities.

Figure 4.7 Khon Thaiso Community Radio Station’s meeting
The Khon Thaiso CRS appeared to show that good management requires a clear working plan, enough money to operate the station, and sufficient support from the community. The Khon Thaiso station manager did not allocate the station tasks to the volunteers. As a result, he had to bear all the work and finally gave up all endeavors. The station did not have steady sufficient revenue. Upon receiving a substantial grant, the CRS did not have spending guidelines. One person dominated money management leading to a transparency problem. Finally, volunteers left because the station did not allow them to get involved fully, except to fill radio programming. They finally lost their motive to volunteer at the station.

**Conclusion**

The Khon Thaiso CRS was fortunate that they got help from Uajit Virojtrairat; they were able to set up a radio station in a short time. However, having been trained for a short period seemed to limit their ability to learn the concept of community radio. Consequently, participation and management levels suffered. In other words, the case of the Khon Thaiso CRS showed that participatory communication may have taken place at higher levels if the community originated the station themselves when they were really ready.

Among the three attributes of the participatory communication practice, access was best handled at Khon Thaiso. The station promoted access in many ways. First, the physical location of the station in relation to the village made it possible for community members to visit the station often. Second, the use of local language made the programs accessible, especially to those elderly people who mainly spoke the So language.
Selecting Esarn and Thai languages helped expand to an even wider audience. Third, understanding the nature of the audiences made the radio hosts choose proper content and music to fit audiences’ needs. Fourth, using the station as an announcement tool made the station become a part of the community and connected the station to community members’ life and activities. Finally, feedback mechanisms were promoted widely. The radio hosts encouraged their listeners to respond by telephone and in person.

Participation at Khon Thaiso CRS took place by personal invitation. Friends persuaded friends to produce radio programs. Co-hosting was the technique to train a new host. It helped reduce tension for newcomers because a veteran radio host accompanied them until they felt comfortable doing the show alone. Unfortunately, the participation practice at Khon Thaiso CRS had some limitations because the station manager and the head of the station management committee controlled programming decisions. The actions of these two appeared to cause resentment among volunteers, many of whom resigned from the radio station.

Finally, three problems limited self-management. First, what volunteers judged as unprofessional behavior of the station manger and the head of the station management committee caused several volunteers to resign. Jealousy and competition made the working environment at the CRS unfavorable. Because they were volunteers, the radio hosts at Khon Thaiso CRS did not have to tolerate the uncomfortable environment. As a result, they simply left the station. The turnover rate at Khon Thaiso CRS was high because the station could not solve this problem.
Second, what appeared to be a lack of management skills hindered the development of the radio station and the recruiting of volunteers. Interviews showed that the station manager of the Khon Thaiso CRS realized that the station needed to be improved but that he did not know how. He appeared unable to assign duties to the volunteers; as a result, he had to bear all the work by himself. Volunteers stated that they believed the station manager did not trust them enough to let them be involved in the station’s activities. This belief diminished their motive to volunteer at the station beyond radio production.

Finally, misuse of power and transparency problems caused friction among volunteers. A volunteer system was good because socially committed people tend to participate. However, it did not guarantee that these people did not desire power or were not greedy. Problems of power concentration and transparency might have been avoided with a clear set of by-laws including a specific job description for each position, training to create good teamwork around each duty, and specific financial management guidelines.

This chapter analyzes the practices of participatory communication in Khon Thaiso CRS. Key factors that encouraged better access to the station are discussed such as the location of the station, the use of local language, the understanding of the nature of the audience, the station as an announcement tool, and feedback mechanisms. Participation is described as the way the station uses personal invitations to recruit volunteers and problems pertinent to the limitation of participation. Finally, three
problems in self-management—unprofessional behaviors resulted in volunteer drop out, lack of management skills, and misuse of power and transparency—are raised.
CHAPTER 5
DOILANGTHAM COMMUNITY RADIO STATION

Introduction

Doilangtham Community Radio Station (CRS) is a good example of participatory community media. Farmers in Sritia and nearby sub-districts were actively engaged in the establishment and operation of the station. It was built as a communication tool among farmers who were affected by the national land reform, the project that the Thai government set up at the suggestion of the World Bank in 1980s. Doilangtham CRS was a center where the Land Reform Group (LRG) and community members shared their information and opinions to fight for the right to regain their land and property. This made the Doilangtham CRS become a citizens’ medium.

The beauty of this radio station is in the endeavor of a group of farmers to claim their constitutional rights to own a radio station by “enacting its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape . . . contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations . . . empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformations and changes are possible” (Rodriguez, 2001, p. 20).

Like other CRSs in Thailand, Doilangtham operated without a license. The station broadcast on FM 100.25. At the time of this writing, Doilangtham offered 84 hours a week of programming. The station had about 25 to 30 radio hosts. Four or five were teen radio hosts. The programs spanned a wide range of content from music, personal advice,
farming, to Buddhist religion. Eighty percent of the programs were broadcast in Khom Mueang—the northern regional language.

The station volunteers seemed to not be worried about its illegal status. Bunsong Kuntawong, a radio host and technician, said: “I don’t think that this station is illegal. We didn’t do anything wrong. The constitution allows us to establish the station. We work here with good hearts and we didn’t do it for profit. We volunteer here for our community” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 11, 2006). Annop Taejawan, another radio host, added, “Our station is not illegal because it is established by the community and all radio shows are good. They are for the benefit of the community, not for anyone specifically. Community members get involved actively. It is a democratic tool and it is not a pirate station” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 10, 2006). Ratree Pinthukard, a radio host, shared her thoughts:

I know this station operates without a license but so do the others. I’m not scared because we didn’t do wrong. We don’t carry advertisements. We don’t get wages. We’re volunteers who work by hearts. See, there is no profit here, why do we have to be scared (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 10, 2006).

These volunteers affirmed a high level of involvement of the community in their CRS.

This chapter investigates the practices of participatory communication of the Doilangtham CRS and how the station adjusted itself to survive. The first section of the chapter provides a historical background of Sritia sub-district and its land reform
problems which led to the establishment of the radio station. The next section is a report of participatory communication at Doilangtham in which I discuss three attributes—access, participation, and self-management.

Figure 5.1 Location of Doilangtham Community Radio Station

Sritia Sub-District and Land Reform Problems

Doilangtham CRS is in Sritia sub-district of Lamphun province in the north of Thailand. This station is located near the entrance to a Buddhist temple, Doilangtham. Sritia is an old community that dates back to the Queen Chamathewi period (1157-1292) (Komgrit, 2006). At present the population of this sub-district is about 6,000. Fifty
percent of the villagers are farmers (Sritia District Administrative Office, 2006, p. 3). In the past, the villagers grew crops on their ancestors’ property. These lands were used for generations, but the villagers did not have land titles. The community members also used public land which was an open area for the community to grow crops and gather wild products. Those who wanted to use a piece of public land marked signs by cutting grass around the area. Traditionally, if they wanted to use a piece of public land that another family used, they had to ask for permission from the head of that family. Sometimes, the head of the village called the community members for a meeting to arrange a deal concerning which part of the public land each family would be allocated to use for that year. This was the way the villagers used to manage the public land. Nobody could claim possession of it.

The land problem started in 1966, when the state authorized the Land Department to allocate and title the land within Banhong and Pasang districts to villagers. This project included the land in Sritia sub-district. For reasons that were not entirely clear in the process of allocation, land that had been used by one family was to be given to another family in a land title. Arguments took place; as a result, no land was titled during that time (Komgrit, 2006).

In 1984, the state launched a national land reform suggested by the World Bank. But the same problem reoccurred. Moreover, the state categorized the public land as a forest preserve. This type of land could not be used or be titled to anyone. However, the land law opened a hole that the state could remove it from the forest preserve category if the community had to use it and therefore it could be titled to anyone who claimed the
right. As a result, businessmen, officials of the Land Department, politicians, and heads of villagers cooperated in the process to document these lands and sell them out. The community villagers did not know it for several years until the new owners fenced their property. This problem occurred widely in Lamphun and Chiang Mai provinces, as well as in Sritia sub-district. Up to the time of this writing, Sritia villagers still fought against the land reform project. They formed the Land Reform Group (LRG) (Komgrit, 2006).

Figure 5.2 Sritia village
Suebsakul Kitnusorn, NGO officer from Chiang Rai province in the north, came to help Sritia villagers and the LRG fought with the state to retain the land. Suebsakul was also the key person who introduced the concept of community radio to the group. According to him, in 2002, the state arrested some members of LRG because they carried out a demonstration. The mass media reported their story with discrepancies. The group needed a tool to communicate with the community and the society, telling why and how the group had to fight for the land. The group has maintained its fight with the state on and off for more than 20 years since 1984.

In 2002, Suebsakul heard about community radio. He consulted the LRG about setting up a radio station. The group agreed, so Suebsakul contacted Supinya Klangnarong, Secretary General to Campaign for Popular Media Reform, for training and processing the establishment of a CRS in Sritia village. The villagers did some fundraising to build the studio in Doilangtham temple (personal communication, July 17, 2006).
Doilangtham CRS went on the air in 2004. Suebsakul said that the objectives of the station are 1) to strengthen the groups’ position on the land reform problem, 2) to be a channel of communication among the group members and to increase understanding about their movement, and 3) to call for support from those who are not affected by land reform (personal communication, July 17, 2006). Clearly, the civil society of Sritia is strong due to the problem shared by over half of the population in the community.

An Overview

In July 2006, I visited the Doilangtham CRS and its staff. It was my second visit after I did a preliminary study at this radio station in December 2005. A few months
before I took this trip, I contacted Chutinan Suwan-aksorn, a radio host with whom I stayed during my preliminary study, because I planned to stay at her house during my field study at Doilangtham. Unfortunately, Chutinan, Muk (her close friend who also hosted a radio show), and the station manager had resigned from the station. There were hints of a love affair gone wrong and charges of misuse of the radio station. The governing board had just appointed a new administrative board in May 2006. (More details on this shortly).

On my arrival, I met with the new assistant station manager, Thananun Phainunta, who was waiting at the radio station to welcome me. Thananun was a local masseur and a farmer. I asked him about the former station manager and the story that I heard from Chutinan. Thananun did not share details. He simply said that the board believed these people misused the station. This is an important issue which I will discuss further later.

About noon, a listener came to the station with her son. They brought lunch with them. I asked the mother about the food. She said that it was for the station staff. She had heard that the deejay and technician did not have lunch yet. She was in town picking up her son from a drawing competition so she bought lunch for the station operators. I was impressed by the story because it showed active involvement of a community member. Shortly after that, three listeners visited to the station. They were on their way back from Doilangtham temple, so they stopped by to request songs.

On that day, three hosts did not show up because they went to work in the longan fields. Normally, July and August are the longan harvest season. Most farmers were in a hurry to collect their fruits. Those who finished their harvest were hired to work in other
farms. Therefore, the radio station did not have as many volunteers as there were during the longan off season. Thananun, the assistant manager, encouraged the lady’s son to join the program and talk about his painting and the competition. The boy was excited. His voice shook but he did well. At about 2 p.m., a nurse came to the station to prepare for her show. She came an hour ahead of her air time. Likewise, another radio host came ahead of time to prepare for his show.

The advent of the Doilangtham CRS was a phenomenon. Community members were excited about this station. Anucha Kidha, a station founder, radio host, and program monitoring committee member said, “When the station started its operation, many villagers bought a transistor radio. The sales of transistor radios went up three times in Sritia and nearby villages. They were excited about the new radio station” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006). Anucha told me that a transistor radio costs about USD$13 each while villagers earn only USD$3-4 a day working in the longan fields. Sukit Bunmayong, a radio host and programming committee member stated, “Normally, there are about 20-40 calls in my show. The phone rang all the time. I can only allow four listeners to speak on the air. And I receive about 10 letters a week too” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 13, 2006). The station was popular.

**Participatory Communication in Doilangtham Community Radio Station**

The activities that I observed on the first day of my field study at Doilangtham CRS demonstrated that the station was an active communication channel. Community members showed involvement in the station. Some brought food and some stopped by to
request music. However, during my observations, I noticed that programs on the station did not mention land reform problems. Instead, it focused on longan price problems. Suebsakul Kitnusorn, a social activist who helped established the station, said, “Sritia people are active. They share their thoughts about their problems. . . . At present the station does not focus on land and farmer problems because people complained that the station is too serious. They’d like to hear music” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 17, 2006). Although the focus of the station shifted from land reform problems to problems like longan prices and playing music, this station was still popular and the favorite station of many community members. The following section discusses three attributes of participatory communication in this station in more detail.

**Access**

Access is the first gateway of participatory communication. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s meeting in Belgrade in 1977, access was discussed and interpreted to mean that every community member should be guaranteed the right to access a radio station in every aspect, such as access to the station programs, production, and policy. In addition, Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, Thai media scholar and Chairperson of the Campaign for Popular Media Reform, explained that accessibility could take place at two levels—listenership and ownership. From the listenership level, a CRS needs to broadcast using appropriate language, content, and a clear radio signal so that community members can understand. Moreover, the process of media democratization in Thailand expanded accessibility to include citizens or civic groups that can establish and own a CRS as a constitutional right (personal
communication, July 20, 2006). In this section, I will discuss access to the Doilangtham CRS at the listenership level. The ownership level will be discussed in relation to self-management.

During my stay at Doilangtham, I found that the CRS promoted access through the use of local language, convenient location, good content, and multiple feedback mechanisms. Moreover, cell phone technology helped expedite access and connect listeners and the station. Finally, the use of pseudonyms and the creation of listening networks took place in the emergence of Doilangtham CRS.

*Khom Mueang language: The main broadcasting language.*

Typically, the first query about a CRS is how accessible the radio station’s language is to the audience. In the Northern region of Thailand, Khom Mueang is a dominant local language. Listener Chunfong Pongtatip said, “I like Khom Mueang language. It is easy to listen to” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 13, 2006). Saokaew Phainunta, a radio host, explained, “I use Khom Mueang because of the community. It is our spoken language” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 8, 2006). Thananun Phainunta, a radio host and assistant manager, and Annop Taejawan, a radio host, shared the same reason that they used Khom Mueang because it was the local language (personal communication, July 8, 2006; personal communication, July 10, 2006 respectively).

*Location: The connection between Buddhism and a community radio station.*

Doilangtham CRS is fortunate that it is located on the periphery of the Doilangtham temple. Suebsakul Kitnusorn, one of the station founders and a monitoring
committee member, stated that the Land Reform Group (LRG) chose to build the radio station on the temple’s land for four reasons. First, for Buddhists, the temple is a sanctuary where people do no harm. Second, no one will be able to claim to own this CRS. Third, the priest will be the mediator if conflicts take place. Finally, the station would not have to pay for the land, electric bills, and utilities because the Doilangtham temple would take care of expenses (personal communication, July 17, 2006). Thana Yasopa, the President of the LRG, Head of Sritia district, and the key founder of the radio station, added other reasons. There are several villages surrounding Doilangtham temple: Sritia, Nongkiet, Thakongmuong, Thaloop, Srilaporn, Srichareon, Dongkilek, and Paetai. These villages were facing national land reform problems. Locating at the temple would make it easy for everyone to access to the station. It was also convenient to recruit volunteers for the station. Finally, Doilangtham temple is on a hill; therefore, the radio signal would be able to travel further than locating it in a low land (personal communication, July 12, 2006).

However, back then, no one expected that locating a radio station near the temple would lead to frequent donations to the station. When community members came to give their offerings at Doilangtham temple, they stopped by the radio station which is located by the entrance of the temple. Once they saw a donation box, they donated some money for good personal karma. This represented the connection between Buddhism and a CRS in this community.

In addition, several listeners told me that they visited to the radio station because it was not far from their houses. Most listeners lived about one or two miles away from
the station. Yungyong Kumpira, a listener, said that he comes to the station every day since the station started. Yungyong delivers vegetables to the market and his job finishes about 10 a.m. He came to the station after finishing his work (personal communication, July 9, 2006). More importantly, the station is located on the route to villagers’ longan orchards so they had to pass the radio station every day to get to their fields. Each day several of them stop by the station to request songs.

Radio content: Adjustment to survive.

Doilangtham CRS is a good example of a radio station that knew how to adjust itself to the needs of community members. Although the station was established as a tool to announce the pain of farmers who faced an unfair national land reform project, the station staff found that listeners did not like to hear about problems and serious stories every day. Sombat Nawanthai, the station manager, explained that this type of radio content exacerbated their feelings and emphasized how unfortunate they were. As a consequence, the station began playing more music and opened up the opportunity for listeners to dedicate messages to each other which led to the use of jodmaikom (personal communication, July 14, 2006).

At that time, jodmaikom, in Khom Mueang language “little letters,” were sent to the station every day, either by the writer or by those listeners who called themselves postmen. Jodmaikom is a short note stating the title of the song, name of a listener, and sometimes accompanied by dedication messages. Yungyong Kumpira was one of those letter carriers. He called himself “Mr. Postman.” Every day, after coming back from delivering vegetables to the market, Yungyong would visit four to five longan fields to
collect letters from his friends and bring to the radio station. Yungyong shared his feelings:

Since we have this station, we have music to hear every day. I love this station.

. . . I’m the station’s postman. I collect little letters from my friends who work in the longan fields. I ride a motorcycle to several fields. I started this job four or five months ago. I don’t think about gas. I have time so I help the station to collect letters. I also helped my friends save some money because they don’t have to call the station. I sometimes ride a bicycle to save gas. Today I brought seven letters. Sometimes, I carry ten or twelve letters (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006).

Figure 5.4 Yungyong Kumpira (left) bringing Jodmaikom to the station
Figure 5.5 Jodmaikom or a little letter

Figure 5.6 The deejay of Doilangtham reading Jodmaikom to her audience
Another example of how congruent Doilangtham’s radio content is to the needs of the community is revealed in Niyom Wongsaya’s interview:

I listened to the station about a year ago. Previously, I didn’t pay attention to the station. Last year, the longan got worms because of bad weather and disease. I was very stressed. I heard the station talking about the longan problems and many deejays blessed us. They said that they also shared the same problem because their longan got worms too. I felt like they are part of the village. I listened to the station since then (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006).

Like other districts in Lamphun province, Sritia community grew longan fruits. Outside the longan harvest season, community members grew vegetables such as onion, chillies, and lime. Some residents worked in red onions packing houses in the village. Others went to work at construction sites in other provinces. However, Longan was the main thing that provided most income to the families. The economy of this community truly depended on longan products.

As aforementioned, the northerners are strongly connected to Buddhism and mystical beliefs. As a result, radio content like fortune telling was very popular at Doilangtham. Niwat Homkumma, a program host, said that his radio show was very popular. He bought a computer program about a century calendar. In this computer program a user puts in his or her date of birth and the program will check what day of the week he or she was born. Knowing the day a person was born is important because in Buddhism, there is a symbolic monk icon for each day of the week, and a person donates
to the specific monk of his or her birthday for good fortune. Thai Buddhists also believe that if they do enough good deeds and never harm anyone, they will go to nirvana after death. However, they will be reborn or go to hell to pay for bad karma. They believe in an afterlife. They also believe that in their next life, they might be reborn not as a human but as an animal if they did evil. Therefore several people go to the temple to provide offerings on their birthday for merit. They also donate when they have an opportunity.

This computer program also provides details about the fortune of each birth date. Niwat read listeners’ fortunes from the computer over the air in his radio show (personal communication, July 13, 2006). Niwat’s program lasts two hours a week but it seemed to be too short for several listeners, including Chanfong Pongtathip. One day, during my visit, Chanfong rode a motorcycle to the station with her husband. She said that it was her first time visiting to the station. She tried to call Nivat’s show. Unfortunately, she and her husband had no luck. There was always someone else who made a call faster than them. They decided to visit the station because they would like Nivat to read their fortune. Chanfong shared her thoughts:

I tried to call in for four weeks already. I’m so frustrated that I couldn’t reach the deejay. . . . I gave my birth date and Nivat typed it in the computer. We found that the day is correct. My husband’s birth day was not correct. It is not Tuesday but Friday. From now on he has to give offerings to the Friday monk, not the Tuesday monk. . . . He misunderstood for a long time (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 13, 2006).
Apart from this content, Doilangtham CRS announced local news and information, including lost and found information. Bunsong Kuntawong, a radio host, said that sometimes people called the station when they lost their belongings or when they found something such as a purse, a farm tool, or an animal such as a cow. He added, “This station is a communication channel for everyone. The signal covers several villages which is better than a transmitter tower (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 11, 2006). Sukit Bunmayong, another radio host, said that a CRS is very useful. He added the following:

We can communicate and warn about problems such as floods or fire. The information reaches community members in a wide area. During longan season, we announce longan prices several times a day so that farmers know where to sell their product. Some longan factories offer a better price. We have volunteers who run to check longan prices in factories nearby (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 13, 2006).

Listener Niyom Wongsaya said sometimes the station also announced personal news:

I was impressed with the station. I asked the station to announce that I will celebrate building a new house and would like to invite all listeners. I did not think that there would be a lot of people to cerebrate with me. That day, about 80 people came. They brought gifts and food to share. I felt grateful (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006).
Obviously, Doilangtham was a place the community members thought of when they needed to make an announcement. The station functioned as community communication center.

_No advertisement: The best thing ever_

The Doilangtham station did not carry advertisements. The station was a member of the Thailand Community Radio Federation (TCRF) so it followed the guidelines of the TCRF that it must be a nonprofit station. The station was subsidized by Doilangtham temple and received donations from community members. Because the station used a volunteer system and had no paid staff, its expenses mainly came from electric and phone bills.

Although the station depended heavily on music programs, it did not pay for the right to use music and never received any complaints from any music companies. As mentioned previously, copy right law might be in force but it did not affect the operation of this CRS. Because of budget constraints, Doilangtham CRS simply bought pirate music albums in the form of MP3s or CDs from the market. In fact, nationally, CRSs without the money to buy even these MP3 or CDs played music from the volunteers’ personal collections or those that were donated from the community members.

Saokaew Phainunta, a radio host, stated that he did not like the idea of carrying advertisements. He complained that the former station manager, Chutinan, and Muk behaved contradictory to the station’s mission by accepting money from several shops in town and advertised their products on their radio programs. They were alleged to have done this for three to four months (from January to April 2006) before they resigned from
the station. Saokaew said, “I don’t agree that the station should carry advertisements. Money causes friction. We do not really need money. The donations are enough” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 8, 2006).

Chanfong Pongtatip, a listener, did not support advertisements either:

On a rainy day, I cannot receive the radio signal from Doilangtham clearly. I have to listen to the other stations. I don’t like these stations because most of them do not have good content. They carry lots of advertisements. It is very boring to hear advertisements. I like Doilangtham station because deejays always announce about temple charities and community activities (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 13, 2006).

Listeners seemed to understand that the station did not have any revenue. They helped the station in several ways. For instance, Niyom Wongsaya, a listener, said, “I brought soda or juice for the deejays. They didn’t get paid. The station doesn’t have any income to pay them. I like that the station does not have advertisements. I donate about USD$3-5 a month to support the station” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006). Yungyong Kumpira added, “I like this station because there is no advertisement. The other stations have too many advertisements. I am bored with them” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006).

**Feedback mechanism: A comment box and cell phone technology.**

In front of the Doilangtham CRS, a comment box is hung on the door. Thananun Phainunta, assistant manager and radio host, told me that the station tried to promote dialogue with the community and would like to get feedback from listeners. However,
people did not give many comments. Instead, they left messages about music requests and left their letters in the box (personal communication, July 8, 2006). The station fixed the problem by asking deejays to persuade their audience to call in and comment about their show. Nathapong Phawaree, a radio host:

I sometimes announce that this station belongs to the community. They should visit us. I told my audience that we put a comment box at the station’s gate so they can leave their opinions or suggestions. In my show, I leave the last 10 minutes for suggestions but not many people share their thoughts. They call to ask for music (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 8, 2006).

Annop Taejawan, a radio host, told me, “I asked my audience to be my mirror and suggest or advise me how to improve my program. I allow listeners to speak on the air. It is a way to encourage them to talk to the community” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 10, 2006). Bunsong Kuntawong, a radio host and technician, said, “I let them call during the songs to make suggestion for my show. . . . When my listeners meet me, they give me advice about the show” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 11, 2006). Saokaew Phainunta, another radio host, said that during his first month hosting at this radio station, some listeners called him and commented: “They complained that I said ‘yes’ too often” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 8, 2006).

One thing that I noticed was the popular use of cell phones among community members. Most listeners called the station from their cell phones. This technology
connected the station and the audience. Ratreepinthukard, a radio host, discussed the use of cell phones: “I announced that I’d like to hear some suggestions about my radio program. Some called in and said I speak too fast. A mobile telephone is very useful. It makes contact easy” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 10, 2006). Thananun Phainunta, another radio host, commented:

Some listeners called to my mobile phone to ask about northern rituals after the show. They couldn’t catch the content. . . . I don’t think the listeners feel that they waste their money because they hear their song and they feel happy (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 8, 2006).

Porntip Laten, a listener, supported Thananun:

Yes, it is expensive to call. I don’t want to pay but I like music and I’d like to request a song to dedicate to my friends. . . . We became close friends because of this radio station and the cell phone. Previously we were neighbors but we were not close (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 10, 2006).

Porntip expressed the important role that Doilangtham CRS had for villagers, that of becoming closer through messages and song dedications. It indicated the success of this radio station as a communication channel and the benefits that community members received from the establishment of this radio station.

Dedication messages: The use of pseudonyms and listening networks.

The phenomena relevant to the advent of Doilangtham CRS were the use of pseudonyms among listeners and the formation of listening networks within the
community. I noticed from my first visit to this radio station in December 2005 that listeners used pseudonyms rather than their real names, such as Pa Yung (Godfather Yung), Siiyaek nangkhoy (Lady Waiting at the Intersection), Stree thi lok luem (Lady Who the World Forgets), Num nonduk (Late Sleeping Man), Pa Sert (Godfather Sert), Maengpong daeng (Red Scorpion), Maengpong dum (Black Scorpion), Kulab daeng (Red Rose), or Kulab dum (Black Rose) among others.

I interviewed a group of listeners about the use of pseudonyms. They explained that they did not want anyone to know who they were. They felt shy about identifying themselves on the air. Some explained that they were farmers and they had low levels of education. They were not confident and not familiar with talking in public, including when the radio signal traveled across villages. They felt the need to conceal their identities and pretend to be other persons to hide their shyness. It was not clear who started using pseudonyms. One of the listeners said that when she first called in, she was very excited. She became frightened when a deejay asked her name. She decided to make up a pseudonym and used it until the present. In addition, these listeners became friends knowing each other from the air. They decided to meet at the radio station and started to spend time and do activities together. Finally, they created their own listening network and sometimes dedicated music in the name of their network.

Niyom Wongsaya, a listener who used the pseudonym, “Huo hoi soi sii (Hou Hoi Village, 4th Alley), said the following:

I have about 100 listeners in my network. We listen to several stations and dedicate songs to each other. But for this station, I have about 50 people. I call the
station several times a day. I bought a mobile phone plan which is cheaper because of unlimited calls. . . . The first time that I called this station, a deejay asked me if I’d like to dedicate a song to anyone. I had no idea. However, I remembered some listeners’ pseudonyms so I dedicated to them. In return, they dedicated songs back to me. We never met each other but we dedicate songs to each other. It was fun. The station is the channel for us. One day a deejay announced that a listener’s daughter needed blood. This listener used to dedicate a song to me so I went to the hospital and donated my blood to her daughter. The other time I heard a deejay announce that “Stree thi lok luem” (Lady Who the World Forgets) had a throat operation. My wife and I visited her at the hospital. We had not met before but we used to dedicate songs to each other for several months. The nurse helped us look for her. Since then we became close friends. Now we promise to be brother and sister (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006).

A day after I interviewed Niyom Wongsaya or “Hou Hoi Village, 4th Alley,” six listeners came to the station and looked for me. I was impressed to learn that Niyom contacted them to come see me. When I interviewed Niyom, I mentioned that I would like to talk to other listeners who were in his listening network. I did not expect that he would help me. It was amazing talking with these listeners. They were happy people. They laughed and smiled all the time. They showed me their transistor radios and a handmade wire radio antenna to hang on longan trees for a better signal.
In conclusion, Doilangtham CRS was successful in promoting radio access. The use of the Khom Mueang language made the programs easy to listen to. The way the station changed radio content from land reform problems to light entertainment revealed that the station tried to provide the content that fits the needs of community members. In addition, this station was located in the proper area. Farmers had to pass it every day to their longan fields and those who came to visit the temple had to pass the station because the station was located on the entrance of the temple. They tended to stop at the station. A comment box and cell phones became other means of communication between the station and the listeners. Finally, the use of pseudonyms made listeners felt more confident to contact the station and dedicate the message to the other. The creation of listening networks was very unusual. It indicated that the station played a crucial as a community medium that bought community members together.

Participation

The involvement of community members in a CRS can take place at many levels such as production and programming decision-making. At Doilangtham, community members supported the station’s decision about not carrying advertisements by donating money to the station. Bunsong Kuntawong, a radio host and technician, said, “Some listeners come to the station and help water the garden and sweep the floor. They know that we do not have a janitor. Some donate 50 cents or a dollar to support us” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006). The involvement of community members is important because it leads to the station’s sustainability. At Doilangtham CRS, participation was encouraged through personal persuasion and radio
production workshops. Community members were also involved in radio programming and station decision making, when a crisis took place such as when a radio host used the station to denounce the other.

*Personal persuasion, radio production workshops, and volunteer recruitment.*

Most volunteers of Doilangtham CRS participated in the station because of personal recruitment. Saokaew Phainunta, a technician, was invited by Thana Yasopa, the President of the Land Reform Group (LRG), Head of Sritia district, and the key founder of the radio station. Saokaew said that he helped the station because Thana was his cousin. He offered the following:

I volunteered as a technician once a week. . . . My job is also to help a new radio host to become familiar with the equipment. We have many elderly hosts. They struggle with the equipment and the computer. I have to teach them several times. Some can do it but some can’t. Most elderly hosts don’t use a computer. They play music from a CD or cassette player because to search for a song in a computer, they would have to type. They do not know how to type (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 8, 2006).

Ratree Pinthukard, is a radio host who was invited by Thana Yasopa as well. She shared her story that Thana was her uncle. He contacted her to join the radio workshop:

I had no idea about hosting a radio program, but my uncle encouraged me. After the workshop we didn’t do anything because the station was not built yet. When the station went on the air I started my first show. I was very excited and spoke
Nathapong Phawaree, a teenager of Sritia village, was invited to work at Doilangtham CRS by his barber who was a deejay there. Although Nathapong was interested in the station, he did not participate. One day he heard an announcement from the radio station inviting people to join the second radio production workshop. He decided to join. At that time, Nathapong was in the 12th grade. He explained the following:

After the workshop, I waited for three weeks for the programming committee to grant me a two-hour show. My barber came to help me at the control room. . . .

Before changing the program layout, we have to propose it in a meeting. In the meeting, the station manager reports about the performance of new programs and listeners’ feedback. The committee will decide whether the show should be continued. For a new show, the manager will propose a request. Mostly, everyone gets a chance but they have to participate in the radio production workshop and wait for the committee to grant the air time (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 8, 2006).

Annop Taejawan, a radio host, said that the priest of Doilangtham temple invited him to help at the station two years ago. He respected the priest so he volunteered at the station. He added, “After volunteering about a year, I was appointed to be a program monitor committee member” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 10, 2006). Sukit Bunmayong, a radio host, said that he was a local singer and
also a village master of ceremonies. Boatha Supahan, his relative, invited him to co-host a show with her because she did not have public speaking skills:

I came to help her. After Baotha felt confident enough to host a show alone, I split and had my own show. I have volunteered here for two years already. I persuaded one of my friends to do a football show. I taught him to use a sound mixer and the other radio equipment until he could do it by himself (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 13, 2006).

Sombat Nawanthai, the station manager and an LRG member, added the following:

Previously, the Land Reform Group members came to host the show. They are the station founders and they aimed to use the station as a tool. Their programs were serious and did not have many listeners. . . . Later some resigned from their service because the radio signal did not go far. Many of them could not hear the show. At present, many community members host the program rather than only the LRG members (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006).

Doilangtham CRS was open to community members to participate in the station. Radio workshops were used as a means to train new volunteers to be ready for radio production. In addition, veteran radio hosts or technicians also helped new volunteers by co-hosting with them until they felt confident to do the radio show by themselves. This was a good strategy because it not only supported new volunteers but also assured radio quality.
Radio programming: Active community involvement.

The Doilangtham CRS’s listeners were active. They gave suggestions for radio programming. Anucha Kidha, a radio host and program monitoring committee member, expressed the following:

The station started operating in July, 2004. During the early period, the station only broadcast Friday to Sunday from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. There were about 15-20 hosts. Most were LRG members. Community members suggested that the station should broadcast every day and have diverse programs. It took about eight months for the station to prepare and recruit radio hosts in order to broadcast every day (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006).

Another example of community participation in the station programming is in the case of Ratree Pinthukard, a radio host:

I am a kindergarten teacher so my first radio program was for kids. It was on Saturday at noon. I read tales for kids. Two listeners called in and said that the time was not appropriate for kids. I went to the market and met some listeners. They said the same thing. These people are farmers. They said that they are taking a break for lunch so they’d like to hear music, not a tale. I decided to change my target audience to farmers because those who suggested this are farmers. I also changed the content to health and general information about family and some Northern beliefs such as luck and fortune, color, costume, and day of birth. I received many calls and little letters. They like this kind of content. For example, I said if you would like to invite luck, you should put an egg and an orange in a
basket and leave it in the house. Some listeners called in and asked where they should put the basket specifically. I think I know my listeners a little bit (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 13, 2006).

Because of the community support, Ratree felt happy to volunteer at the station and do her radio program. In April 2006, Doilangtham CRS was in a crisis. Chutinan and her friend, Muk, quarreled at the station. During that time, Chutinan was hosting her show. She let the conversation go on the air intentionally. Unfortunately, the story was about an accusation of Muk having an affair with the former station manager. No one knew whether this was a true story but the message went through the radio signal and was heard in several villages.

Sombat Nawanthai, the station manager, tells the story:

That time (May 2006) Thana Yasopa (the President of the LRG, Head of Sritia district, and the key founder of the station) wanted to close down the station for awhile because there were several problems arising during the period of the former station manager such as money embezzlement, overlooking the governing board, and misuse of the radio station. However, in the meeting, about 20 community members participated. They disagreed with Thana. They proposed withholding hosting from Chutinan and Muk. They proposed that the station change the administrative committee members. Therefore, the station decided to set up another meeting to select a new administrative board. I was appointed as the station manager from that meeting (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006).
Annop Taejawan, a radio host, took part in that meeting:

The meeting room was crowded. There were about 50-60 people. Normally, few community members participate in the meeting. This meeting was different. Community members felt that they have to be involved. Otherwise, the station might be closed down. I think people understand and know that the station is useful and that is why they participated in the meeting (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 10, 2006).

Pranorm Naksaen, a listener who uses a pseudonym “Red Scorpion” joined the meeting. She was pretty angry when I asked her about the meeting:

We boycott Chutinun. We don’t want to listen to her show. In the meeting, we suggested the governing board fire Chutinun. We couldn’t accept that she used the station to publicize Muk and the former station manager about their love affair. We felt so shamed about how people from other villages would think about our village. She shouldn’t have done so (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 10, 2006).

Pranorm and other listeners said that this radio station should not be used to hurt anyone. That was why several listeners distrusted Chutinan because they perceived that she misused the radio station for her personal purpose. The problem that Doilangtham CRS went through was unfavorable. However, the crisis encouraged community involvement.

Participation in the radio station was high. The station had many active listeners. The advent of this radio station gave the community a chance to learn how to manage
their own community broadcast medium. Personal recruitment and radio workshops were strategies used in the station to engage community members to work at the station. Two changes which evolved were program content and radio hosts. The station provided more music to satisfy the audience. Ordinary community members replaced the LRG members to produce the program.

*Self-management*

Owing to the fact that the Doilangtham CRS was established as a tool for the LRG to fight with the government on national land reform, the station chose to become a member of the Thailand Community Radio Federation (TCRF) rather than registering with the Public Relations Department (PRD). As previously described, only a few months after its start up in 2004, the PRD required Thai CRSs to register with it by the end of that year and allowed these registered CRSs to air commercials for six minutes for every hour of broadcasting. Kanok Maneewong, a coordinator of the Community Radio Networks in the North wondered, “We wonder if the department has any hidden agenda. Why did it allow the business sector to exploit community radio programs?” (“People’s Radio,” 2004). On that occasion, CRSs operators under the TCRF announced that they would demonstrate if the PRD insisted on taking them under its control (“People’s Radio,” 2004).

Sombat Nawanthai, the station manager at Doilantham, recalled the event: “We have our own policy that the station is independent and it belongs to the community. We did not register with the PRD. If we did so, the PRD will become our supervisor” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006). Sombat
shared his thoughts that he was worried about the station’s status. Since he was appointed a station manager, he collected all the documents about how the station got funding to verify that the station did not carry any advertisements. He added that at present, the government did not have a clear plan for Thai CRSs so Doilangtham followed the rules of the TCRF rigidly (personal communication, July 14, 2006).

*Structure and rules.*

Thana Yasopa, the President of the LRG, Head of Sritia district, and the key founder of the radio station, was the most important actor in the Doilangtham CRS. He received respect from several villages that participated in this radio station. He was the chairperson of the station meeting and supervised the station manager. Thana shared his thoughts with me about how the station selected the station operating committee members:

> We select the ones who know about land reform problems or those who are members of the LRG because this radio station belongs to the LRG. Especially for the station manager position, it is important to recruit a volunteer from the LRG. It is easy for management since this person understands the process of land reform and the mission of the group. At present, 90% in the governing board are LRG members (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 12, 2006).

In operations, the station had certain rules for volunteers. For instance, everyone had to participate in a radio production workshop to be eligible to host a program.

Thananun Phainunta, assistant manager, said that in practice, the rules were easy to
follow such as using polite words on the show, dressing properly at the station because it is in the temple area, preparing content and coming ahead of time, being on time, no advertisements, and no propaganda (personal communication, July 8, 2006). Anucha Kidha, a program monitoring committee member added, “Later some problems arouse which resulted in more rules. The governing committee met and said no alcohol before coming to host the show” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006).

On a daily basis, Doilangtham had two volunteers staying at the radio station. They were a technician and the station’s daily caretaker. In practice, both volunteers did not have to stay at the station at the same time. One of them could stay at home or work in the farm and check the broadcasting. Bunsong Kuntawong, a radio host and technician, said, “Sometimes, I do not stay at the station because most deejays can use the equipment. They call me if something happens. I go to the station right away” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 11, 2006).

Moreover, the station set up programming, monitoring, and fundraiser committees to help the station manager. Sukit Bunmayong, who was appointed to the programming committee, explained the role of this committee:

We have a meeting with all the deejays every two or three months. Normally, if a previous volunteer would like to come back, the programming committee can make a decision and grant him or her a time slot. But for a new person, we have to bring the proposal to the station meeting and ask permission from the governing
board (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 11, 2006).

The station tried to hold regular meetings. Ratree Pinthukard, a radio host and station treasurer, stated that in the meeting Thana Yasopa was the chairperson. The priest was a consultant. She added, “Normally, the priest opens the meeting and then Thana started the meeting and asked the station manager to report to the governing committee members, followed by the other committees reporting their activities” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 10, 2006).

Doilangtham CRS had about 40 governing board members. Several of them were also appointed to some of the committees such as programming and fundraising. The station relied solely on volunteers as its workforce keeping the structure simple, and, to relax volunteers, carrying few rules.

Volunteer system.

Thana Yasopa, the President of the LRG, said that a volunteer system was good because it allowed everyone to participate, taking some responsibilities and letting them help the community (personal communication, July 12, 2006). Ratree Pinthukard, a radio host, commented that this system was good, but it was hard to force volunteers to be responsible. As a result, several of them stopped working for the station (personal communication, July 10, 2006). However, Bunsong Kuntawong, a technician, did not view the volunteer drop off as a problem. He told me, “I did not see any drawback. Some may disappear but we have some who want to replace them” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 11, 2006).
Sukit Bunmayong, a radio host and programming committee member, offered the following on this subject:

The problem of a volunteer system is that people do not get paid. When they come to the station, they cannot work in the orchards. They lose their income for that day. Another problem is that many volunteers drop out. We frequently have to recruit new people and train them. Also a drawback of a volunteer system is that everyone is a volunteer. They have their own work. We cannot ask them to host at the time we want. It must be the time when they can come. It is also hard to expect them to practice. This makes it difficult to improve the program quality (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 13, 2006).

A CRS that relies on a volunteer system has to accept these drawbacks. A turnover rate was a common problem. A volunteer could resign from his or her service at any time he or she wanted to. Sombat Nawanthai, the station manager, agreed with Sukit:

A voluntary system is good if we can find good volunteers. We spent money to do several radio production workshops. These participants come to host at the station for a few months to practice and then leave us. We don’t have any reward. Everyone said similarly that they don’t have time. Several left us to work at a local commercial radio station (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006).

Sombat added that the station needed about 50 volunteers to host the programs. However, at the time of observations, there were about 20 people showing up regularly. Sombat was elected for a manager position recently so he did not have an administrative
plan yet: “Everyone is very busy harvesting longan. After the season, we’ll have a station meeting to design a development plan. So far, I know that the station has funding problems. We don’t have budget to do workshops for volunteer recruitment” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006).

_Misuse of power and transparency problems._

In early 2006, Doilangtham faced a very hard time as a result of a situation that arose among the former station manager, Nan Yod, his girlfriend, Muk, and Chuntinan. Many believe that these three may have abused their responsibilities to the station. Thana Yasopa, the president of the LRG, said that three of them volunteered to host a Thai boxing competition. Everyone helped them sell the tickets. After the fundraiser, the former station manager reported that the station did not get any profit from the boxing. Thana offered the following:

I helped sell tickets for USD$385. When we checked the account, we did not find this account. It was our fault that we did not ask anyone to take care of the account. But we did not do anything because it was hard to find a capable manager. We decided not to take it seriously (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006).

Anucha Kidha, a program monitoring committee member complained that the former station manager’s girlfriend dominated the station manager, controlled the station management, and might have kept the station’s donation and fundraiser money (personal communication, July 9, 2006). Thananun Phainunta, assistant manager also suspected them for those accounts (personal communication, July 8, 2006).
Saokaew Phainunta, a radio host and technician, said that he stopped working at Doilangtham CRS for a while because of the former station manager:

I could not work with him and his girlfriend. They were not transparent. I know that everyone suspected them but we didn’t talk. They spent the money for themselves, money that villagers donated to the station. For example, the girlfriend bought CDs for the station but kept them at home. Other deejays are not pleased with her ideas. The manager did not solve this problem. . . . The manager took radio equipment to fix and always overcharged the station (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006).

Sukit Bunmayong, another radio host, shared his story that when the station started, the volunteers proposed that the station should have an identification song. Sombat Nawanthai, one of the governing committee members at that time (a current station manager), contacted Sukit to sing three songs for an album. Two other local singers contributed too. Sukit played the music on his program and several songs in this album became a hits. Sukit complained:

I used to have problems with the former manager and his friends—Muk and Chutinan. They were jealous that I had a chance to record for a music album. I played the songs on my show. Many listeners liked my doing it and requested them every day. Muk alleged that I used the station to promote the album. She told her audience that I did wrong and used the station for my personal benefit. Later the station manager asked me to stop hosting the show and Muk took away my time slot. I was disappointed that the manager did not ask the committee
members but ordered me to leave. I went to visit Thana Yasopa (President of the LRG) to request fairness. Thana came to the station and told the manager to return my air time. They quarreled. Finally, I regained my time but I didn’t feel comfortable working at the station. This story did not get into the station meeting because at that time the governing committee members were very busy with the government about the land problems. Most of them were sentenced to jail for their protests. No one had time to supervise the station. That is why the former station manager, his girlfriend—Muk—and Chutinan controlled the station for several months (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 13, 2006).

In April 2006, Muk and Chutinan quarreled over the air about the love affair. Chutinan played music and turned a microphone on; therefore, their argument went on the air along with the music. Vulgar language was used when they were arguing. The whole community and other villages heard the story. Thana Yasopa had the following reaction:

We could not stand the former manager’s love affair. He has a wife and children. The community blamed him and objected to his holding a manager position. A day before, the governing board’s meeting, the former manager resigned from the station. . . . Everyone heard the story on the air. It was terrible. They used very bad words with each other (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006).
Saokaew Phainunta said that the community members complained about the event and requested that Thana set up a station meeting. The station founders, governing committee members, radio hosts, and community members were invited. The former station manager, Muk, and Chutinan were invited as well. The meeting was held at the temple pavilion. The priest was the president of the meeting. Saokaew reported the following:

Over 40-50 people came. We talked about 4-5 hours but we could not find the solution. The former manager persuaded the participants to listen to the station’s operating problems and how he helped the station. Finally, the meeting requested Muk and Chutinan stop working at the station for three months. The meeting could not agree on what to do with the former station manager. The next meeting was scheduled 7 days later. The station manager resigned before the second meeting. Only a few came to that meeting. The three did not show up. That day participants decided to elect a new station manager (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006).

Thana Yasopa took a positive view. He believed this event made people get involved in the station: “Several people told me that the station has to fix this problem because many villages heard about it” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 12, 2006).

Although the event passed, there were still some other problems that Doilangtham had to solve. Probably the most immediate was that Sombat Nawanthai, a new station
manager, had to balance his administration under the close supervision of the LRG leader, Thana Yasopa. Sombat told it this way:

I do not have authority to make a decision. I have to wait for the governing committee which has Thana as the president. I felt uncomfortable. The president and the governing board control the decisions. I can only take care of the daily operation. I would like to have freedom to do everything. At present, I don't like the way the president watches my actions closely. I feel like I am puppet (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006).

**Conclusion**

The case of Doilangtham CRS demonstrates that participatory communication can take place at a high level when community members feel involved in the station. First, access was encouraged through the use of Khom Mueang as the station’s main broadcasting language because it was easy for listeners to understand the radio content. The selection of the station’s location was considered from several angles, but the most important was that locating the station on the periphery of the Buddhist temple helped remind community members of the connection between Buddhism and the station. Therefore, their support for the station was considered charitable for their personal karma. Moreover, radio content was adjusted to the needs of community members as seen when the station offered information about longan prices and some content that suited community members’ mystical beliefs.

Jodmaikom or the little letters, a commentary box, and cell phones were encouraged as communication methods between the station and its listeners. These led to
higher numbers of dedication messages the station announced daily and feedback that the station received for its performance. Perhaps, what made listeners most happy was the fact that this station was free from advertising. In return, the station often reminded its audiences about donations and support.

Second, participation must be inspired in many ways. Doilangtham CRS used personal persuasion and radio production workshops as techniques to recruit volunteers. Moreover, they opened the station to community criticism for better radio programming and followed their advice. In return, community members appreciated the station for recognizing their suggestions.

Finally, the active community involvement made self-management practice at this radio station lively. In other words, high participation of community members made this station a citizens’ medium. To accommodate volunteers, the station tried not to impose many rules, and this made radio work pleasant. Although a volunteer system caused problems such as frequent turnover, the Doilangtham CRS stood by its commitment to refuse commercials and maintain its volunteer system by recruiting replacements. This helped keep the station from being forced to transform itself into a commercial station. Lack of transparency and misuse of power may have taken place because the governing board was preoccupied with land problems and rather than supervising the operating committee members. Fortunately, the station received support from the community members and the problem was finally resolved.
CHAPTER 6
PATTANI COMMUNITY RADIO STATION

Introduction

I started my teaching career in the remote and turbulent Muslim province of Pattani in 1997. The first year was spent exploring and learning about an unfamiliar place and culture of Muslim community. The next year became crucial when I interacted with many Thai officials (mainly Buddhist) and Muslim villagers. I started to see the social inequality the Muslims received as the second class of Pattani society due to their poverty, low level of education, religion, and language. Outside the Pattani community, Muslims were ignored by national mainstream media, only receiving attention when unrest took place. Accordingly, Pattani became a violent place in the eyes of outsiders.

As a media professor and director of a university radio station, I believed that if these Muslims owned a communication outlet, they would have a chance to inform and express their identity and needs. Consequently, the perception of Muslims would be improved.

In June 1999, I attended a media seminar in Bangkok. This activity was held by Uajit Virojtrairat, an independent media scholar, and CivicNet, a not-for-profit network coordinator and civil society information support center. I learned about the concept of community radio from this seminar. I foresaw the possibility of setting up a community radio station (CRS) in Pattani. I came back and contacted Muslim leaders. It took four years for the Pattani CRS to come into being. Soon after the station was established, I left Pattani to study at Ohio University.
I made two visits to the CRS in December 2005 and August 2006. Unfortunately, I found that the station was facing many problems due to the southern insurgency and the decline in the number of the station’s volunteers. At the time of the field observation, Pattani CRS was unlicensed. The station broadcast on FM 97.75. Its 40 hours of programming a week included regular programs hosted by the three current volunteers, short documentary programs from many organizations to promote health, economics, democracy, and media reform, and music hours with no radio hosts. Sixty to seventy percent of the programs were broadcast in Malay but always accompanied by Thai translation. Due to the southern insurgency, the station’s operation remained stagnant and
broadcasting hours were shortened to end at 6 p.m. for the safety of volunteers. Daily bombing and shooting intimidated volunteers. Teenagers were not allowed to work at the station because of this. Fieldwork in this station uncovered many interesting findings about the practice of participatory communication within the organization.

I start this chapter by introducing the history of Pattani in order to draw a basic understanding about the southern separatist ideology and Islamic roles in the Pattani CRS’s operation. After that I discuss the practice of participatory communication of this station through three attributes—access, participation, and self-management. In the section on access, I explicate six factors related to how community members gain access to the station. Among them, interpersonal relationships and the southern insurgency are new findings that have not been discussed in other literature. Participation is focused on the decline of the station’s volunteers and their common religious faith. Lastly, the practice of self-management is discussed through issues of accountability, transparency, and internal conflicts.

History of Pattani

Pattani province is located in the south of Thailand. The majority of its population is Muslim. However, Muslims in Pattani are considered a minority because they account for only 4.6% of the total Thai population. The rest of the population is Buddhist (“The World Factbook,” 2007). Historically, Pattani or Kumpung Pak Tani was a small sea village of Kota Mahligai kingdom ruled by Raja Sri Wangsa (Syukri, 1985, p. 14). It is not clear when Kumpung Pak Tani was established but Teeuw and Wyatt (1970) state, “The dates of its [Patani] foundation thus might best be sought between the middle of
fourteenth and the middle of fifteenth century, at a time of expanding trade, increasing Thai interest in the Peninsula, and the spread of Islam” (p. 3).

Because Kumpung Pak Tani had a good harbor for boats and ships, people left Kota Mahligai for this village. Eventually, the Raja decided to move his family to Kumpung Pak Tani. This move made Kumpung Pak Tani a capital city. The Raja’s royal citadel was called Pak Tani or Patani for the Persian or Arabic merchants (Syukri, 1985, p. 15).

Originally, Kota Mahligai and Patani followed the Buddhist religion of the Mahayana sect but converted to Islam in the reign of Raja Intera (Indra) in the early sixteenth century. Raja Intera, the son of Raja Sri Wangsa was sovereign in Patani from 1500 to 1533. According to legend, Raja Intera suffered from a severe skin affliction. His illness could not be cured by anyone but Sheikh Said or Sheikh Syafialudin from Kumpang Pasai in Patani who was known as a dukun, a traditional Malay herbal healer. Before the healing, Sheikh Said asked the Raja to promise to convert to Islam. After his recovery, the Raja converted to Islam and changed his name to Sultan Ismail Syah (Bougas, 1994, p. 30; Syukri, 1985, pp. 15-17; Teeuw & Wyatt, 1970, p. 4). Since then Patani has been an Islamic kingdom and was renamed as “Patani Darussalam” (Hadtha, 2005, p. 140).

Patani was ruled by nine male and female Rajas of Sri Wangsa dynasty until 1688. Earlier, Patani was ruled by male Rajas until Sultan Bahadur Shah was assassinated in 1584 (Syukri, 1985, p. 22). The Sultan had no sons but three elder sisters—Raja Hijau (Green Princess), Raja Biru (Blue Princess), and Raja Ungu (Violet Princess) named after
the colors of the rainbow (Teew & Wyatt, 1970, pp. 9-10). Sykri writes, “In a council meeting among the royal family and the chiefs, a decision was made to elevate Raja Hijau to the throne of the kingdom of Patani, the very first female Raja to rule the country of Patani” (1985, p. 22).

During the reign of Raja Hijau (1584-1616), Patani Darussalam was very prosperous. Syukri (1985) cites the memoir of Pinto, the Portuguese merchant: “For many years Raja Hijau governed with feminine justice and skill. Her name became famous in all countries including the continent of Europe, so that Rajas of those countries sent missions to Patani in order to strengthen bonds of friendship” (p. 22). Smith (1977) adds, “In time the ships of the fore-companies began to visit ports not noted as spice centers in an attempt to trade their money and goods for other high-value goods which could be sold in the European market. One of these centers was the important Malay peninsular kingdom of Pattani . . .” (p. 8).

Trading with major countries of that period such as Japan in 1592, Holland in 1602, Spain in 1605, and England 1612, Patani became the most significant trade city among Malay countries (Hadtha, 2005, p. 153; Syukri, 1985, pp. 23-27). Consequently, Siam, the strong kingdom up north, yearned to occupy Patani. In 1603, thousands of marines led by Okya Decho (which was the formal title of the Siam military commander) were sent to Patani. Although Siam was defeated during the war, they became an enemy that Patani worried about (Syukri 1985, p. 25). In order to strengthen her kingdom, Raja Hijau married her youngest sister, Raja Ungu, to Sultan Abdul Ghafur of Pahang in 1612 (Syukri, 1985, p. 28).
In 1616, Raja Hijau died. Raja Biru, the younger sister of Raja Hijau, succeeded to the throne. During her reign (1616-1624), the relationship between Patani and Siam was not settled. Therefore, Raja Biru planned to merge Kelantan into Patani to strengthen her reign. Meanwhile the Sultan of Pahang passed away. Raja Biru took back her sister, Raja Ungu, and her niece, Raja Kuning (Yellow Princess) who was named after her whitish-yellow skin (Syukri, 1985, p. 30). To favor Siam, Raja Biru married her niece, Raja Kuning, who was only 12 years old to a Thai noble, Okya Decho, the eldest son of the ruler of Nakorn Si Thammarat or Ligor (Syukri, 1985, p. 28; Teew & Wyatt, 1970, p. 20). Ligor at that time was a very important state because it gained a high position from Siam to govern the southern region of Siam (Teew & Wyatt, 1970, pp. 6, 15-16; Hadtha, 2005, p. 156).

During her rule, Raja Biru ordered the building of two big cannons, Sri Negara and Sri Patani, and one small cannon, Mahalela, to protect the kingdom from Siam (Syukri, 1985, pp. 30-31). The two major cannons were confiscated by Siam after the Patani kingdom was defeated in the war. However, Sri Negara was sunk in the sea during shipping. At present, Sri Patani is positioned in front of the Thai Ministry of Defense in Bangkok. The cannon became a symbol of the loss of the Patani kingdom and its submission to Siam.

After Raja Biru died in 1624, Raja Ungu succeeded to the throne. During her reign (1624-1635), Raja Ungu rebelled against the Siam kingdom. She married her daughter, Raja Kuning, to the Sultan of Jahore and ignored her daughter’s earlier
Syukri, 1985, p. 39). The Kelantan dynasty ruled Patani for 41 years until 1738. Tengku Lamiden was appointed to govern Patani (Binci, Laoman, & Bualuang, 2000, p. 46). This is because Siam was weakened due to its transition to the next ruler:

King Song Tham of Ayudhaya (Siam) died in December 1628, and there ensued a long period of internal political crisis which persisted up to the accession of King Prasat Thong in 1630. At that time, Patani already was in rebellion, and Nakorn Si Thammarat was threatened with a serious war by people of Patani (Teew & Wyatt, 1970, p. 16).

Raja Kuning ruled Patani after her mother passed away. During her reign (1635-1688), Patani reconciled with Siam. The Raja visited Siam in 1641 “to renew the peace” (Teew & Wyatt, 1970, p. 18). In 1688, Raja Kuning died and the Sri Wangsa dynasty came to an end because Raja Kuning did not have any descendants. The Council of the royal family and their chiefs invited the son of the Raja of Kelantan to the throne of the Patani kingdom (Syukri, 1985, p. 39). The Kelantan dynasty ruled Patani for 41 years until 1729. After that Patani did not have any rulers for 40 years. Meanwhile Siam was at war with Burma. Siam lost its independence to Burma in 1767 and regained its independence in 1768 (Teew & Wyatt, 1970, p. 23).

In 1769, the council of the Patani royal family and their chiefs installed the descendent, Sulatan Muhammad, who ruled Patani until 1786 when it lost its independence to Siam (Hadtha, 2005, p. 141; Binci, Laoman, & Bualuang, 2000, p. 38). Siam selected one of the Patani residents, Tengku Lamiden, to govern Patani (Binci, Laoman, & Bualuang, 2000, p. 46). At the same time, Siam sent officials from Nakorn Si Thammarat to supervise (Syukri, 1985, p. 45). This resulted in many conflicts and Patani
tried to fight for its independence several times. In 1808, Siam decided to divide Patani into seven cities to reduce its power and recruited new governors for each city to replace the old power. Syukri (1985) stated that the Siam kingdom gradually absorbed Patani to the state of Siam-Thai:

The Siamese officials who came from the Bangkok region began to take up posts in Patani. . . . The majority of the Siamese officials never seriously considered the welfare of the Malays . . . never tried to understand the Malay people and the Islamic religion. . . . The administration of judicial matters depended on the High Commissioner, on the police, and finally on the judges. Sometimes people brought to court were forced to wait for months before their case came to trial. This state of affairs was caused by officials who wanted to find out how much money would be given to them by an accused person when their case came to trial. Such a system of administration made the Malays feel restless and dissatisfied (Syukri, 1985, pp. 63-64).

In 1906, the seven cities were again consolidated into the four cities Pattani, Yala, Saiburi, and Ra-ngae. Later, Siam changed its administrative policy by changing the term “city” to “province.” On that event, in 1916, Saiburi city was combined into Pattani province whereas Ra-ngae city was renamed Narathiwat province. In 1933, the three provinces, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, were administrated by a governor system in which the governors were appointed by the Thai government and reported to the Ministry of Interior Affairs. This system is still used (Hadtha, 2005, p. 120).
The conflicts between Siam or Thailand (Siam changed its name in 1939) and Pattani occurred periodically, especially during 1939-1942 when the government announced a “State-Authorized Nationalism” policy which contained several rules contradictory to Islamic shariah law. In 1948, there was a rebellion in Narathiwat province. Over a thousand Muslims died and thousands migrated to Malaya (the former name of Malaysia). After the tragedy, several Muslim political organizations were set up to oppose the Thai government. Among these were the Liberal Front of the Republic of Patani (LFR) in 1963, the Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO) in 1968, and the United Fronts for Patani Independence or Bersatu in 1989. Bersatu asked help from Muslim countries to free Pattani from Thailand and aimed to establish the Republic of Islam Malay Patani. In 1997, Bersatu announced the Assembly of Malay Patani and declared June 15 as its independence day.

Then the separatist movement was dormant for a few years. During 2001 and 2002, there was occasional unrest. However, the trouble rekindled in 2003, a few months after the government of Thaksin Shinawatra dissolved the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Principalities Center. This center was a governmental organization that was established on January 20, 1981 to relieve conflicts in the south (the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Principalities Center, 2006). The former Prime Minister, Shinawatra, did not take the unrest seriously and stated, “There’s no separation, no ideological terrorists, just common bandits” (South Thailand Insurgency, 2006). The southern insurgency became severe in 2004 and there were constant threats. The terrorists still created violent situations, “. . . in the eyes of local people, one or two people killed a
day is ‘normal’” (Supara, 2005, p. 7). The International Crisis Group noted, “The origins of the current violence lie in historical grievances stemming from discrimination against the ethnic Malay Muslim population and attempts at forced assimilation by successive ethnic Thai Buddhist governments in Bangkok for almost a century” (2005, p. i).

**Civil society: An Emerging Idea of Having a Community Radio Station in Pattani**

In 1998, Pattani community leaders were invited to participate in the workshop of Social Investment Funds (SIF). The SIF project aimed to help Thai communities recover from the 1997 Asia economic collapse. The initiative of its campaigns was to decentralize and liberalize local institutions. Three to four hundred community leaders in Pattani attended the SIF workshop. These participants were encouraged to develop social and economic plans for their community. Some community leaders made connections with others, especially, those whose communities shared boundaries or problems and could work together.

By this means, in Pattani a civil society developed gradually composed of citizens from several areas of the province who were loosely interested in community development. Their activities varied because these leaders were interested in several aspects of local problems. I introduced the concept of community radio to Pattani’s SIF participants in 1999. In that meeting, although few of them were interested in the idea at first, enough interest was generated to later form the Pattani Community Radio Group (PCRG). The main reason of having a CRS was to promote local activities, preserve Muslim identity, and provide information to Muslim communities.
I worked side-by-side with these community leaders for four years. During this period, I received some funding and grants from the U.S. Embassy in Thailand. The former Thai section of BBC twice sent its staff to train people in radio production and news reporting for PCRG. In addition, Thailand Research Funds (TRF) contacted me to conduct participatory action research about the formation of PCRG. Most of the research budget was spent on radio training and other learning processes such as group management and radio production and management. In late 2002, PCRG received funding from SIF to purchase a transmitter and other radio equipment. The radio tower was built by using the residual budget of my participatory action research. Finally, in June 2003, Pattani CRS went on the air.

Figure 6.2 Pattani Community Radio Station locating on
the third floor of this building
An Overview

In August 2006, I visited the Pattani CRS and its staff. I found that there were only three volunteers who regularly came to work at the station. The rest dropped out due to unrest in the south and other reasons. The station had not held a meeting for almost two years. Likewise, the President of PCRG had not been to the station for over a year. The station was abandoned to the station manager, the assistant manager, and the station consultant. These roles are not defined in TCRF’s guidelines and they vary from CRS to CRS. At Pattani, the station manager holds the key to the building, represents the CRS at official functions and to the community, and is generally considered the leader. The assistant manager on the other hand is responsible for the physical plant, the accounting, and hospitality. Finally, the station consultant handles public relations.

Every morning, it was a routine that Suriya Waedolao, the station consultant, came to open the station and turn on the transmitter. Then he hosted the shows from 8 a.m. to 9.30 a.m. and closed the station. Likewise, every afternoon, Narong Maseng, the station manager, came to the station at 2 p.m. He warmed up the station by playing music for one hour hoping to attract listeners with a non-stop music hour. He then started his show from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. Yah Alee, the assistant manager, came to host her evening show from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. Then Narong played music for an hour and closed the station at 6 p.m.

None of the listeners ever noticed that this CRS was run by only three volunteers for over two years since unrest began in the south. The terrorists frightened everyone in town, including the station’s volunteers and made them reluctant to participate in the
community radio station. There will be further discussion on this later. The silent atmosphere at the radio station affirmed that Pattani CRS was facing difficult times. By the hard effort of the three volunteers, the station was surviving. The question was how long these people could withstand such difficulties.

**Participatory Communication in Pattani Community Radio Station**

This chapter explores the participatory communication at the Pattani CRS. I discuss the nature of access, participation, and self-management practiced at this station from the perspective of the listeners and the station operators. This chapter explains how access is promoted to the listeners, how community participation is encouraged, and how self-management is practiced.

**Access**

Access refers to the ability of community members to listen to and provide feedback about the programs broadcast by the radio station. Literature on this issue suggests several factors that support the audience’s access to the radio station such as, location that is close and convenient for access, use of a language that is spoken in the community, content that fits audience’s needs, and feedback mechanisms that encourage listeners to communicate with the station. In the case of Pattani CRS, I found that personal relationships were an additional factor that promoted access, while the insurgency caused by Muslim separatists was an obstacle that hindered access. In this section, I present six factors that relate to access—interpersonal relationships and listening encouragement, the southern insurgency, content fitting audience needs, Malay Language, location, and
feedback mechanisms. These factors arose from my observation and the perspective of the CRS’s operators and listeners.

*Interpersonal relationships: Listening encouragement.*

On-uma Wantim said that she listened to the Pattani CRS from its beginning. At that time, Narong Maseng, the station manager, came to have lunch at her small restaurant and became a loyal customer. He introduced her to the radio station and asked if she would like to request a song. That afternoon she heard her music and the name of her restaurant. It was one of her happiest afternoons. Since then, she called into the station at least three times a month. She added that she liked to listen to the other callers. She also liked the songs that they requested. She knew several callers from listening to their conversation on the air but she never met them. She added that she felt relaxed when she listened to this radio station (personal communication, August 13, 2006).

There were several listeners like On-uma, who listened to this CRS because a radio host persuaded them to do it. It was a practice that differed from mainstream stations where deejays and station operators were not so close to their listeners. Mayaki Wicha was also one of those who listened to the station because of personal contact. He was a friend of Yah Alee, the radio host. He said that Yah told him about her show and he listened. When he learned that the other villagers also heard Yah on the air, he announced that Yah was his friend and said, “I became a hero because I have a friend who is a deejay” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).
The case of Maye Mama was a little bit different because he found out about this station by himself. It was about six months earlier that he accidentally tuned into this station. Maye usually listened to the Pattani CRS on his transistor radio while he worked at construction sites. Maye said that he listened to the station for a few months but he has never decided to call in because it was costly to make a phone call from his cell phone. However, the more he listened, the more he liked the deejay, Suriya Waedolao. Therefore, one day he decided to call in. On that evening, he came back to his village. He was overjoyed when his neighbors said that they knew that it was him who called in. Since then, he called into the station almost every day. He said that he has never felt like he is wasting money by calling the station. Moreover, he became close to Suriya. Therefore, he sometimes called Suriya outside the show to consult him about his personal problems (personal communication, August 8, 2006).

The southern insurgency.

The violence in the south blew up in August 2003, only a few months after the CRS was established. The unrest caused much trouble to the radio station in many aspects and hindered access.

During my observation in early August 2006, the radio station was very quiet. Only a few listeners came to visit the station. I talked to Narong Maseng, the station manager, about whether this was caused by the insurgency in the south. Narong was not sure because even before the violence took place, few listeners visited the station (personal communication, August 6, 2006).
Yah Alee, the assistant manager, stated that in 2003 and early 2004 several organizations and newly formed CRSs from all over Thailand visited the Pattani CRS. They came to observe the operation and broadcasting. The Pattani CRS was famous because it was one of the very first Muslim CRSs in Thailand. Moreover, the station helped the two communities in Pattani province, Saikhao and Troaborn, to set up their CRS and it became the model for these two CRSs. Yah complained that since bombings and killings happened almost daily, people were too scared to come down to the south. For herself, she used the station as a tool to address the unrest. She said that: “I sometimes talk in my show about why terrorists have to threaten or kill. Although I know that my message is not strong enough to change anything, I would like my listeners to learn information and understand the situation” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006). Jaepo Samae, former volunteer and former president of PCRG, said similarly that the violence got worse and the CRS was unable to help alleviate the situation (personal communication, August 13, 2006).

Although Narong Maseng, the Pattani CRS manager, could not explain why listeners did not visit the station, he agreed that the violent events had impacts on the station. This included affecting the volunteers and the program content. For instance, the station did not touch the issue of terrorism for the safety of the volunteers and the station. For himself, he only reported general information of the tragedy. No investigation or commentary would be added to it. He stated:

I only said in my show about the bombings or killings and some general information such as the place and time then I returned to the show. . . . Recently, I
tended to go back home at different times so it would be unpredictable (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).

However, from the perspective of the audience, Buraheng Jelae thought that the station should not limit its content about politics and terrorism. He would like the station to talk about the insurgency and the causes of the conflicts between terrorists and the government. He commented that the Thai army often said bad things about Muslims and condemned Muslims for everything. The station should help correct this misunderstanding (personal communication, August 13, 2006).

Obviously, the insurgency in the south impacted access both in physical access to the station and the limited content. Suriya Waedolao, the station consultant and radio host, said, “My house is only a five-minute walk but I am scared to come here at night. Terrorists killed without any reason. We did not know who is a real target. They killed both Thais and Muslims” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006). In addition, Mayaki Wicha, a listener, was one of those who faced difficulty from the southern insurgency. He said, “Lately, I have not gone out often because my face is like a terrorist type. I am sick of the way people look at me. . . . As I came down here, I also thought what I would do if the station staff would not let me in” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006). Mayaki came to the station to announce that the Mosque in his village, Kamiyo, would hold a tea party at the end of the month. The village hoped to receive donations of about 1.5 million baht (USD$39,000) to renovate the mosque. His effort to commute to the station showed that Mayaki and his village understood the roles of this CRS, that it could help promote
local events and dialogues among listeners. Clearly, terrorist threats created some obstacles to the CRS access.

_Happy when listening: Content fitting audience needs._

Most listeners revealed similar viewpoints: that they listened to the Pattani CRS because they liked the content and music. Dalao Jeyue told me in a telephone conversation that he liked the way the station provided knowledge and information. He learned local news (personal communication, August 13, 2006). Maye Mama said that the work at construction sites was heavy but this station relaxed him.

I like teacher Suriya (Suriya Waedolao) very much because he does not talk too much and plays a lot of songs. I also respect him and trust his knowledge. I called to his show to introduce myself and let him know that I am his listener. . . . On the day that I miss his program, I become frustrated. I love his show (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 8, 2006).

Buraheng Jelae also liked Suriya’s show very much. He listened to the station since its opening. He said, “It is a good station. It provides good music. All deejays talk politely” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 13, 2006).

From the producers’ side, the three radio hosts worked hard to satisfy their audience and tried to widen the access mechanism. For instance, Suriya contacted some music shops in town to ask for CD donations because the station did not have the budget to buy CDs. He would like his audience to listen to all kinds of music. He stated,

I played Thai, Indian, Chinese, English, and Malay. I read news, local affairs, government announcements, and play music. I speak two languages. When I
speak Thai, I play Thai music. When I translate that news into Malay, I play Malay music. When I teach English in my show, I play English music. I also know that my audiences like to listen to religious lessons. I play the religious tape every Sunday morning. I play both Thai and Malay versions. I think most listeners like my shows (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006).

Suriya also paid close attention to news selection. He usually selected news that related to the community members. He mentioned an important criterion for the news selection:

I did not touch politics at all. It was not safe. The station operates without a legal status so there might be some effects if we talk about the government. We might be closed down. I also do not talk about terrorism. They might attack us and the station. Who knows? (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).
Yah also worked hard to prepare for her cooking show. She said that she sometimes tried the recipe first. She believed that her show was popular because there were many call-ins. She added that: “Some listeners came to my house to copy the recipes” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006).

In short, the Pattani CRS was very successful in creating a close relationship with the listeners. It also showed that when the community members became message senders or deejays, the communication practice shifted from vertical to horizontal. Moreover, these community members brought informal communication practice into media. Radio became closer to the community than it used to be.
**Malay Language.**

Since most CRS operators do not follow PRD regulations, they do not comply with the language rule. CRSs broadcast in both Thai and their local dialect and claim their right to this practice from the constitution of 1997. In the case of the Pattani CRS, over 60% of their programming was in the Malay language and the rest was in Thai.

While I was the director of a university radio station, I had a personal conversation with one of the PRD officials who took care of the national broadcast announcement test covering local languages. I brought up this issue because over 50% of the radio audience in Pattani spoke Malay and elderly Muslims did not understand Thai. In my experience living in the south, the reality is that Muslims use Malay in their daily life except with Thai officials.

Despite this fact, that official suggested I use Thai for broadcasting. She explained that Thai is a national language which every Thai citizen should be able to speak and understand. Radio should be an instructional language tool. More importantly, according to this official, broadcast in Thai helped maintain national security, particularly in a critical area like the three southernmost provinces, Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. Government officials and the army could not understand Malay well. It would be difficult to investigate the radio content. This official suggested that when broadcasting in Malay, a producer should translate it into Thai. Therefore, I always requested the radio producers whose show was in Malay to consecutively or simultaneously translate the content into Thai.
Although this practice would contradict the reality that over half of the population in this area spoke Malay, no mainstream radio stations would offend the tradition. However, the advent of CRSs changed this practice nationwide. A local dialect became a main broadcasting language for CRSs instead of Thai language. Likewise, at the Pattani CRS, Malay was the main broadcasting language. Although the use of a local language by CRSs irritated the PRD, it was not contradictory to Ministerial Regulation NO. 14 (1994) and the 1997 constitution.

In addition, during my observation, some Pattani CRS listeners shared their opinion that they supported the station broadcasting in Malay language. For example, Dalao Jeyue said that he liked the station to broadcast in Malay and he liked Malay music as well (personal communication, August 13, 2006). Maye Mama added that he could listen to both Thai and Malay but was more communicative in Malay. He liked to listen to the program in Thai language as well because he used it to improve his Thai and to learn the vocabulary (personal communication, August 8, 2006). Buraheng Jelae affirmed that he liked Malay music and liked deejays to talk in Malay. He added, “Not many elderly Muslims can speak and understand Thai” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 13, 2006).

Yah Alee, the radio host, said that her listeners suggested their language preference was Malay because “They only requested [that they would like to listen to] any song sung by the local singers. They would like to support the local artists and Malay language” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006). Suriya Waedolao also said, “They listen to the station because of Malay language and
Malay music, and because there are no advertisements” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).

In short, Malay language was an important factor in building radio listening in the Pattani CRS. That explained why 60%-70% of the programs of this station were broadcast in Malay and the rest was in Thai language. Audiences were satisfied with the station. They enjoyed the program content because they understood it.

Location.

The location of a CRS is important. If the station is located in a convenient place, the listeners may visit it more frequently. Unfortunately, the Pattani CRS did not have any choice in selecting the location. Back in late 2002, Jaepo Samae, a committee member of the Social Investment Fund, Pattani (SIF), and former President of PCRG, affirmed that SIF would grant the group USD$1,500 to purchase a transmitter and radio equipment. Therefore, PCRG members had a meeting to discuss the place to locate the radio station. The members could not find a solution due to the scarcity of the budget. It was not possible to rent a place or build a building. Therefore, Narong Maseng, Jaepo Samae, and I decided to visit the head of the Pattani municipality, Pitak Kokiatpitak because he had supported the group. Pitak offered PCRG use of one of the classrooms in the Jabungtikor School because this school was under his supervision. The school principal agreed to help. PCRG accepted the offer and built a radio tower near the school.

The location of the station did not facilitate access because the school was located out off a main street. It would need an effort for audience to come to the station. Moreover, the station was assigned to be on the third floor of the building. According to
Narong Maseng, the school environment, teachers, students, and door guard unintentionally generated some barriers to entry (personal communication, August 6, 2006). Yah Alee added that it was inconvenient that the station had to ask permission from the school principal every time there was a visiting group or when the station would do activities there. She said,

I would like the station to move out and have our own place. The school is very nice but I felt uncomfortable. It is not our place. When the school’s computer was stolen, the teacher came to ask us. We were worried (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006).

However, in the context of the unrest in the south, Narong agreed that the Pattani CRS was lucky that it was located in the school and in town rather than in a critical area. Narong said, “The Thai army did not suspect us even though we broadcast in Malay. We are located in a public school which is a governmental office” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006). It was unfortunate that the three CRSs in Narathiwat, a province nearby Pattani, were closed down. According to Narong, these CRSs used Malay language and were located outside downtown. The army suspected that they might be involved in the southern insurgency. Narong added, “I think they were closed down for national security” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).

Feedback mechanisms.

It took almost a half year before the Pattani CRS decided to install a phone line. This was because the station did not want to spend the money on telephone installation
and monthly service. Previously, the listeners had to contact the station by post or come to the station. Suriya Waedolao, radio host, said that some listeners complained that it was not convenient and suggested the station install a telephone line. Suriya solved the problem by announcing his personal phone number to the audience so they could call in during his show. Narong and Yah did the same.

Suriya found that many listeners called him and so did Narong and Yah. They finally decided to install the phone line at the station. From the interview, Buraheng Jelae said that he called to the station two to three times on Sundays during the religious show. He said it was the way to show his appreciation to the deejay (personal communication, August 13, 2006). On-uma Wantim also called in Narong Maseng’s show which was her favorite show (personal communication, August 13, 2006). And Maye Mama used his mobile phone to call from the construction site almost every day (personal communication, August 8, 2006). Their stories displayed an important role of the telephone and mobile phone in promoting conversation between the station and its audience.

To provide a better feedback mechanism, the Pattani operators asked the callers about whether they could receive the signal from the station clearly as well as about their opinions on the radio show. They sometimes visited their audiences at home. Yah often stopped by some restaurants or talked with people in the market about the station programming and content.
Figure 6.4 Yah Alee visiting one of her listeners who owned this restaurant.

Yah also had breakfast there.

Suriya visited some communities within the station’s coverage area to check the audience’s listening. Suriya said, “I sometimes go with a friend of mine who is a technician at the Radio of Thailand, Pattani. We drive out to check how far the signal goes” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006). Narong said that he often visited villages around the station. He found that some listeners could not receive the signal well although their houses were in the coverage area. He explicated that the station’s transmitter did not meet a standard. It was built by an
independent technician. It was off line a few times the preceding year (personal communication, August 6, 2006).

In fact, most Thai CRSs faced the same problem with ineffective transmitters. The problem arose because the advent of CRSs occurred rapidly and with insufficient technological preparation and support. Therefore, those who were interested in setting up a CRS simply contacted a local technician to invent a transmitter for them.

In conclusion, I found that the staff of the Pattani CRS worked hard to support audience access to the station. Although, there were some factors such as location, unrest, and technological problems, which were beyond their ability to solve at that moment, they tried to compensate listeners by making an effort to encourage audience listening by using a local language and providing several ways for the listeners to give their feedback. These actions showed that the volunteers at the Pattani CRS understood the concept of participatory communication.

Participation

Participation is another key element of participatory communication. In a CRS, participation can be seen from the involvement of the community members in the production and programming decisions. In the field work at the Pattani CRS, I investigated how the community residents participated in the radio station, in particular, whether they got involved in the production of radio content and made programming decisions.

As mentioned earlier, there were only three community members who regularly participated in the production at the Pattani CRS. These volunteers also helped operate
and care for the station. They were Narong Maseng, Suriya Waldolao, and Yah Alee. The President of PCRG, Nirapong Sukmuang, and the other station committee members did not usually come to the station. Likewise, former volunteers and former radio hosts participated in the station’s activities at times. The three active volunteers realized the volunteer problems, but they had not been able to remedy them.

**Why did the volunteers drop out?**

Because I took part in setting up this radio station, I was pretty worried when I heard about the volunteer drop-off problems. I contacted some former volunteers to talk about this issue. Only Wanpen Jae-oa and Jaepo Samae answered my invitation and shared their stories. Wanpen attended one of the PCRG workshops a few years ago. After the workshop, she practiced by co-hosting with the other host, Abdulao Kasao. Later, she had her own program about health and exercise. Wanpen liked working at the station. She said that people in her village recognized her. She said that at that time the station did not have a phone line yet so people called her cell phone. Most consulted about health problems.

I recalled that Wanpen was a very active volunteer. She had not missed any of the group activities. She did several outreach programs for the station and took care of the food and drinks for many activities. Therefore, her leaving was unfortunate. When I asked Wanpen about her decision, she explained that her husband passed away about a year ago. She was deeply saddened by his sudden death and lost her motivation to do anything. She did not come to the station at all. She did not go out, but stayed home most
of the time. However, Wanpen revealed later that this was not the only reason that she decided to leave the station. Previously, Wanpen was the treasurer of the PCRG:

I have never had a chance to do my job. The president (Nirapong Sukmuang) and his girlfriend, Kulaya, kept all the money. The group’s savings book is with them. They have never told me when and how they spent the money and where the receipts were. I could not do anything. I asked for these receipts but Nirapong always postponed. . . . I sometimes wonder what my duty is. I should be responsible for the group’s account and money. . . . I do not want to get involved if he and his girlfriend want to be corrupt, let them do it (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006).

I was surprised to learn about the story because I recalled that the president was a nice person.

Jaepo Samae, former president of the PCRG and one of the station founders, was another person who left the station. Back to the SIF meeting in 1999, Jaepo was the first person who raised his hand and said that he was interested in a CRS and would like to help me. Since then Jaepo, the head of Bangtawa fishing village, persuaded many friends and neighbors to join the PCRG. He always encouraged people to strengthen the group, created outreach programs, and did fundraising. He had a political show at Prince of Songkla University (PSU) radio station where I was the director. The program made him well known. The former provincial governor appointed him as a consultant for several of the provincial projects. He was busy and faded from his role in the group.
Jaepo said that he did not help the station any more because he could not stand Kulaya, the girlfriend of the PCRG president. He complained that Kulaya controlled Nirapong and she held the group’s money:

I cannot accept her. She comes to take advantage. She is greedy and selfish. I think Nirapong is not transparent. I am not sure whether they are corrupt but it is better if I decline my role. I do not want to associate with them (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 9, 2006).

Wanpen and Jaepo did not share their suspicion to each other. Wanpen talked to Yah Alee because they were close friends. Yah also suspected Nirapong, but she could not do anything. Suriya Waedolao, the station consultant, simply said that there was no point to bring it up: “We have a small saving. If they did, they couldn’t get much. I would rather to have him with us. He knew many people in the province. It would be more advantage to have him” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).

Narong Maseng, the station manager, knew about this story but he did not raise this problem. He did not want to touch this story because he was afraid that Nirapong might leave the station. He preferred to overlook the problem. Currently, Narong was unemployed. He told me that he would like to get a job: “I am thinking of leaving the station. I’d like to find a job. Coming to work here wasted the time. I need to work to support my family” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006). Probably, Narong could not volunteer at the station for long. He had a part time job as a local reporter for Internews, an independent online news network in Thailand.
This was the reason he did not bring up the story. He would like to keep Nirapong, in case he had to leave the station. He said:

I love the station. I helped build it. All of us fight for it. We formed our group and tried to work it out for many years. We attended several meetings over several years to make connections with the other stations. We worked hard to get funding from SIF and finally we built the station. If the station would die during my term, I would be regretful (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).

Participation is a complex issue because it involved human interactions. From the conversations with former and current volunteers, I found that group acceptance in the Pattani CRS was based on accountability and transparency. Unfortunately, the reputation of the PCRG president was damaged by his girlfriend. Probably, what irritated the volunteers the most was the fact that both Nirapong and Kulaya were married to others. Therefore, their relationship was considered an affair. Although none of the volunteers commented on this issue, I could sense that they could not respect Nirapong and Kulaya.

*Religious faith: Participation encouragement.*

It was very interesting to learn that the three volunteers worked at the station because they have faith in religion and good karma. Yah Alee said that:

I am very happy. I do not have a husband or children. I have time. I think I am doing good deeds. Allah noticed and granted many good things to me. For example, when I have to close my bridal shop to do the station’s business out of town, I did not lose my business. Allah returned my good deeds. There were
always many people come to rent a costume when I came back. I got money and I was able to do good deeds as well (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006).

Narong Maseng and Suriya Waldolao thought similarly. Narong said, “I have never thought how much gas I spent. It is a donation” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006). Narong told me that he spent about USD$1 a day for gas. Suriya said that: “I am retired. I am happy that I can be useful to the community” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006). Wanpen Jae-oa, former volunteer, said that she did not feel bad about working at the station with no wages. She was happy because she could use this CRS to inform others about health information (personal communication, August 3, 2006).

Community involvement in radio production.

Literature suggests that a CRS should encourage the community members to participate in radio production. However, according to Nirapong Sukmuang, the president of the PCRG, participation at the production level seemed a little bit too hard for some community members:

From my view, this CRS is a place for educated volunteers. Low-education people seemed to hesitate to participate. The equipment and the place scared them. It is hard to persuade these people. This station has not been used by general community members yet (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 8, 2006).
I agree with Nirapong. Originally, this station was initiated by my endeavor to help Muslim villagers set up their own radio station. I shared my thoughts in the SIF meeting where over 300 community leaders participated. Some of these were interested in the idea and contributed their efforts to setting up the station. It took almost four years to learn the concept of community radio, law and regulations, group collecting and member recruiting, fundraising, production training, and so on. As a result, the station was founded by the community leaders from several parts of Pattani province. Along the four years, several people dropped out and several more were recruited. The decline of volunteers was not considered a big problem earlier because there was no station to take care of yet. However, once the station started operation, it required personnel to take care of the office and equipment, as well as to fill in the program layout. Participation became an immediate problem when those who lived far away from the station could not come regularly. In addition, the radio signal did not reach far enough to their house and village so they lost their motivation to work at the station. Distance became an obstacle for participation.

The group members discussed this problem and decided to make an attempt to expand CRSs in the other villages where PCRG members could have access and participate with less travel. Their effort resulted in the establishment of the two CRSs in Saikhao and Traoborn communities. At the same time, the Pattani CRS turned to recruiting the residents who lived within the coverage areas. The station got many volunteers such as college students, school students, teenagers near the station, and some
officials from the hospital, courthouse, and schools. These volunteers worked at the station for a few months and stopped when the southern insurgency became severe.

The station tried to recruit replacements but was unsuccessful. Suriya Waedolao, the station consultant, said that he contacted many community leaders and members but they did not come. They were afraid of a microphone (personal communication, August 6, 2006). Narong Maseng said that most people were afraid to host the show. They thought that they did not have knowledge to share with the audience (personal communication, August 6, 2006). This problem was a result of the long practice of the Thai mainstream radio stations where they usually invited well known persons or specialists to the show. This situation led the listeners to believe that radio is a tool of the elite group.

Narong knew about this problem so he tried to make his show more accessible and easy to participate in. He visited some listeners and asked for their suggestions. Unfortunately, the audiences did not have any ideas to share: “Most of them requested music. They do not have any opinions to share. Some are too shy” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006). Narong mentioned another obstacle: potential participants’ belief that the radio host must have a beautiful voice. He disagreed, “We are a community radio station. Everyone can join and talk” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).

I interviewed Mayaki Wicha, one of Pattani CRS’s listeners, about whether he would like to participate in the station. He replied that the deejay job required a good voice and knowledge. He thought that his voice was pretty good and believed that he
could do it because he was one of the village’s masters of ceremonies. What worried him was that he did not have a radio announcement certificate and could not speak Thai intelligibly (personal communication, August 6, 2006). Maye Mama, another listener of Pattani CRS, shared his ambition to become a radio host after he listened to the station for a while. However, he has never tried because of low education. He was afraid that he did not have enough knowledge to share or host the program (personal communication, August 8, 2006).

Obviously, if the station could overcome these misunderstandings, it would have more volunteers to host the show, which would result in a higher participation. This happened in the case of Yah Alee, the radio host. She said that three years ago Narong invited her to his show at the Prince of Songkla University radio station. At that time, she was thrilled that Narong offered her a chance. She had co-hosted with Narong for a half year. When Pattani CRS was established, Yah had her own show. Yah said that she had a lot of good times at the radio station. She added that since she has hosted the show at the station, her speaking has improved. She could speak intelligibly in both Thai and Malay. People in the community knew her better and trusted her. As a result, she has been appointed by the community committees for many positions (personal communication, August 3, 2006).

Volunteer recruitment.

It was very interesting that some listeners did not know that there were only three volunteers working in Pattani CRS. For instance, Mayaki Wicha thought that this CRS was big and formal. He told me that he was surprised to see only Suriya Waedolao and I
in the radio station (personal communication, August 6, 2006). On-Uma Wantim, another listener, thought that the school principal was the station manager because the station is located in the school (personal communication, August 13, 2006).

Their thoughts suggested that the station needed to promote its status and correct the image of the station so people would know that the station was looking for help. Mayaki Wicha said: “I did not know that I can help here... I never knew that the station is asking for help” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006). Buraheng Jaelae, a listener, said that he never thought that the station needed help. However, he did not have time to participate because he had to work every day. He would rather be a listener (personal communication, August 13, 2006). Finally, Dalao Jaeyue, another listener, said that he had no idea how he could help the station: “I did not know that the station called for help. Why doesn’t the station hire a deejay?” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 13, 2006).

Jaepo Samae, former volunteer, stated that a CRS is a very good community communication tool. He hoped that the community members would have noticed its usefulness. He stated, “Today, people may come to ask for help. Some day, they might pay back and help volunteer at the station” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 13, 2006). Obviously, the Pattani CRS needed to announce that they were looking for help. The hosts might have said in this their show but the messages might not have been strong enough to get audience attention. At that time, the listeners of the Pattani CRS and the other community members neither participated in the production of the radio content much nor influenced decisions on the station’s programming.
Self-management

Self-management is the highest form of participatory communication. It requires maturity to make decisions about the direction of the station management and the station’s rules and regulations. Self-management is relevant to several factors such as class, race relations, motivations of volunteers, accountability, the interplay between funding sources and management decisions, problems in the workplace, and constraints caused by the station’s rules or regulations.

In the field work at Patatni, I investigated how the volunteers managed the station and whether there were any constraints to their management. I found that the station was facing several problems as the following.

Structural problem: Accountability.

Suriya Waedolao, the station consultant and radio host, said that the Pattani CRS had an adequate organizational structure, but the governing committee members did not have accountability. They never showed up. Therefore, the station got only their names, not their help. Suriya complained:

The station is on the way down. We do not have staff. We have not been developed at all for the last two years. The president did no work at all. For instance, after the meeting, he did not have any follow up activities or plans. He often said that he did not have time. I used to suggest that we should dissolve the governing committees and start over but no one paid attention. . . . Some used the station’s name to attend the meeting in Bangkok but they have never come to help
Narong Maseng added that the governing committee members participated in the station’s meeting because the station compensated their time for 100 baht (USD$2.5) for each meeting. He stated:

If we said we would like to ask them to help host the program, no one would come. You know, in the meeting some did not say anything and some spoke but never did act or help. Mostly, after the meeting, these people did not do anything. I wonder why we should have a meeting to waste our money. . . . There were those who dislike the meeting’s compensation rule. When they saw us pay money to the other participants, they rejected to take the money and they have never come back. They lost faith and distrusted us (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).

As a result, the station did not have a regular meeting for more than a year. Although Suriya would like to see some change in the governing board, it was hardly possible to dissolve the station’s structure because the station did not have any replacement volunteers. Yah Alee seemed to admit the situation. She said that:

If we have only us, we do only what we can do. You know, if we give salary, everyone will join. They won’t miss it. . . . I love this station. We have few people so we walk slowly. We don’t have to run. I think walking little by little is better than running. We are not ready to run (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006).
During my visit, the president of PCRG and the station managers contacted current and former volunteers to welcome me. They also set up a meeting and reported the station’s activities to the governing board and volunteers.

Figure 6.5 The meeting at Pattani Community Radio Station

*Transparency*

Narong Maseng, the station manager, said that there was nothing much to decide or manage because the station did not carry out any outside activities and there were no
volunteers. The station operated whenever there were volunteers available. However, what Narong Maseng worried about was the transparency issue:

Although the president is not active in the running of the station, he is still useful for making connections. He is widely known. I think he is accountable for the station. It is only that his girlfriend, Kulaya, interferes in the station’s business too much. She is his girlfriend so we have to put her on the governing board. She keeps the station’s money. We cannot do anything because Nirapong believes in her. Yah, Suriya, and I do not want to touch money anyway. . . . I think many left the station because they distrusted Kulaya. Teachers Fatima and Mariam [former volunteers] would like me to take the president’s position but I don’t want to. I don’t know how long I can help here (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).

Personally, I knew Kulaya very little. She joined the group’s meetings occasionally. I recalled that Nirapong said that she was skillful in proposal writing. Most of her proposals got funded. Nirapong said that she could help the PCRG to write proposals. However, several PCRG members did not like her because they suspected that she embezzled money from those projects.

In the station’s meeting, during my observation, Kulaya announced that one of her projects was funded for three million baht (USD$79,000) to do networking with CRSs in the south and to promote health projects. Everyone in the meeting was surprised because they had never heard that the CRS submitted any proposal. Kulaya said that it was her personal proposal, not on behalf of Pattani. The funding was not for the station. She
added that she would give some money to the Pattani CRS to produce the health program. She also planned to contact the other CRSs in the south to produce health programs. After the meeting, Yah Alee complained that Kulaya always used the station’s name to get funding. It disturbed her very much. She asked me to help her write a proposal to the Asia Foundation. She felt bad about Kulaya’s story (personal communication, August 3, 2006).

I suggested that Yah have the station carry some advertisements so the CRS would earn some money to pay for bills and use for the station’s development. Yah refused: “We are free from advertisement. We want to be different. We announce community affairs and election news because we want to be the communication channel for the community” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006). Probably Yah was right as Maye Mama and the other listeners said similarly that they liked the station because this station did not carry advertisements (personal communication, August 8, 2006). The practice of underwriting was not yet introduced in Thailand; therefore, CRS volunteers did not know that they might be able to get funding from the shops or institutions that would like to support the station. I introduced an idea about underwriting to Pattani CRS volunteers. They did not seem eager about it. They said it was another type of advertisement but used different name.

**Internal conflicts.**

After Wanpen Jae-oa did not help at the station, Nirapong Sukmuang, the PCRG president, appointed Yah as a treasurer. Unfortunately, Yah faced a similar problem: “I did not have the group’s bank account book. . . . Nirapong kept all receipts. I cannot do
my job” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006). Yah did not give up on her duty. She still worked at the station even though she disliked the situation. Wanpen Jae-oa, former volunteer, added that previously the station did not give money for those who attended the station’s meetings. She did not know when and how this practice began: “It created friction. Everyone is supposed to be devoted to the station, not take benefits. Several people disagreed and they did not take the money” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006). Yah said that she did not agree with this practice because the station did not have any income. She revealed that it was Nirapong and Kulaya who started this practice (personal communication, August 3, 2006).

Jaepo Samae, a former volunteer, mentioned the friction within the PCRG. For instance, some volunteers felt disappointed that they never had a chance to be appointed to attend any meetings either regionally or in Bangkok: “Only two or three people got that chance. They go again and again. They never share the opportunity” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 9, 2006). Jaepo added that sometimes he and the other volunteers did not have any information about the invitations for the meetings. They always learned about it after these people had already gone. The unfair distribution caused problems constantly. People liked to join the meetings because the opportunity gave them a chance to make new friends, establish connections, learn new things, get free travel, stay in a nice hotel, and earn a stipend. In the past, Jaepo, Nirapong, Narong, and Yah often joined the meetings or workshops in Bangkok.
Narong Maseng, the station manager, agreed that there were some problems in the station. The volunteers disapproved of the president’s behavior, particularly, his relationship with Kulaya and his drinking. He stated:

The two teachers (Fatima and Marium) were very strict. They could not bear to work with Nirapong because he behaves contradictory to the Qur’an (the Koran). So they left the station. . . . Nirapong is not a Muslim but he is our leader, so he should respect our beliefs. Several people complained about his behavior to me so I passed the message to him, but he said that he drinks for the social purposes. I could not tell him more than once (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).

In fact, this situation is similar to the past when Pattani was governed by the Sultan and was supervised by the Buddhist Thai officials. The conflicts in Pattani history occurred because the Thai officials disrespected Islamic law. The internal conflicts in the station seemed relevant to the Muslim identity issue as the two teachers and the other volunteers refused to work at the station under the unacceptable behaviors of their Buddhist leader. Perhaps, deep inside, all Muslims volunteers tried to accept what they could. They did not make any argument, but kept silent instead.

I asked Nirapong Sukmuang whether he noticed any problems in the station. Nirapong replied,

We do not have management problems because we can manage the station. The only problem is that we do not have the volunteers to host the shows. It is difficult to find volunteers. . . . We do not have money so we cannot develop the station.
and the volunteers. . . . This station does not discriminate against women. For instance, I had an idea to resign from my position. I asked Yah to replace me but she did not accept. She is very responsible so she deserves the position (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006)

The conversation shows that Nirapong is not sensitive to Muslim identity and misconduct issues. However, his suggestion about having Yah as a leader indicated his different perspective from Muslims. His story made me recall that several years ago, I used to encourage teacher Fatima to run for the president of the group because she hold Bachelor’s degree and had leadership. Fatima refused and decided to take a vice-president position instead. She said that it was proper for Islamic custom to have a male leader.

*The volunteer system.*

I asked Suriya Waedolao whether the management problem came from the volunteer system. Suriya replied,

The volunteer system is good for those who have a real heart and would like to give. The drawback is that we do not get a staff to work permanently. These volunteers could not stay with us for long. They also have their work to do. . . . We put on several training sessions. After that some came two or three times and disappeared. Moreover, the good ones often left to work for commercial stations because we could not pay them (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).
Suriya added that he would like the station to get some sponsors so the station could have money to hire staff and a technician and to give compensation to the radio hosts.

Yah also agreed that the volunteering system was good. In the course of one of the interviews she said,

Everyone can come and exercise their right to use this community broadcast medium. It is not owned by anyone but the community. This [volunteer] system has some drawbacks such as many volunteers not having realistic expectations. Some come only two to three months and disappear. Some trained at the station and went to work at other radio stations (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006).

Yah seemed disappointed with the turnover rate of the volunteers. Wanpen Jae-ao expression her opinions that:

Many people stopped working here because they became well-known from the station. Many organizations invited them to help or to be a consultant. These people did not come back. . . . Because we did not have the budget, the station stopped most activities and people disappeared (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006).

Manager Narong Maseng complained that the station spent a lot of money for several training sessions in order to recruit the volunteers, but,

They disappeared after the workshop and did not come to help. . . . I felt frustrated sometimes. I want to improve the program and the station. It is too much to run the station with only two or three people. . . . I needed help. I’d like to have a
scholar to teach us about how to recruit volunteers (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).

However, Nirapong Sukmuang, the president, thought differently:

If we’d like them to participate, we have to change the station to become an Islamic teaching center. Then I believe a lot of people will join and listen. Instead of producing shows about occupations or cooking, we should have invited the religious leaders to talk about the Koran and the Islamic way of life. Let the station become the channel for Islam (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 6, 2006).

The volunteer system at Pattani CRS presented its own set of challenges. The southern insurgency, Islamic customs, and budget tightness played crucial roles in self-management.

**Conclusion**

The case of the Pattani CRS shows that the practices of participatory communication can take place. First, access at Pattani CRS was promoted through a good fit of content to satisfy audience needs. Malay language was used and religious programs were provided to attract Muslim listeners. The station’s volunteers encouraged their listeners to communicate with the station, including visiting with their audiences occasionally. This practice widened the feedback mechanism and made the station more accessible. Personal relationships were another successful strategy that Pattani CRS used to keep listeners. The obstacles to access for this radio station were the southern unrest and the station’s location.
Second, the study of the Pattani CRS provided information that participation in a CRS could take place if the volunteers were strongly committed to service. Interviews showed that common religious faith in Islam was a predominant factor that encouraged the current volunteers to work at the station. Moreover, the case of this CRS affirmed that participation was complex because it involved human interactions which led to acceptance of each other. The frictions in Pattani CRS stemmed from the fact that the volunteers distrusted their leader and their distrust was related to accountability and transparency issues as well as unbecoming behavior. Some volunteers left the station because of this. One interesting finding about the participation in the radio production was that community members tended to believe that they were not qualified to participate in the radio production due to their low level of education and their unintelligibility in Thai language. Therefore, the station might need to correct their misperceptions. Finally, the case of Pattani demonstrates that self-management is difficult in practice. It required skills and good intentions in order to benefit the development of the station and the recruitment volunteers. At this CRS, the volunteers were facing such constraints as the decline in their and governing numbers, accountability, and transparency. This resulted in the stagnancy of the station activities. The station did not have any alternatives for a new leader or governing board.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The concept of community radio was introduced into Thailand around 1998 by three media scholars and activists a year after the Back May events. They are Uajit Virojtrairat, Chairperson of the Civil Development Institute and former professor at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Supinya Klangnarong, Secretary General for the Campaign for Popular Media Reform (CPMR), and Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, Chairperson of the CPMR and professor at Chulalongkorn University.

I first learned about the concept of community radio from Uajit Virojtrairat when I attended one of her community radio workshops in mid 1999. However, at that time, I comprehended this concept very little because a CRS is very different from commercial and public radio stations. It is a radio station for, of, and by grassroots communities intended to be a community medium with high participation and not profit driven. In other words, a Thai CRS is a participatory community medium that is established, owned, and managed by community members for the benefit of the community. I became interested in how community members would operate a station without broadcasting experience, radio professionals, and advertising support. Gradually, I developed my understanding after I participated in a series of community radio seminars. At that time, I was among a few Thai media scholars and social activists who believed that a community and grassroots organization would be able to manage this new type of radio station. Most of the country did not have a clear idea what a CRS looked like or how it worked because
Thailand never had this type of radio station before. It was difficult for community members to imagine how a station could be operated solely by grassroots people.

In late 1999, I introduced the concept of community radio to community leaders in Pattani province, where I taught communication courses for Prince of Songkla University. Most of these leaders were Muslims because a majority of the population of this province is Muslim. I worked with these people who called themselves the Pattani Community Radio Group (PCRG) for about four years until they were finally able to establish a CRS in mid 2003. That was the time when I departed Pattani to pursue my doctoral study at Ohio University. Since I did not have a chance to pursue my experience with the PCRG and how they operated their newly created radio station, my interest was in how the PCRG and eventually other CRS operators in Thailand managed their stations. Of particular interest was whether they employed participatory practices to initiate a democratic structure of the station. These interests led to my dissertation on Thai CRSs.

The main goal of this dissertation has been to explore an ongoing dynamic relationship between CRSs and community members. The framework of this study is participatory community media which focus on Thai community radio as a community medium and its participatory elements: access, participation, and self-management. In this study, access refers to the ability of community members to listen to and provide feedback about the programs broadcast by the radio station. Participation refers to the ability of community members to produce radio programs and get involved in programming decisions. And self-management refers to the ability of community
members to decide the policies and management of their CRS (O’Connor, 2004; Berrigan, 1981).

In this dissertation, three Thai CRSs were chosen as case studies based on geographical, historical, and cultural criteria. They were the Doilangtham CRS in the north, the Khon Thaiso CRS in the northeast, and the Pattani CRS in the south. Participant observation and qualitative interviewing fieldwork were conducted during June and August 2006 in order to answer these four research questions: How is access to the CRS promoted? How does the community participate in the CRS? How is self-management practiced by the CRS? And how do community members consider their community in relation to the CRS in their locale?

The first three research questions were answered through the findings of each radio station from Chapters 4, 5, and 6. The final research question is reported and discussed in this current chapter. Because this last question is pertinent to a central idea that a Thai CRS is a new type of community medium in the Thai society, this dissertation seeks to explain the general feelings of the community members about this participatory community medium and how they regard it as related to their community. Therefore, I find it more effective to describe the findings of the final research question in this chapter and discuss it at the same time.

In this chapter, the outcome of each research question is provided in order to display a comprehensive picture of participatory communication drawn from the three case studies of Thai CRSs. Then, I provide a section discussing the three attributes—access, participation, and self-management—of participatory communication. Lessons
learned from the participatory communication practices of the three CRSs are discussed and theoretical possibilities for making a CRS work effectively are proposed. Finally, I provide suggestions for future research.

The Question of Access

The advent of CRSs in Thailand was closely associated with an attempt to reform and democratize the Thai mediascape as well as with an effort to establish participatory community media at the local level. Thai CRSs were expected to foster community members’ involvement. Therefore, the first question concerning participatory communication in the Thai CRSs was how access was promoted by the radio stations. Four sub-research questions pertinent to access were asked: How accessible is the CRS’ language to the audience? How congruent is the radio content to the needs of the community? How does the proximity of the station to the community affect access? And how do the stations promote dialogue between the station operators and the community members?

This dissertation found four common features relevant to the promotion of access across the three CRSs. They were the use of local dialects, the location of the station, the content fitting audience’s needs, and the feedback mechanisms. In addition, the study revealed that each radio station used a variety of techniques to facilitate access such as employing interpersonal relations to motivate listening, advocating the station as a community announcement tool, and encouraging the use of dedication messages. Finally, the case of Pattani CRS and the southern insurgency was extraordinary as it is an example of how social unrest affects the operation of a CRS as well as hinders access to
the radio station. Some examples are the following: 1) unanticipated daily bombings and shootings frightened the volunteers and so some stopped working at the radio station, 2) the station operators decided to shorten the operating hours by cutting off evening programs to avoid traveling at night to the station, 3) teen volunteers were not allowed to work at the station for safety reasons, and 4) listeners did not visit the station as frequently as expected.

**The Question of Participation**

Participation was considered as a high level of involvement in a radio station because those who decided to participate in the station were normally required to take more responsibility, such as in a radio production or radio programming. Noticeably, the advent of a CRS stimulated Thai community members to become involved in broadcasting tasks. This circumstance shifted their status from outsiders as listeners or donors to insiders as radio producers or programmers who had an obligation to provide good programs for their community. In addition, a CRS granted them an opportunity to control the flow of information in their community. In this dissertation, I investigated how community members participated in their CRS and how the station promoted participation to their community members.

The field study showed that the three CRSs relied solely on participation of community members as the station’s operational workforce. None of them hired station staff or radio professionals to work at the radio station. These CRSs depended heavily on the quantity and quality of participants. The main reason for using a volunteer system was that these CRSs are members of the Thailand Community Radio Federation (TCRF).
Therefore, they had to abide by the TCRF’s rules that a CRS must be established, owned, and managed by grassroots groups, keep its non-commercial status, and function for the benefit of the community rather than any individuals.

Generally speaking, these rules were very difficult to enforce, and it resulted in numerous transformations of Thai CRSs into commercial businesses. These guidelines were established to help the CRSs release the Thai radioscape from government-owned and commercial consolidation.

Field observations revealed that the three CRSs respected these guidelines and retained their non-commercial status by relying on donations and outside funding. As a result, they did not have enough funds to hire professionals or technicians. Unfortunately, the most common problem found in the three CRSs was a decrease in the number of volunteers. The main reason was that these volunteers did not have time to devote to the station. They had to focus on making a living since work at the CRS was unsalaried.

Consequently, the three stations frequently had to look for replacement workers. Two common approaches for volunteer recruitment found among the three CRSs were calling on personal relationships and conducting radio production workshops. The use of personal relations to recruit new volunteers was common. Normally, a current volunteer persuades his or her friend or neighbor. This approach is good for the station in that a new volunteer is not a total stranger. He or she is selected by a current volunteer who invites him or her and then is thought to be reliable by the sponsor. Radio workshops are used to train new volunteers in basic knowledge of radio production. Such experiences help assure the quality of radio programs.
Among the three stations, the Doilangtham CRS was most successful in their recruitment. The station had many volunteers and at the same time the community members were very active in shaping radio programming towards their preferences. For instance, the station decided to follow the suggestion of the community members by reducing serious information about land reform and providing light entertainment content instead.

Participation at the Khon Thaiso CRS was moderate compared to that in the Doilangtham CRS. The station encouraged teenagers and elderly to participate in the production. However, the main obstacle to participation seemed to be generated by the station manager who often changed radio programming without consulting volunteers. Those radio hosts who were affected by the changes became upset. The arbitrary control of programming discouraged participation.

Finally, participation at the Pattani CRS was diminished due to the southern insurgency. Most volunteers decided to stop working at the radio station because they were afraid of being targets of the southern separatists. Radio had made them popular figures and thus perhaps vulnerable to attack. The decline in the number of volunteers was also caused by transparency problems. Some volunteers could not accept that the president of PCRG and his girlfriend might have misused financial resources of the radio station. Some disliked the president’s alleged drinking behavior as it was contradictory to Islamic laws. (The president was Buddhist.) Although his social drinking was not a concern for the Buddhist society, Muslim volunteers decided not to associate with him and resigned from the station. In addition, the remaining volunteers for the Pattani CRS
carried out their tasks at the station because they believed that they were doing good deeds. It was their faith in Islam that encouraged them to work at the radio station, and they used the radio to promote religion and an Islamic way of life.

The Question of Self-Management

Self-management is a crucial issue in this research. The knowledge or lessons learned from the three CRSs will be very useful for other CRSs in Thailand and those outside of Thailand which are new to a concept of community radio. The field observation showed that each radio station created its own managerial model according to the nature of the community and the problems within the station itself. For example, the Doilangtham CRS tried to limit number of rules and regulations in order to make the station a pleasant place to work and to reduce stress on volunteers who were already struggling with land reform problems. The Khon Thaiso CRS faced internal conflicts; therefore, the station manager decided not to carry on regular meetings to reduce conflict and confrontation. Finally, the Pattani CRS did not have any management plan, community outreach activities, or even regular meetings due to the southern insurgency. The stagnancy of that station will continue as long as there is social unrest. The current volunteers could only keep the station operating a few hours a day to prevent to station from dying.

The field observations also revealed that all three CRSs displayed moderate management skills. For example, the station managers did not have development plans; as a result, the stations operated without clear directions or goals. Job descriptions for each committee were pretty broad and committee members did not remember their duties
or take their duties seriously. Some never showed up at meetings or visited the station. These typical problems may have taken place because it was the first time that Thai community members had owned a radio station. They did not know much about broadcasting and they lacked radio management skills. There were no clear rules for volunteers.

This research found that a volunteer system at these radio stations was difficult to carry on, especially when situated in a low income area. Interestingly, there has been no mention in the literature on this issue. What I found was that all three CRSs faced a shortage of volunteers and it handicapped station activities. Because all three CRSs depend on volunteers they must attract people who have free time to devote to the station duties. The problem was that in rural area, most people work in the fields. They have less spare time because their life style depends on working from dawn till dusk every day. Unfortunately, the income from their work was only at a subsistence level. If they stopped working, they would not have money for that day’s food. As a result, most participants could not afford to work at the station. Some volunteers stopped their service for this reason and those who decided to stay had to tolerate the sacrifices. As a consequence, station managers and governing boards had little control over volunteers and found it very difficult to increase volunteer hours.

In addition, all three stations faced transparency problems. For instance, the current volunteers of Doilangtham suspected the former station manager and his girlfriend of embezzling donation money. Even so, the station committee members did not take this problem seriously. A possible explanation is that the board knew that the
former manager and his girlfriend worked hard for the station and believed that rewarding them would keep them working. Embezzling was then possibly overlooked.

Similarly, the former volunteers and the station manager of Khon Thaiso surmised that the head of the station’s governing board embezzled money received from outside funding. The former volunteers and the station committee members requested the head of the governing board to account for this money, but the station manager did not want to force him to do so because he still needed the head of the governing board to work for the station.

Likewise, the former and current volunteers of Pattani CRS suspected that the president of PCRG and his girlfriend misused the station’s money. No action was taken. The station manager was afraid that if the volunteers interrogated the president of PCRG and his girlfriend, the two might resign from the station. Because Pattani was not a safe city due to daily bombing and shooting, it would have been very difficult to find replacements. Community members in Pattani were not eager to carry out any community activities, including radio activities partly as a result of the political situation in the area.

The Question of Community and its Relation to a Community Radio Station

Although the three CRSs in this research were established for different reasons, all were established in response to the circumstances of their community. For example, Khon Thaiso was built to be a means to help preserve So language and culture. Doilangtham was founded to be a tool for the Land Reform Group to regain their lands and property. And the Pattani CRS was set up to promote Islam and to be a
communication channel for Muslims. Obviously, the stations’ historical backgrounds indicated that there was an interconnection between a community and a CRS to some extent.

In this research, I queried community members about what they generally thought of their community and how they defined the terms community and CRS. The teen participants defined a community in regard to a physical location. The adult participants provided a meaning attached to the mode of being together or in the sense of belonging. This range of definitions was similar to the study of Ahmed and Fortier (2003) that community members tended to view their community by looking at sameness and connectedness.

In addition, some participants defined a community as bonding and sharing social values and attributes. This category indicated that not only did the community members recognize the people in their community, but values and attributes such as religion, language, and traditional and cultural identities were key elements that formed the community. A community was then more than just a locality (Kneafsey, 1995, pp. 135-136, 149-151). Furthermore, some participants explained the meaning of a community through a lens of politics as they referred to their rights to develop or improve the condition of the community and to solve the community problems in order to make it more pleasurable to live in. This was much the same as Ahmed and Fortier’s (2003) contention that in a political context, citizenship and rights are primary concerns. Accordingly, the Thai participants viewed a CRS in their locale as a means to support the
community. Likewise, they believed that they had the right to own, manage, and operate a CRS for the benefit of their community.

The range of definitions suggests that a community is a discursive constructed notion. According to this dissertation, it was defined from four viewpoints: a physical location, the mode of being together or the sense of belonging, bonding and sharing the social values and attributes, and citizenship and rights.

A community as a physical location

Suriya Tiphalad, a teen listener of the Khon Thaiso CRS in the northeast, stated that a community is composed of “small houses scattered around the rice fields” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 22, 2006). This was the simplest definition of a community. It suggests a common Thai locality in this region where most community members are rice farmers. Metawadee Sirikaet, a teen radio host at the Khon Thaiso CRS, said, “A community is a place where many groups of people gather and live together” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 19, 2006).

A community as the sense of belonging

Yah Alee, the assistant manager and a radio host of Pattani CRS in the south, said that a community is, “The place where people live together which creates a sense of belonging” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 3, 2006). Yungyong Kumpira, a listener of the Doilangtham CRS in the north, added that a community is a place where people live together happily (personal communication, July 9, 2006). Yungyong stated that he was very happy since the Doilangtham CRS started its
broadcasting. Music from this station brought enjoyment to his life. In return, he helped
the station collected audiences’ letters from the longan fields and the community.

Saokaew Phainunta, a technician and radio host of Doilangtham, said, “A
community is a place where people live together and help each other” (personal
communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 8, 2006). The key words in his remark were “help each other,” indicating that neighbors were close and they took care of each other well. Community members were not isolated but rather close to each other.

Niyom Wongsaya, a listener of Doilangtham, gave a similar definition: “It is a village or a place where people live together, help each other, and care for each other, unlike Bangkok (a capital city of Thailand) or Chiang Mai (major city of the northern region)” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006). Niyom stated the belief that families in big cities were isolated. People were not close enough to care for and support each other. The way he thought of the meaning of a community was associated with his contribution to the CRS, often bringing soft drinks to the radio station. He said that it was the way to show that he cared about the radio hosts and volunteers. In addition, he shared with me that he went to the hospital to donate blood because he heard from the CRS that one of the listeners’ daughters needed a transfusion. The sense of belonging seemed crucial as it promoted caring and aiding which led to community’s unity.

A community as bonding and sharing the social values and attributes

Nathapong Phawaree, a radio host of the Doilangtham CRS, defined a community with the same use of a local language. He said, “It is my village. We speak the same
language, the Khom Mueang” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 8, 2006). To him, a community referred to his house and his neighborhood and language was used to indicate their bonding. Plern Yaipangkaew, the head of the station’s governing committee and a radio host of the Khon Thaiso CRS in the northeast, said that a community was composed of people who had similar traditions, used the same language, and were different from other communities (personal communication, June 19, 2006). His definition focused on culture and traditions as he emphasized that they made one community differ from another. Suwakon Pol-asa, the station manager of Khon Thaiso, said similarly, “It is a place where people live together because they share some common rules and traditions” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 19, 2006). In brief, in the north and northeast, language and culture united people.

On-Uma Wantim, a listener of the Pattani CRS in the south, said about a community, “oh, it’s our village and people in the village. . . .about 20% of the people are Buddhist in this village” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 13, 2006). On-Uma mentioned the religion because previously she had been a Buddhist. After she married her Muslim husband, she converted to Islam. That explained why she indicated the number of Buddhists in her community. Mayae Mama, another listener, said, “It was ‘Talubo’ (the name of his village)” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 8, 2006). He added that a community is the place which needs continuous development such as road construction. He also complained about drug problems in his community. According to Mayae, most
community members in his village were Muslims. Only 1% to 2% were Buddhists (personal communication, August 8, 2006). In the south, Islam became a benchmark that unified Muslims, but at the same time segregated Buddhists as when Muslims referred to their community.

*Community as citizenship and rights*

Sritia district of the north faced problems caused by the land reform project; therefore, additional definitions of community were pertinent to this issue. Ratree Pinthukard, a radio host at the Doilangtham CRS, defined a community: “It is a group of people who live in a village. They are our neighbors. We share some benefits and problems such as land” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 10, 2006). Sukit Bunmayong, a radio programming committee member and radio host, said, “... community is composed of many groups of people who live in the same area, share similar problems, and help each other to solve problems. They bond around similar problems such as land problems” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 13, 2006). Clearly, both Ratree and Sukit were very concerned about the community’s problems. This also affirmed that land problems focused the community members on similar interests and their hope to solve this problem. This uneasy circumstance led to the political dimension of community definition.

Pertinent to their land problem, the participants of the north projected the definition of a community toward local governance. For instance, Bunsong Kuntawong, a technician and radio host of Doilangtham, referred to a community as, “The group of people who share some characteristics. It is a strong group that has a clear governing
structure and has a village leader (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 11, 2006). Sombat Na-wanthai, the station manager of Doilangtham, added that a community is “a place where people live together and they have the rights to manage or develop their community” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006). Obviously, Sombat was concerned that community members be the owners of the community and therefore responsible for the decision to develop their community. By the same token, community members have rights to fight to regain their land and property.

*A community and its relation to a community radio station*

A variety of definitions, to some extent, included a CRS as part of the community as well as a means of community development. The next enquiry was about the way community members thought of the CRS in their locale. This question was broached in order to explore the association between a community and a CRS.

This dissertation found that the participants across three locations defined a CRS into three categories: 1) a CRS as a citizens’ medium, 2) as a participatory community medium, and 3) as a means to preserve local identity and culture.

In the north, a CRS was referred to as a citizens’ medium. Niyom Wongsaya, a listener of Doilangtham CRS, stated that a CRS was “. . . a station [belonging to] citizens, and it works as a tool of the community to warn or give information” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 9, 2006). Niyom’s expression was closely related to the fact that Sritia villagers were plagued by the land problems. They learned to fight with the government to regain their rights over the land. Their
activities were highly pertinent to the spirit of democracy and therefore Niyom stated that a CRS is a medium for citizens. This idea echoed the concept of citizens’ media by Rodriguez (2001). A CRS gave voice to the voiceless, strengthened the community’s political standing, and empowered the community to gain recognition from society and the government (Rodriguez, 2001, pp. 5, 10).

In addition, Sombat Na-wanthai, a station manager in Doilangtham, positioned a CRS as a participatory community medium as he said, “A radio station that is established, operated, and managed by community members... It is a channel for community” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 14, 2006). The idea of Nathapong Phawaree, a teen radio host at the Doilangtham was pretty much the same. He said, “It is a radio of our community. We operate and host the show with our community members. It is a communication channel for the village. We announce important information” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, July 8, 2006). The Doilangtham CRS seemed to perform and operate in a similar way to that outlined by Durlin and Melio (2003) where a CRS is a community medium and community members are welcome to participate and have access to all aspects of station management and operation. It also met the key criteria described by Barlow (1998) as being open to the community involvement and bearing a democratic structure. Indeed, the participation of community members in Doilangtham was very high. The CRS became a symbol of a democratic and decentralized community.

This CRS, unlike the two other CRSs, was created as an activist medium. It was meant to help strengthen voices for the community. However, over time, the
Doilangtham CRS became more attuned to the interests of the audiences because not all listeners were interested in hearing the land problem repeatedly. They wanted the radio to serve different functions. The station started from one purpose and finding that not to be what the community members wanted, changed its direction. This adjustment was associated with Lloyd’s remark of being responsive to the specifics needs of the community (1991, p. 11).

In the south, a CRS was defined as a participatory community medium. Buraheng Jaelae, a listener to the Pattani CRS, said, “It is an interesting radio station because it allows community members to talk and host a radio program” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, August 13, 2006). Buraheng pointed out the fact that community members previously never had a chance to get involved in public or commercial radio stations. In his view, a CRS was a revolution.

In the northeast, a CRS was referred as a means to preserve local identity and culture. Suwakon Pol-asa, a station manager at Khon Thaiso, stated that a CRS was, “...a tool for the best benefits of the community. It provides information and preserves the So language and traditions” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 19, 2006). His definition reiterated the goal of this station—promoting the So community. Rianthong Pol-Asa, a community member and listener of Khon Thaiso, added, “It is a station of the community and administrated by people in the community for the benefit of the community” (personal communication, author translation, original in Thai, June 25, 2006).
In brief, these definitions represented how community members thought about a CRS as an organizing force for accomplishing a purpose of the community. It was an activist medium or a citizens’ medium for the Land Reform Group in the north. It was a community medium for Muslims in the south. It was a means for the Thaiso minority in the northeast to preserve their identity and culture. Obviously, community members recognized the connection between the community and a CRS. These findings accentuated the fact that a CRS is established because of the felt need for it. In most situations, a community and a CRS are part of each other. In addition, it appears from the research that a CRS will grow and be accepted by a community if it has participatory communication that allows community members to get involved in all aspects of the radio station.

Discussion

The following section is a discussion of special points pertinent to the three key features of participatory communication. This discussion will be useful for those who are interested in adopting the practice of participatory communication. They will find several lessons learned and theoretical possibilities to foster a CRS based on the experience of the three Thai CRSs.

Language as a consideration of access

Although I did not expect that regional differences would turn out to be very important to the characteristics of the stations, by the end of the study I began to realize that the region was crucial, as the local language issue emerged much more clearly than I expected. This dissertation discovered evidence to support previous research on the use
of local languages in a CRS. All three radio stations used their local language, not the Thai national language, as the main broadcast language simply because it was convenient for a radio host to deliver messages, and it was easy for listeners to understand radio content. This finding is important for any country where the population speaks languages differing from the national language. Forcing the use of a common language in a CRS can limit its audience. In addition, since a CRS is a community medium, it is obliged to preserve the local language and culture rather than the national language and traditions; mainstream radio stations can carry out the national function.

The use of local languages in Thai broadcasting was peculiar as the practice was contradictory to the regulation of the Ministerial Regulation NO. 14 (1994) issued under the Broadcasting Act 1955. Under this regulation, broadcasting service did not exclude Thai dialects. However, in practice the government and the Public Relations Department (PRD) preferred the radio stations to use Thai national language. All mainstream radio stations were state-owned and the private sector was granted concessions for a certain period of time. The termination of the contracts could happen at any time; as a result, these operators tended to follow any suggestions from the government and the PRD.

The use of national language has alone had been going on for several decades and overshadowed Thai dialect usage. Consequently, the use of local languages began to seem unsuited for a professional broadcasting standard. The advent of a CRS revived the use of local languages. The CRS operators were proud to use their local languages. Even through most CRSs in Thailand, including the three CRSs, did not use their local dialect exclusively. This dissertation found that decisions on the proportion of airtime devoted to
local dialects among the three CRSs differed and related to 1) the nature of the language found in the north, 2) the number of competitive languages used within the community in the case of the northeast, and 3) the perception of the language in the eyes of the government in the case of the south which in Malay was attached to the political unrest and Muslim separatism.

At Doilangtham, the Khom Mueang language was used for over 80% of the broadcasting hours. It was a large proportion compared to the two other CRSs. This finding was associated with data from the preliminary study that I conducted in December 2005 which indicated that 92% of community members in Sritia district used Khom Mueang language at home. Only 8% used Thai language as their family language. In fact, the Khom Mueang dialect is not difficult to understand for a standard Thai speaker.

Generally, northerners use the Khom Mueang language even in governmental offices and in the workplace. As a result, the use of Khom Mueang in broadcasting did not seem in opposition to national security when compared to the use of the Malay language in Pattani. This explains why Doilangtham decided to use their local language more frequently. In addition, from my personal experience during field observations, I found that the Khom Mueang language seemed to assimilate to Thai official language to some extent. The northerners adopted many Thai words and pronounced them with their local accent. The popular use of Khom Mueang did not overwhelm the Thai language. On the other hand, Sarassawadee (2005) claimed that Khom Mueang, its script in particular, had diminished in importance for “various reasons, including political ones” (p. 5).
At Khon Thaiso, the So language was used only during the night radio programs. Daytime shows were broadcast in the Thai and Esarn languages. Although So and Esarn were both spoken languages and did not have written scripts, Esarn was considered dominant because it is the primary language of the northeastern part of Thailand whereas So is used only by Thaiso group. Decreased use of So among the next generation might lead to its extinction in the near future. For that reason, some Thaiso people are concerned that their language is in need of preservation.

At present, there are differences in the proportion of usage of So among Thaiso teenagers, adults, and elderly in their daily lives. For instance, Thaiso teenagers learned to speak fluently in Thai and Esarn as they grew up. They used Thai in their classrooms and used Esarn to communicate with classmates and teachers who were not Thaiso. As a result, they tended to have little chance to use their dialect other than with their parents. Thaiso adults speak all three languages. However, most of them cannot not read Thai well due to their low educational level. Only in the last decade has the government started a free education program up to twelfth grade. This generation of Thaiso mostly completed either fourth or sixth grade, which were mandatory educational levels of an earlier time. Unlike teenagers and adults, Thaiso elderly speak only So. They have had the least formal education and some might have had none at all. Most worked in the rice fields and rarely went outside their community. They understand Thai official language and were able to speak it, but not fluently. The station broadcast in So during the night because most of the listeners are adults and the elderly.
Khon Thaiso decided to use three languages. This decision suggests that language is a crucial factor encouraging access to radio content. It would be less beneficial if this CRS decided to use only one language. This case study showed that the selection of the language that the audiences feel comfortable with is of primary importance.

Finally, at Pattani most programs were broadcast bilingually—a mix of Thai and Malay. The radio hosts spoke in Thai and translated the content into Malay or vice versa. The reason for this practice was related to the fact that Malay was spoken only among Muslims in the south of Thailand. Generally speaking, most of the Thai population did not understand this language. Buddhist Thai and government officials who lived in this region did not understand the language either. Malay became a critical language in Thailand due to a series of political events and insurgencies staged by Muslim separatists beginning in the 1950s. The government was concerned about national security and it was afraid that radio might be used by these separatists to communicate with their supporters both inside and outside the country. During a crisis period in the southern insurgency in 2005, the government closed down some CRSs in the south that used Malay in their transmissions. This event became a warning for Pattani not to overuse Malay in their shows. Although most listeners preferred Malay and in spite of the fact that elderly Muslims rarely speak or understand Thai language, the station decided to broadcast only 60%-70% of its programs in Malay and always accompanied that language with a Thai translation.

In conclusion, the use of a local language or dual languages at these CRSs suggests that Thai media policymakers and the government should consider permitting
the use of local languages rather than imposing the exclusive use of Thai. It is clear that a CRS can be a great tool to preserve local languages, especially those that do not have written forms. Without regular usage, these languages will become extinct.

*The location of the station*

On the whole, this study supported previous findings that the location of a CRS was relevant to the amount of access afforded to the station. For instance, listeners visited Khon Thaiso often because it was not far from the community. The station benefited from its physical closeness to the community. However, the case of Doilangtham confirmed the literature that “where a CRS is located” is another important issue and it seems to be more important than the closeness quality.

The case of Doilangtham is remarkable. The station was located at the entrance of Doilangtham temple and also on the route to the longan orchards. With this convenient location, villagers did not have to make much effort to come to the station because they had to pass it to get to their farms daily. As a result, community members tended to stop by frequently to request music when they passed the station.

Moreover, when villagers visited the temple, they often stopped by the station on their way home. They had to pass the station to get out of the temple. Additionally, they tended to donate money to the station to earn personal good fortune. This finding suggests that there is mental association between the temple and donations to a CRS. Interestingly, the donations that Doilangtham received were enough to pay the electric bills.
This CRS shows that a proper location can help motivate access to the station. In addition, Doilangtham operators chose to build the station on the land of Doilangtham temple because they hoped to assure that no individual would claim a right over the station. They learned this lesson from the case of a transmitter tower which was located in the house of the community leader. As a result, community members did not feel welcome on the leader’s property. In other words, a location signified ownership. If the station is located on the property of any individual, that person seemed to have the right of possession more than the others.

Unlike the other two stations, Pattani was located in a public school; therefore, it was not very convenient for listeners to visit and for volunteers to work there. For example, the volunteers had to ask for permission from the principal when they would like to use the space for activities such as workshops or meetings. The station was on the third floor which made it difficult for elderly and handicapped to climb upstairs. In addition, the school was located away from the main street; as a result, people had to make an effort to visit this radio station. The location of the Pattani CRS seemed not to support audiences’ visiting. On top of that, when the actions of the Muslim separatists became severe, guards were posted at the school doors. This became a hindrance for listeners visiting the station. They were checked at the door every time they arrived.

The Pattani experience suggests that a CRS should not be located in a governmental building because of its inherent restrictions. The CRS operators had no claim over the place and were required to ask for permission for extra activities. Locating in this school was also insecure considering that a new school principal might not
welfare. CRS operators. In that case, the station’s volunteers might face many obstacles and they might not be able to work freely. However, in the midst of the southern insurgency, the location of Pattani CRS became a plus as the station had guards. The government and the army seemed not to suspect the station of being a tool of Muslim separatists. However, this did not mean that the station would be free from targeting by separatists. The bombing and shooting took place widely including Islamic religious schools and mosques.

*Radio content and southern insurgency*

Good radio content is pivotal to a CRS because it attracts audiences. If the listeners like the content, they will listen to the station and will support the station. This assumption came from the preliminary study of Thai CRSs that I conducted in December 2005. I found a positive correlation between enjoyment of program and frequency of listening. More importantly, listening frequency was the strongest predictor of the listeners’ involvement in the station. In other words, if the community members liked the programs and content, they listened to the station more often, and that listening encouraged them to participate in the station. Therefore, the ability of the station to provide content that attracts an audience is necessary.

This study found that among the three CRSs, Doilangtham was most concerned about audiences’ satisfaction with their radio broadcast. The case of this CRS was notable because the station operators decided to change the focus of their radio content from land reform problems to entertainment programs. These changes took place to fulfill the needs of the community members who complained that they did not want the station to focus on
their problems. Instead, they preferred to hear music so that they could enjoy their hard life more. In addition, the station recognized the connection of listeners to Buddhism and mystical beliefs; for that reason, the station provided content relevant to their beliefs, such as ones based on fate and luck. The station became popular. It received a numerous phone calls as well as letters from listeners daily. Moreover, some listeners volunteered to collect letters from the villages and longan orchards and bring them back to the station. They called themselves the station’s postmen. The main reason for their service was that they appreciated the work of the station and therefore would like to do some good in return.

At Khon Thaiso, I did not find that radio hosts were devoted to this issue as much as those in Doilangtham. However, radio hosts at Khon Thaiso realized that the Thaiso people did not like serious content. The station provided music and light information to match their audiences’ preference.

Finally, the case of Pattani CRS showed that a CRS had to be aware of the social circumstances in order to avoid problems. For instance, the Pattani hosts chose not to include content about politics and southern separatism. They did not want to get involved in such matters in order to avoid risks of harm either by government forces or the separatists.

The cases of Khon Thaiso and Doilangtham displayed the usefulness of a CRS at least to help relieve community problems. Unfortunately, Pattani showed that the social unrest in the south was so grave that a CRS could play only a small role in helping to relieve its situation. Teachers, policemen, soldiers, merchants, and villagers were being
killed and injured at the time of this research. The southern insurgency handicapped every activity in the area, including the Pattani CRS. The station could not be expected to function fully. For instance, schools could not work well. Teachers and students were frightened due to the unpredictable insecurity situation. Several teachers left their jobs and moved away. The government decided to grant USD$55 a month as supplementary compensation for teachers and professors who worked in this region. Likewise, many volunteers at the CRS left the station. Pattani CRS was on the verge of becoming another failed entity like other organizations in the south. The research revealed that a CRS could not work well in this kind of environment.

*Cell phone usage, pseudonyms, and listening networks*

There was a notable connection between the use of mobile telephones and greater access to a CRS. The radio hosts and listeners of the three CRSs said that the recent advent of a cell phone technology made a CRS more accessible to their audiences. Listeners called the station from their homes, workplaces, and the rice and longan fields. Some listeners called the station more than once a day. The popular use of cell phones came from the limitation of telephone landlines. In 1966 (the end of the first National Economic and Social Development Plan), there were only 83,000 telephone lines nationwide and the government aimed to achieve 480,000 lines by 1986 (the end of the fifth plan) (The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, “The fifth national, chapter 7,” 2007).

Even after 1986, telephone service was not widespread. For example, my family applied for a phone in 1985. It took almost four years to get one. It was also about the
time that the mobile cellular service was introduced into Thailand. However, a mobile phone was then not yet affordable at about USD$2,500. In 2007, the price dropped to about USD$100 and a used one could be as little as USD$20. Competition has reduced the cost of calling. It is about six cents a minute to call to anywhere in Thailand, and a monthly plan can be even cheaper. This has made a mobile phone service affordable to most people. In 2005, the number of mobile cellular subscribers was four times that of land lines with 27.379 million users. Thailand was ranked the 23rd highest in number of subscribers in the world (“Rank Order-Telephones-Mobile,” 2005), whereas the estimation of the population of 2007 is 65.068 million (“The World Factbook,” 2007). There was a cell phone for every 2.4 persons.

In the case of the Pattani CRS, cell phone technology helped the station decide to install a telephone landline to encourage access. Previously, the station did not have a phone line because it did not want to spend money on the monthly service fee. The listeners complained that they could not contact the station. The radio hosts had to announce their personal cell phone numbers and found that many listeners called them. The station operators finally decided to install a telephone at the station. Research shows that a telephone is important to facilitate listener access to the station.

Doilangtham was unusual once again because a cell phone stimulated the formation of listening networks. Originally, the villagers did not call the mainstream radio station perhaps due to their shyness. They preferred to write letters to the station. After the village had its own radio station, they felt closer to their CRS. Some started to call but they were still shy about revealing their real names. Pseudonyms were then
employed to conceal their identities and this became a fashion in the community. They also started to use pseudonyms when they called other radio stations. The radio hosts also had their pseudonyms. The use of pseudonyms made listeners feel less recognizable.

Listeners started to dedicate songs or messages to others even though they did not know each other. It became customary to dedicate music back and forth between listeners. The cell phone played a crucial role in this community because once a listener heard that someone had dedicated a song to him or her, he or she called back to the station and dedicated a song or message to that person. Furthermore, listeners started to visit and created their own networks. They sometimes dedicated music in the name of their group. Other listeners did the same; as a result, a number of the networks expanded. According to Niyom Wongsaya, a listener to the Doilangham CRS, there were three to four listening networks in the community and there were about a hundred listeners in his network (personal communication, July 9, 2006). This phenomenon contributed to the success of the CRS and the usefulness of the cell phone as a mechanism to support access to the station.

It is important to note that cell phone technology made it possible for CRSs to extend their network of contacts out into the community in a way that was not possible before. Likewise, cell phones gave people access to the station in a way that it could never have had previously. In this research, community members used cell phones to communicate with the stations enthusiastically. This was an example of how new technologies enabled greater access to the station. Therefore, even those listeners who did not have benefit of being physically close to CRS were still able to participate in their
activities. While the location of a station is a physical aspect of access, a cell phone is a virtual aspect of access by means of technology. Based on this study, it is possible that cell phones might be an important factor in CRSs around the world.

In conclusion, access to the radio station is the most successful feature of participatory communication. The main reason is that Thai community members yearned to have a CRS of their own because they had no control of either mainstream commercial or public radio stations for over seven decades. Many expectations were set forth and operators had intentions to fulfill them. Jumpol Rodcumdee, former National Broadcast Commission Selection Committee, and former media professor of Chulalongkorn University, stated that in the Thai case, access was extraordinary. It went beyond listening levels to ownership levels as over three thousand CRSs were mushrooming nationwide (personal communication, July 28, 2006).

*Personal contact and volunteer recruitment as a consideration of participation*

Across the three CRSs, volunteers were mainly recruited by personal contact. It started from a friend inviting a friend or a neighbor inviting a neighbor. Kanjana Kaewthep, a key community media researcher and scholar of Chulalongkorn University, stated that this method was not new. It was often used when the community had an event such as building a temple, renovating a mosque, setting up a funeral, and organizing other religious events. Villagers united to work because it was a charity (personal communication, August 17, 2006). Participation in the view of Kanjana helped explain why these volunteers tolerated working without getting paid.
However, Uajit Virojtrairat, Chairperson of Civil Development Institute, suggested that participation would be ideal when every organization in the community was invited to participate in the station (personal communication, July 20, 2006). CRS volunteers should explore organizations in the community and persuade them to share their thoughts on how to make use of the radio station and how to make the station become a public channel for everyone in the community. Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, Chairperson of the CPMR and professor of Chulalongkorn University, also noted that participation should not be limited to friends or neighbors. It should be open widely to every unit in the community and connect to other communities to expand the communication network (personal communication, July 20, 2006).

The case of the three CRSs demonstrated that a community established and owned format was a valuable option for encouraging participation from community members. Radio production at these stations was not forced to achieve commercial or public radio standards. Instead, the radio hosts were set free to produce simple programs. What the three CRSs were concerned with most was the satisfaction of their audience, not professional expectations.

However, this study found that the use of personal contact naturally limited participation and consequently caused problems such as an expansion of individual power within the station and volunteer losses.

*Interpersonal problems as a consequence of using personal contact*

The three CRSs used personal contact to recruit volunteers because it was convenient and without cost. However, a drawback of this method was that those who
invited more volunteers tended to hold more power than the others and became unofficial leaders of that group. Friction occurred little by little as their volunteer service at the station became personalized. Group protection and compensation took place in many forms such as allocating the best broadcasting hour to their people or allowing a follower access to the station’s financial resources. Some volunteers dropped out because they could not tolerate the factionalism. I proposed that this type of internal political dynamic would peak and become severe when power relations lead to contests among rivalries. CRSs should decentralize the distribution of power to prevent infighting. In addition, this study discovered that ethnicity could cause factionalism, as found in the northeast.

At Khon Thaiso of the northeast, a Phuthai volunteer left the station because the head of the governing board announced that this station belonged to Thaiso people. No one wanted to get involved because most of them were invited by the head of the governing board. They felt an allegiance to him. The head of the governing board expanded his influence and power. The Phuthai volunteer decided to establish the Phuthai CRS. Later, the head of the governing board took away the airtime of a volunteer who missed his program for about a half month and granted that time slot to his friend and the station manager’s brother. That volunteer then decided to resign from the station and went to help at the Phuthai CRS. Finally, former and current volunteers suspected that the head of governing board embezzled the station’s funds. They could not do anything more than request him to provide a financial report; however, in the end, he did not accede to the request. These events displayed a negative side of the formation of influence within the station as a consequence of employing personal contacts to recruit volunteers.
At Pattani, one of the former volunteers who used to be the president of the Pattani Community Radio Group (PCRG) complained that the station manager and the current PCRG president always nominated their close friends and themselves to participate in CRS regional and national meetings. He was upset because he did not have that opportunity. This implied that the station manager and president rewarded their followers in order to secure their position and influence. In addition, former and current volunteers at the Pattani CRS were uncomfortable with the president of the PCRG's decision to select his girlfriend to manage the station’s accounts, instead of the station accountant. Transparency was then in question. The problem was difficult to resolve because of strong personal relationships. The problem might not have occurred if the station were composed of representatives from many organizations in the community rather than a small number of closely related individuals.

These three CRSs seemed to have the same kind of human problem. The non-profit status and the high minded motives of volunteers did not keep the people who worked in the organizations from being subject to the same kind of human frailties.

Self-management

Supinya Klangnarong, Secretary General for the Campaign for Popular Media Reform said that the major problem of Thai CRSs was that they were created too rapidly. Some CRSs were not ready and some operators did not consult with community members. As a result, several stations closed down very quickly, but also many of them went commercial in order to survive financially. Those that survived and retained their non-commercial status faced management problems as the participants were not trained
in administration skill (personal communication, August 17, 2006). Indeed, this
dissertation found that the three CRSs faced management problems and that this problem
diminished their participatory communication practice. The key problems of self-
management appeared in two issues: transparency and volunteer problems.

First, the issue of transparency was very subtle because it was relevant to a
volunteer system which made it difficult to solve such problems. Take the case of
Doilangtham CRS as an example. The former station manager and his company appear to
have misused their power. They countered the station’s aim of retaining a non-
commercial status by accepting money from shops in town and advertising their products.
They did this for about three months. The earnings were not reported on the station’s
accounts. The current volunteers also suspected that the former manager’s girlfriend
embezzled donation money. However, the former manager and his company were not
forced to account for these issues. Instead, it incited an incident in which one of them
accused the other of a love affair. The accuser intentionally let their argument go on the
air. The listeners disapproved and became angry because the CRS was used
inappropriately. A meeting was set up for the station’s committee members, volunteers,
and community members to discuss the incident. The former manager and his company
decided to resign. It was clear that the involvement of the community members or
listeners became the key factor in the resignation.

In fact, the two other stations also had similar problems. Only did the community
of the north perceived the mismanagement as a community crisis and stepped in the
station’s meeting whereas the two other communities did not seem to stand out.
Doilangtham CRS received so much community involvement perhaps because it was an account for embarrassment. In term of the location, Doilangtham was located at the entrance of the temple so the station became an iconic of goodness. Another possible explanation was that the station hesitated to fire them because they were not employees, but volunteers. The station did not have rules and punishments or any by-laws to indicate proper action. In fact, none of the Thai CRSs had by-laws because they all operated without a license under the government temporary agreement.

The two other stations faced a similar problem of transparency and the problems were still unresolved. Since making by-laws was not possible for Thai CRSs at the time of this study due to state governance, the cases of the three CRSs offer the lesson that the station’s governance and volunteers should not retain power in the hands of a single group. Once the problem occurs, it is hard to remedy because there will be no counter balance in the station. In addition, a CRS should develop people with skills to manage money and build budgets.

Second, a volunteer system became another major problem of management, especially, on the issues of ethnicity, religion, and power control. The internal conflict at the Khon Thaiso CRS involved the head of the governing board. Obviously, the problem appeared to be related to his personality. Unfortunately, he chose to use ethnicity to segregate the minority group, Phuthai, from the station. The case of the Khon Thaiso CRS indicated that the station defined their mission too narrowly and only to solve problems of So culture and language preservation and overlooked other stakeholders in the community, the Phuthai people. Interpersonal clashes were the result.
At Pattani CRS, internal conflict was not obvious because there was no argument among volunteers. Instead, those who became disaffected simply stopped their service with the station. From my experience as a Buddhist living in Pattani, I could say that, deep down, Muslim volunteers at the Pattani CRS resented having a Buddhist leader (the president of Pattani Community Radio Group). However, they seemed to admit that they could not operate the station by themselves. The station manager, who is Muslim, said that the station needed this leader to do public relations and network with other offices in the community. Politically, in the midst of southern insurgency, having a Buddhist leader made the Pattani CRS appear as part of the Thai government and army. Resentment was reflected in the way of thinking and reasoning. For example, some volunteers decided to resign from the station claiming that they could not accept the president’s drinking behavior. In addition, human resources of the Pattani CRS were affected by the southern insurgency. Only three volunteers worked at the station.

Observation at the Doilangtham CRS revealed that the leader of the Land Reform Group (LRG) had a lot of control in the station because this station was established by the LRG. There were two assistant managers. One was nominated by the leader of the LRG and the other was selected by the station manager. The new station manager was uncomfortable with this situation. He complained that he felt like a puppet of the LRG’s leader. In addition, he did not recall who the other assistant manager was and claimed that person never showed up at the station.

The three cases suggested a need for CRS operators to develop their skill in human resource management. From the not-for-profit nature of the three CRSs, I believe
that a volunteer system must continue to be in use for a long time. There is a slight chance that these stations will have large enough budgets to hire personnel to take care of station daily operations. Underwriting might be a choice to solve budget limitations; however, at the time of this study, the CRS operators did not consider the need to do underwriting. They were fearful that more funding would cause more frictions and might convert them into commercial stations.

In conclusion, the three CRSs displayed the complexity of efforts needed in making a participatory community medium function properly. The CRS operators had to consider all aspects because previous research suggested that accessibility to the radio station led to higher participation and guaranteed greater support from the community. Sustainability could be assured. In addition, participation encouraged community members to get involved in management when needed as it in the case of Doilangtham CRS.

This research found some theoretical possibilities for enhancing participatory communication practice in CRSs. First, a CRS had to adapt in order to survive. For example, the Doilangtham CRS was established as an activist medium but later decided to reform itself. Its programs shifted toward entertainment and light information. Volunteers later were recruited from the community rather than solely from within the Land Reform Group, resulting in higher community involvement. Doilangtham's case suggested that a sustainable CRS must be composed of multiple stakeholders in a community. Ordinary community members should be included in any case.
Second, a CRS must be aware of human problems. For instance, the Khon Thaiso CRS was intended to be a tool to help preserve So culture and language. However, Phuthai language and people were neglected because of policies adopted by the head of the governing board. To reduce conflict and confrontation, the station manager decided not to carry on regular meetings. Power and influence led to conflicts. A CRS must beware of this possibility. A mix of representatives from diverse organizations on the governing boards might help prevent the problem.

Third, a CRS must adjust to the circumstances within the community. The case of the Pattani CRS was a good example. The station was intended to be a channel for Muslims and to promote an Islamic way of living. Unfortunately, the southern insurgency handicapped the station's ability to function in that way. It lost a lot of volunteers and did not succeed in finding replacements. Amid the political turmoil, community members in Pattani were not eager to contribute to community activities, including radio volunteering. Although, due to the insurgency, the current volunteers did not have much hope that the station would become vibrant soon, they were not willing to let it die. The station seemed to accept the need to reduce the number of broadcasting hours and outreach activities as well as allow a stagnancy of the management. A CRS seemed to not work out well under the violent circumstances.

Finally, on the issue of responsiveness, it should be emphasized that no CRS can respond to all community expectations. Even in a homogeneous setting, diverse demands will be much greater than a simple small radio station could address. Therefore, there will always be some people who will somehow be dissatisfied with the product of a
community radio. CRS operators then have to accept that the station cannot be totally responsive to the entire range of community expectations. The station must decide on which community demands it can successfully meet.

**Future Research**

This dissertation attempted to provide a comprehensive picture of Thai community radio stations through the lens of participatory communication. However, there are some limitations in the research. For example, all three CRSs revealed that participatory communication could take place in practice. Of the three attributes, access was easiest to encourage. This suggests that a CRS is a beneficial tool because it is accessible to most community members. This finding is important as it indicates the possibility of training listeners to communicate with their stations and later to the community. Public communication skills will develop and should result in the development of social expression. However, what this dissertation did not examine closely was program content. I believe that many new CRSs around the world are looking for samples of a good radio programs that can fit their community. To my knowledge and radio production experience, there is no such format. The community has to experiment with a variety of program types and observe the community members’ feedback. Likewise, there is no way to say what content should be presented. The best suggestion may be that CRS operators do a problem-based radio program. Research focusing on radio presentation styles is therefore another important topic for future studies.

According to this research, participation practices in the three CRSs mainly occurred in radio production duty. That is to say that most volunteers liked to host radio
shows but they seemed to not want to deal with other station responsibilities. This dissertation was not designed to explore what a CRS should do in order to persuade volunteers to take action in station. Participatory action research on the development of participation in the radio station would be my suggestion for future study. A researcher might spend more time in a CRS to learn about the nature of that CRS and community, evaluate their performance both in the present and the past, and then brainstorm volunteers to design the model they prefer to accomplish participation.

Finally, self-management is the most difficult for this study to discuss. I could only discuss what problems took place in the three stations I observed, but I could not answer how they should solve their problems. I came to realize that if I had conducted a brainstorming session with each radio station during the fieldwork, I would have had some answers and at the same time helped the CRS operators plan their management. In addition, what I did not include in the issue of self-management in my study were those elements that related to fundraising and sustainability, the political dynamic and relation between CRSs and mainstream media in the community, future CRS law and regulations; therefore, these would be suggested issues for future studies.
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The 1997 Constitution was suspended due to the military coup on September 19, 2006.

Here are the key sections of the 1997 Thai Constitution for media reform.

Section 39

A person shall enjoy the liberty to express his or her opinion, make speeches, write, print, publicize, and make expression by other means.

The restriction on liberty under paragraph one shall not be imposed except by virtue of the provisions of the law specifically enacted for the purpose of maintaining the security of the State, safeguarding the rights, liberties, dignity, reputation, family or privacy rights of other person, maintaining public order or good morals or preventing the deterioration of the mind or health of the public.

The closure of a pressing house or a radio or television station in deprivation of the liberty under this section shall not be made.

The censorship by a competent official of news or articles before their publication in a newspaper, printed matter or radio or television broadcasting shall not be made except during the time when the country is in a state of war or armed conflict; provided that it must be made by virtue of the law enacted under the provisions of paragraph two.

The owner of a newspaper or other mass media business shall be a Thai national as provided by law.

No grant of money or other properties shall be made by the State as subsidies to private newspapers or other mass media.
Section 40

Transmission frequencies for radio or television broadcasting and radio telecommunication are national communication resources for public interest.

There shall be an independent regulatory body having the duty to distribute the frequencies under paragraph one and supervise radio or television broadcasting and telecommunication businesses as provided by law.

In carrying out the act under paragraph two, regard shall be had to utmost public benefit at national and local levels in education, culture, State security, and other public interests including fair and free competition.

Section 41

Officials or employees in a private sector undertaking newspaper or radio or television broadcasting businesses shall enjoy their liberties to present news and express their opinions under the constitutional restrictions without the mandate of any State agency, State enterprise or the owner of such businesses; provided that it is not contrary to their professional ethics.

Government officials, officials or employees of a State agency or State enterprise engaging in the radio or television broadcasting business enjoy the same liberties as those enjoyed by officials or employees under paragraph one.

Section 78

The State shall decentralize powers to localities for the purpose of independence and self-determination of local affairs, develop local economics, public utilities and
facilities systems and information infrastructure in the locality thoroughly and equally throughout the country as well as develop into a large-sized local government organization a province ready for such purpose, having regard to the will of the people in that province.