

ALL-AMERICAN ISSUES: SEVEN STORIES FROM THE HOMELAND

Proceedings of the News about Networks workshop

by the Govcom.org Foundation, Amsterdam

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Preface

The Govcom.org Foundation organized a workshop for U.S. and international media reform advocates, academics and activists at de Balie Center for Culture and Politics, Amsterdam, on 10-14 November 2003, with generous support from the Ford Foundation, New York.

“The News about Networks” workshop was dedicated to understanding whether NGOs may operate effectively without a commercial press penetration strategy. Do the rise of NGO Internet-based networks, in particular, imply an end to the reliance on the press to resonate the message? Can networks alone mobilize other organizations and key players to act on important social issues of the day? In short, can NGOs do without news?

“Doing without News?” is the main thread running through a series of specific research projects undertaken at the workshop, using data collection, analysis and visualisation software tools. The report provides an introduction to the some of the arguments about why one may desire to ‘do without news’. Subsequently, it describes each of the projects, including the data collected, the methods employed and the results that were sought, and eventually found. It also contains the info-graphics created during the workshop that aid in telling the stories in our final presentation, *All-American Issues: Seven Stories from the Homeland*.

Richard Rogers
Amsterdam, 29 February 2004

INTRODUCTION

Doing without News?

17 media reform advocates, activists and academics gathered for a week in Amsterdam to seek answers to the question, “Can we do without news?”

There are reasons to ask a question that may appear to be purely hypothetical, or simply impossible to pose in the first place. The question may be pursued in two different contexts. In particular, I address how networked actors working with new media these days are doing without news, as networked actors always have. Secondly, I address why one may wish to do without news more generally, owing the formats of news and the results they yield.

The question of doing without news may be asked in relation to the existence of issue networks, inter-linked clutches of organizations working on social issues, making extensive use of the Internet and gathering at events - often high-profile meetings that parallel or dovetail with summits and other gatherings of powerful actors. The issue networks are made up of cross-sections of advocates, activists, academics, donors and others, coordinated in ‘networks’, ‘coalitions’, ‘caucuses’ and similar groupings. The network is more the everyday term (and includes donors), whereas the ‘coalitions’ and ‘caucuses’ are formed for the purposes of a specific action, or within the machinery of a summit, respectively. The everyday networks are principally driven by NGOs, which organize actor linkages through a professionalized culture of information sharing and participant mobilization at events. NGO issue agendas sometimes fit with current governmental and inter-governmental calendars. Government treats many NGO actors as *salonfaehig*, albeit with an event format that frequently marginalizes NGO input in the language of the final declarations.

When one is ‘on the inside’ or ‘working behind the scenes’, as is the case when issue networks work according to the governmental schedule, news enters the picture after the fact. Indeed, historically, news has been about the outcomes of behind-the-scenes work. News has been about the coverage of the opening and closing of an event, not the process preceding and succeeding it. In this sense, issue professionals (“process people”) always have done without news.

Typically, ‘the press’ was considered a last resort. Should the process be going poorly, one would countenance ‘going to the press’ by leaking information, by exposing or whistleblowing, or by deciding to speak out of turn. “Going to the press” was an act of some desperation. All of this still occurs, of course, but there are further arguments concerning when and why do to without news.

Six arguments against news

News also may be thought of as a media space that devours - a land of personalities and story templates that require constant attention to the smiles, styles and cycles of its production.

Indeed, *news may be described primarily as a format*. Students of journalism learn there is a reality out there to be covered, and there are events to be reported. But the more journalism studied the more is learned about the formats that guide what counts as news. One learns the formats; one learns how to format the reality so that it may be called news. One also learns how to make the reality fit the formats that we call news.

Nowadays, however, the translating and formatting jobs are not done by the journalist alone. Rather, *reality increasingly delivers the formats to the news*. Delivered are press releases, sound-bites, story and video cans, and scripted events. Reality becomes something that is pre-formatted to fit news.

When formats are delivered, instead of reality, the media critics enter the debate most fiercely. The delivery of formats, as opposed to reality, quickly gets caught up in debates about media manipulation. Media critics are continually pointing to the strategies behind the delivery of pre-formatted news, and the agendas they serve. These critics may scandalise the sound-bites, the cans, the choice of b-roll, the scripted events, the stunts. The scandal is about how the media accept them unproblematically, *how they take over the pre-formatted 'news' as news*.

Fact gaps emerge. The scandal widens when we learn what recently has been called the 'fact gap'. When a poll revealed that a majority of Americans thought US forces had found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, it was called a fact gap. (In his famous New York University speech in August 2003, Al Gore used the term 'false impressions'.) News, a primary source of learning what is really going on, is not meant to produce gaps between facts and what is known (if we are able to blame it on the news).

The temporal mismatch between what is really going on and what is news. There is much going on that is not covered, and there are people who are in the business of staying out of the news. They may be the same people delivering formats and scripts that obfuscate what is really going on. (Simultaneously doing one thing, and delivering another well-formatted version of events to the media is the greatest scandal of them all.) They operate outside of the media space, chuckling to themselves about what is not known, what is not being covered. By the time it hits the media, they have moved on, making new moves outside of the news.

That's the way it will be is the title of a book that summarises how news has begun to change the timeframe it covers. This is the idea that news increasingly is not about what has happened, but what will happen. For example, you may read something like this: 'Ministers meeting in Cancun today are expected to put forward new plans to make globalization work.' When news is about the future, one could argue, that, finally, the news

is catching up with the people who are ahead of the news. Whilst interesting, the problem with that argument is that “what will happen” may just as well be a format in itself.

There are masters of all the formats. There are master press release authors, scripted day designers, sound-bite editors, spin-masters and media advisers, with ‘press sense’.

A good example of ‘press sense’ from one of the masters comes from a recent interview with Dick Morris on the *BBC World Service*, on 16 December 2003 (paraphrased below). The instant-poller and former media adviser to Bill Clinton discussed why the capture (instead of the killing) of Saddam Hussein benefits ‘George Bush media’ in the run-up to the national election.

If a mass grave were discovered, and Saddam were dead already, the news would be buried in the back of the newspaper. Because he’s alive and awaits trial, the mass grave is news. The BBC will cover it. You wouldn’t have covered it if he were dead, or wouldn’t have covered it prominently. The drip, drip, drip of heinous revelations, because he’s alive and because there will be a trial, will weigh more heavily and benefit Bush more, in a media sense, than the false premises of going to war in the first place. The Democrats, and Dean, need a different approach.

The suggestion is not being made that Saddam Hussein was kept alive in the service of Bush’s upcoming campaign. Rather, the suggestion may be made that a media adviser, with press sense, would recommend capturing him alive. This would be among the recommendations made by the various advisers.

Among the masters, these days, is also a new breed of reality-formatter, called pre-mediators. With ‘press sense’, they take advantage of the temporality shift in the news, and the “what will happen” format. Pre-mediators are the masters of putting forward scripts of what will happen. They are also called media seeders, carefully planting scenarios of what will happen. The press is an active contributor to pre-mediation, doing it as well as covering it. For example, you may read (in the *New York Times*, 21 December 2003):

Last week Mr. Bush for the first time voiced his support, saying, "I will support a constitutional amendment which would honor marriage between a man and a woman, codify that." The statement signals the White House's increasing confidence that it can exploit the matter in the presidential campaign, both to energize its evangelical supporters and to discredit the eventual Democratic nominee.

After successful pre-mediation, reality safely becomes an exercise in post-production. This is the argument made by Richard Grusin, Professor of Literature at Wayne State University in Detroit. He took up pre-mediation as perhaps the most extreme form of media manipulation these days, demonstrating how pre-mediation may be the answer to the question, “Why did the Iraq War seem inevitable?” (See his separate paper.)

Given the challenges put to news, in the first couple of days of the workshop, our 17 media reform advocates, activists and academics began examining in some depth the conditions under which news may be marginalised. Among these are tactics that may lessen the importance of press appearance, as well as strategies for being known without appearing in the news.

Prior to devising tactics and strategies to marginalise news (on the basis of some of the arguments put forward above), we are interested in demonstrating, briefly, the importance of news to NGOs. Thereafter, we would like to understand what may be done with news in new media, before returning to the idea that networks may serve as a new means to do without news.

NGOs in and out of the news

In the run-up to the workshop I received some emails from media reform advocates in the United States, an audience we targeted. One in particular is germane to the subject at hand.

July 29, 2003

Dear Mr. Rogers:

I just read the email call for applications for your planned seminar on media policy. I don't know whether you wrote the RFP, but I suggest that its analysis is faulty. Public interest media groups in the US, such as mine and many colleagues, utilize a press strategy as part of a strategic framework related to policy/shaming pressure (on government, industry, etc.); public education (consciousness-raising and constituency development); and agenda setting. The notion, as described, that media citations have become a proxy for effectiveness is incorrect. Our small group of advocates have been very effective at getting media attention with our limited resources. Indeed, it has helped us make significant advances in the areas of online privacy, broadband access, equitable access, etc. Press work is routinely tied to policy and market analysis, independent research, and specific advocacy initiatives.

<Name withheld>

The call for workshop attendance described what I call one of the tragedies of NGOs these days. The great NGO tragedy is the continued reliance on measuring the value of their activities by press appearance, or what the writer properly calls 'media citations'. Many NGOs rely on (commercial) press coverage as demonstrable evidence of organizational or individual worth. On their Web sites, for example, they proudly cite or link to their press appearances. Not only 'getting press' but pointing to it and displaying it, are some of the main NGO activities. It is part of their public relations, and, possibly, their 'network relations' (a subject discussed elsewhere). The behavior is particularly prevalent in the US.

It may be worth considering the larger question of whether media reform is possible at all, in a culture in which the reformers are reliant on appearing in that which needs reform. But that's too easily said, for it returns the debate to one between the 'realo's' and the 'fundi's', as the German Greens Party once characterised the rift between the members who would, and would not, be willing to work within the system to change it. The subject of the undertaking at hand, however, is whether reliance on the press, and a media strategy, may raise questions about integrity and authenticity. One of the larger dilemmas inhering in activist and NGO activity today is the extent to which NGO work is driven by the coverage of its work. Similarly, and related to the question of coverage is another potential impact of the news on NGOs. Do NGOs take up issues depending on the press coverage of the same issues?

In asking the extent to which NGOs are beholden to the press, both in terms of self-representation and in terms of issue selection, we also would like to know whether it matters in the terms put forward previously. That is, is coverage of itself or of its issues related to an NGO's standing in its networks – networks that traditionally have stayed out of the news? The networks may have other means of distributing standing, and other ways of choosing issues. Indeed, we may find that NGO standing and issue selection has little to do with the leanings of the press.

If issue selection were performed in networks, and if networks were able to distribute celebrity (well-known-ness), would it still be necessary to follow the news, to appear in the news and to show that you have been in the news? Need issues in the news be signs of their importance? Need news attention be a sign of individual and organizational value? Do we need news to know what and who are known? More to the point, do Internet-based networks challenge our perceived need for press attention at all?

Beyond News

Before returning to the question of the extent to which networks (and reading them with the Internet) challenge our perceived need to do 'news work', I would like to take up the perversely persistent idea of whether new media may substitute for the old. The case for 'doing without news' is being made, after all, in relation to what new media have on offer. I would like to begin that discussion by inquiring into the extent to which Google News takes us beyond news. Later, we return to networks.

Google News has been criticized because it contains press releases and other inputs to news (instead of only delivering finished 'news'). Being able to view the inputs to news is novel, and presents opportunities for doing analysis on media, and especially media concentration from a substantive viewpoint. Are they all telling the same story?

Google News is new media in the sense that it places in the same space (aggregates) raw news inputs and finished news outputs. It is different from the old media situation, whereby the inputs were available to the eye-witnesses (and the news producers and professional newspeople only). Classically, one may have had the benefit of 'being there', and the pleasure of later watching it on the news. (My personal experience of watching the fall of the Berlin Wall with the cameras on next to me, and later turning on the TV to see it again, comes to mind. The Romanian revolution is the more interesting case in terms of participant viewing. The revolution had to be done over because the first one had technical difficulties and was not captured for TV.)

Being privy to the meso-level, between the event and finished news, I would like to argue, takes us beyond news in two important respects.

The more obvious argument to make is that Google News relocates and subsequently resurrects a diversity of news. Google News, with its U.S.-style internationalism, would seem to solve the plurality-of-viewpoints problem within the larger U.S. media concentration issue, by providing stories by *Baku Today* and other English-language news sources from the rest of the world. Crucially, for the U.S., Google News makes U.S. news only a part of the English-language news, and often places the international and the U.S., side by side, as search engines once placed the establishment and the alternative side by side. (Google News, in this sense, is currently like Altavista in 1990s.)

With Google News, significantly, the production of news also becomes exposed, with analytical opportunities that first join and then move beyond typical media criticism. As pointed out above, media criticism often focuses on the pre-formatted scripts that are taken over unproblematically as news; they strive to expose the agendas they serve, wittingly or unwittingly. (It becomes especially serious when the scripts wittingly serve the financial agendas of the commercial news industry. The question becomes how to decouple news from commerce. Confronted by the formats and the agendas, media critics vest hope in independent media alternatives that compete for the honor of telling what is really going on.)

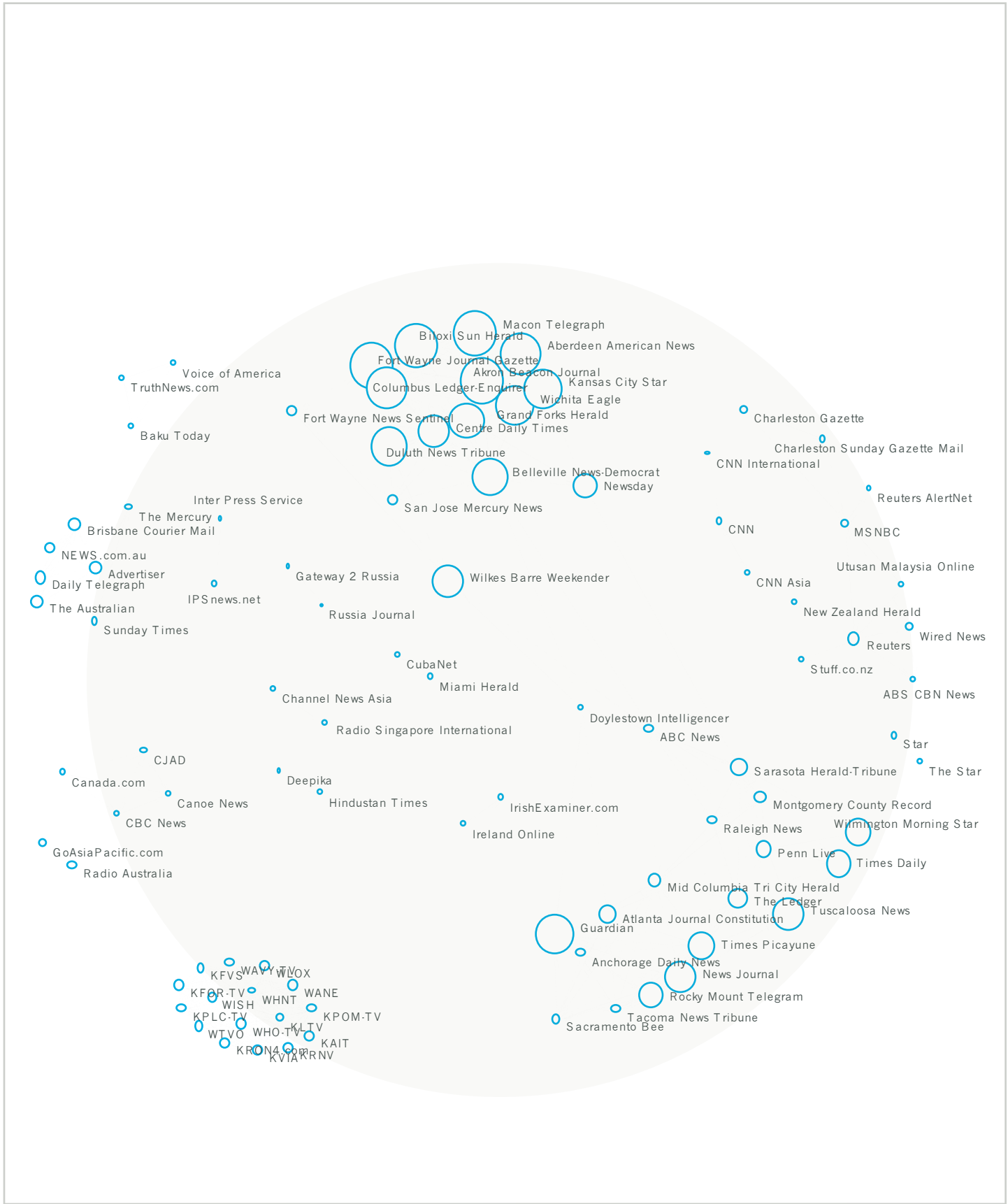


Figure one. Media concentration in terms of lexical analysis of stories pertaining to Burma and a set of key words, analysed and visualised in ReseauLu (aguidel.com, Paris). The analysis of Google News, from 6-30 September 2003, shows which media outlets cluster most significantly around the same Burma story lexical elements.

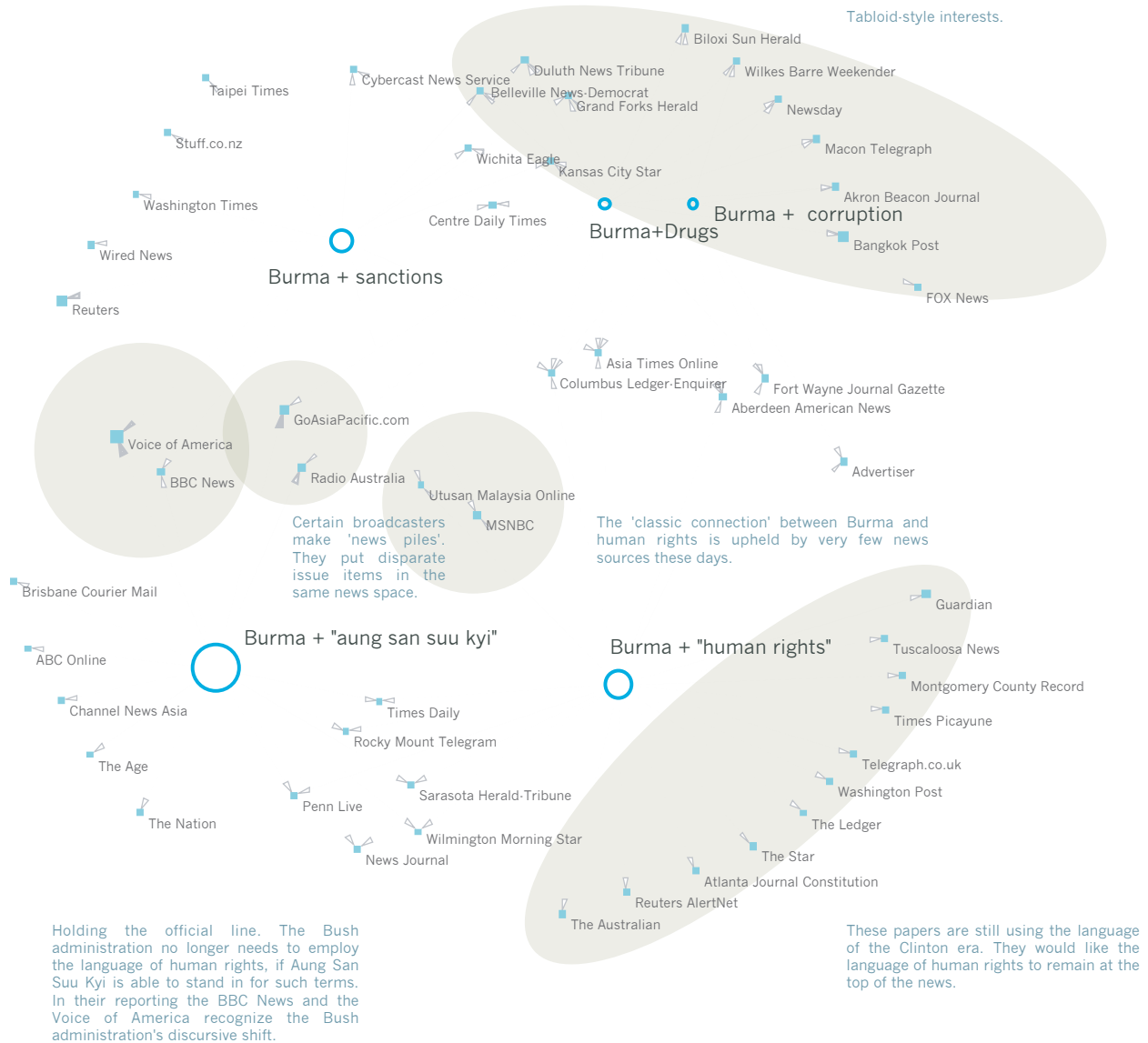


Figure two. An analysis of Burma + key words, in Google News, 6-30 September 2003.

Google News provides more than U.S.-style internationalism, and a plurality of views by virtue of adding the international. By serving up the press releases and other raw inputs, it is a media criticism tool. It shows where the news is coming from (the raw pieces), which news outlets are taking them over literally, and when. (See figure one.) It also may show the cycle of news sampling in the various outlets from press release or breaking story to end of story (if the analysis can be done in the 30-day timeframe Google News offers, or if the project plans to do monthly capturing over a longer timeframe).

Typically, concentration is viewed from an industrial standpoint – few owners economically dominating markets. The words monopoly and oligopoly come to mind, although FCC policy and US law forbid them. The concentration of news source ownership results in underrepresented viewpoints, in a lack of plurality of views. (As stated above, the media critics ask whether the views presented are in line with the official.)

Google News allows one to view the extent to which the story is the same across media outlets. An analysis of Google News (as above) allows the analyst to view media concentration, where for example US TV outlets, registered by Google News, are in a story space all their own.

Figure two is a second depiction of the coverage of Burma, in relation to the various stories that news could be telling. The stories could contain some of the following key words or lexical elements: Burma + sanctions, drugs, corruption, human rights, and Aung San Suu Kyi, respectively. In particular it is the combination of these key words as storylines that is of interest here.

One could argue that the contrasting Bush line, represented by the *Voice of America* as well as *BBC News*, replaces human rights with the figure of Aung San Suu Kyi, and ties her detention to the sanctions. (Bush traditionally has not relied on Clinton language to make similar policy moves.) Australian radio piles the lexical elements together, in a seemingly non-sensical way, whereby Aung San Suu Kyi is tied to the Burma and drugs storyline.

Google News, however, seems to bring us beyond media criticism and the media concentration debate, if we see it as a news outlet itself. Seeing aggregations of media as new media and, in this case, a unique news outlet in itself, is a typical argument. It is one of the ways people make distinctions between old and new media. Such an argument is often countered by the remediation thesis (Grusin), which views such aggregations as illustrations of the double logic of remediation. Old media is reproduced in the new medium, and the new medium at the same time tries to wipe traces of the old.

The argument to be made here, however, is that new media is erasing something else. It is erasing distinctions made in the old media, distinctions between the raw and the finished. It is also putting forth a means to do analysis that allows for media criticism, that is, which raw is taken over as finished?

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For NGOs and others, one of the questions to be pursued concerns whether one can do without news, in the sense of operating outside of the (American) media space. Following from that question is the related issue of where to do one's media work, whether the new media creates spaces in which organizational celebrity is sufficiently distributed and accrued. Finally, we are also interested in the relationship between social issues, news and networks. Can issues do without news, in the sense that they can gain urgency through collective NGO action in networks?

1. "Bush Lies" Defeat Bush?

Moveon.org is the American political action committee that uses new media to do fund-raising, to raise awareness about issues and to gather people at events, either major speeches or at house parties (see also figure three). They also buy old media space - billboards, adverts in newspapers, etc. One of moveon.org's initiatives has been to promote a particular storyline recently about George Bush. "Bush Lies" has been the subject of at least five recent books, and one is featured on the moveon.org site.

The moveon.org phenomenon is of interest to many in politics, especially because moveon.org stands in for the idea that a strong progressive grass roots is being mobilised in the run up to the primaries. To its analysts (like Frank Rich in the *International Herald Tribune* of 20 December 2003), moveon.org also is operating behind-the-scenes (on the Internet), whilst the establishment is tuned in to TV and the newspapers.

In linking itself with a particular storyline surrounding the current administration, moveon.org may be bringing particular candidates into its space. Which candidates, in other words, are relying most on moveon.org's storylines and network spaces? Which candidates are becoming tied to it?

In the analysis undertaken, we have been interested in learning about how the moveon.org network is re-organizing the political landscape in terms of candidates' associations with "Bush Lies," put forward by moveon.org, alnetnet.org and others. (See figure four.)

We mapped the web network around "Bush Lies" with the IssueCrawler, server-side software that crawls specified sites, undertakes co-link analysis, locates densely interlinked networks of sites, and visualises them in a network map.

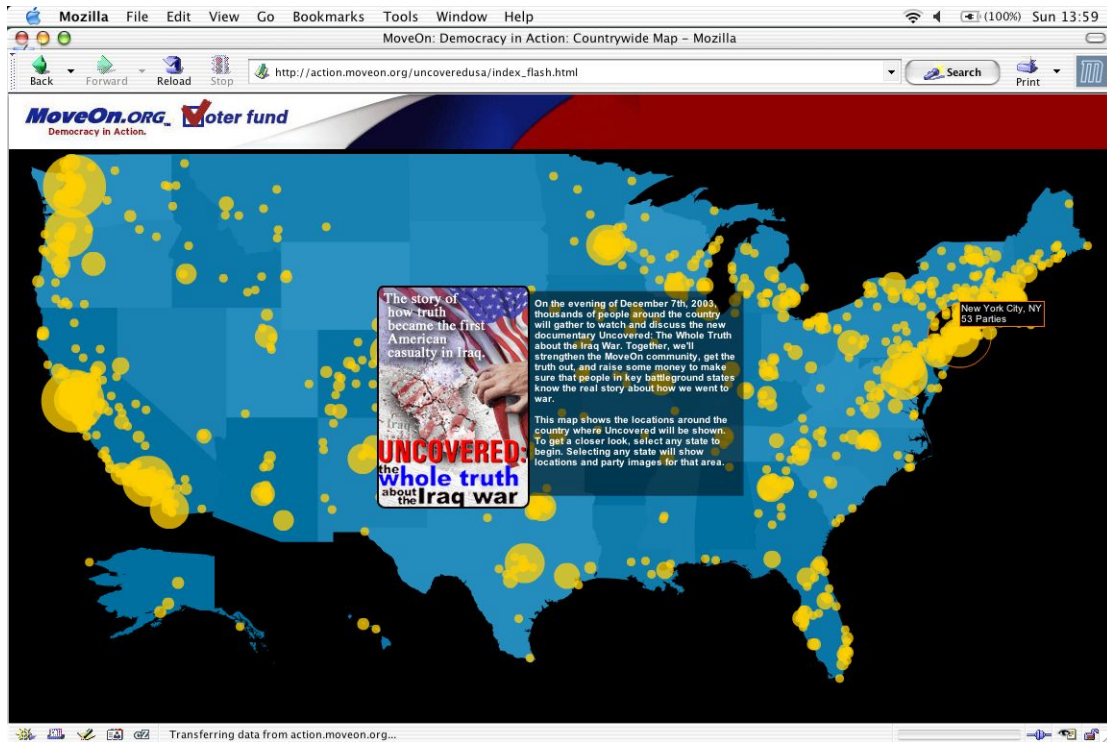


Figure three. A map of moveone.org's house parties, organized nation-wide for the viewing of the documentary about "Bush lies".

Figure four shows the space around "Bush Lies". To the right, it shows a space where all Democratic party candidates are present, flanked by the various state Democratic party offices. The candidates cluster together. To the left is the space most substantively dealing with "Bush Lies," a left-of-center critical media space, made up of such organizations and sites as Michael Moore, Alternet, the Daily Howler, *The Nation*, Common Dreams and Open Secrets. Moveon.org is situated now firmly away from the political action committees in the more grassroots, critical media space. The only candidate that has been pulled towards that space is Howard Dean. This led us to the preliminary conclusion that Howard Dean is most reliant on Bush Lies.

2. The Iraq War was inevitable. Exploring inevitability as a U.S. media format.

We argued previously that the news, in pre-mediating the Iraq War, made the Iraq War seem inevitable. If pre-mediation makes future events seem inevitable, we decided to undertake prospective research and look into what else is currently 'inevitable' in the U.S. media space. After all, inevitability is in the news, but what's the line?

The research analysed outputs from Google News (in particular, the American news sources returned), and looked into the subject matters that are and were inevitable. What is inevitable, these days? What was inevitable? What is not inevitable?

Where 'what is not inevitable' is concerned, the small quantity is striking. Only a story about a particular WTO model being implemented in South Africa is picked up. The mentioning is understood as an effort to undo pre-mediation, undo the previously inevitable. Strikingly, there is very little of that in the news. This led us back to thoughts about news formats, and how they preclude messages that may circulate with more resonance in networks. NGO networks frequently discuss whether or not WTO models must be implemented.

Where 'is' and 'was' inevitable is concerned, the subject matters shared by the terms are striking (see figure five). Sharing the inevitability space (past and present) are such key words as economics, politics, sports, Iraq and war issues towards the bottom. The reading of the results suggested that inevitability is a news format, for it has become a part of many of the traditional 'departments' or sections of news.

The second analysis probed deeper into the media coverage of post-war Iraq, teasing out the subject matters that concern various news outlets. (See figure six.) Google News was queried for 'inevitable +' terrorism, Iraq, U.S., Bush, war, democracy, freedom, chaos, reconstruction, post-war, and Rumsfeld. There is a clear divide, where the dotted-line is drawn, between those sources that concentrate on inevitable + US, Iraq, war and Bush, and those that concentrate on inevitable + democracy, freedom, reconstruction and chaos. Looking in particular at the news sources in each divide, we find that Iraq and democracy appears to be mainly a "Third World" concern. It is not a significant subject in the U.S. mainstream or alternative media. The second observation, looking at the more hawkish space, is that war is not an issue in the international media as much as freedom and democracy. In the evitability media space, war and terrorism are Anglo-saxon media concerns, including the local and regional American press.

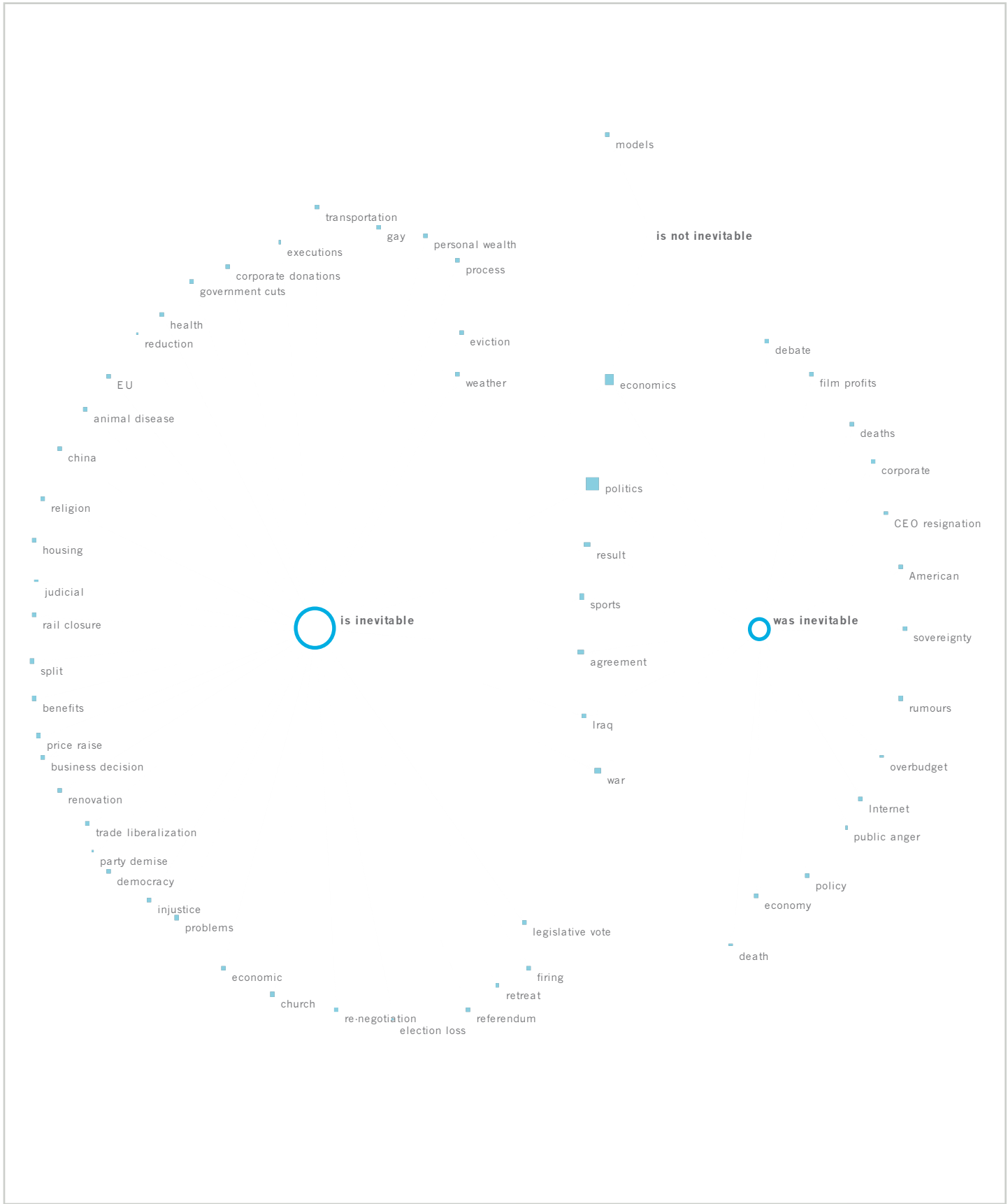


Figure five. Exploring inevitability as a news format. A depiction of key word analysis from Google News, 12 October – 12 November 2003.



Figure six. Is democracy a Third World concern? Results of Google News analysis, 12 October – 12 November 2003.

3. ICTs. What the rest of the world does, and what that means for civil society.

ICT and IT are acronyms, which respectively stand for “Information Communication Technology” and “Information Technology”. These are the two different terms frequently used around new technologies that relate to the issues of better access to information and better communication. IT is an especially US term, whereas ICTs is a term not often encountered in the US.

ICT is the broader term and includes the radio and the Web, whilst IT more specifically involves computer technologies and questions of information flows. The promises and challenges around the ICT and the IT have become issues of global interest. However, we might ask, what are the spaces that ICT and IT respectively organise on the Web? Which are the actors involved in this debate around new technologies? And, do they both - ICT and IT - address civil society in the same measure? Or, in other words, what is their impact on the civil society?

In order to answer those questions, we generated two different maps, one corresponding to the network organised around the term ICT, and the other one organised around the term IT (see figures seven and eight). Both maps rely on Google News results for different queries – queries chosen because of their association to key issues related to the ICT and IT debate.

In order to proceed to a comparative study of the two networks, the key issues were in almost all cases the same for both terms, for example, “ICT + democracy”/“IT + democracy”, “ICT + private sector”/“IT + private sector”, etc. The resulting maps show the different resulting news sources clustered around those different issues.

There are two main observations. First, compared to the map corresponding to the IT debate, the ICT map shows a far more homogeneous and inter-related network. ICT more successfully addresses civil society than IT. The second observation refers to the centrality, in both maps, of “north-south” organisations. Indeed, OneWorld and AIIAfrica connect the different issues on the ICT map. On the IT map, it is the African news portal, News24, which does that work.

The ICT map shows how this term has been able to address more successfully civil society than IT. Another telling piece is there is no real North American discussion, which is quite unfortunate. There is virtually no North American organisations which even mention this word, ICT. In comparison to the other maps generated during the workshop, North America is doing Media Reform (old media) and the rest of the world is doing ICT (new media).

We might conclude from those observations that ICT more successfully addresses civil society and that the debates about new technologies and the north-south relations are closely related. Last but not least, it is just as striking that the United States does not seem involved in the debate around ICTs. This shows how the U.S. stands apart from the NGO international community by not adopting the term ICT.

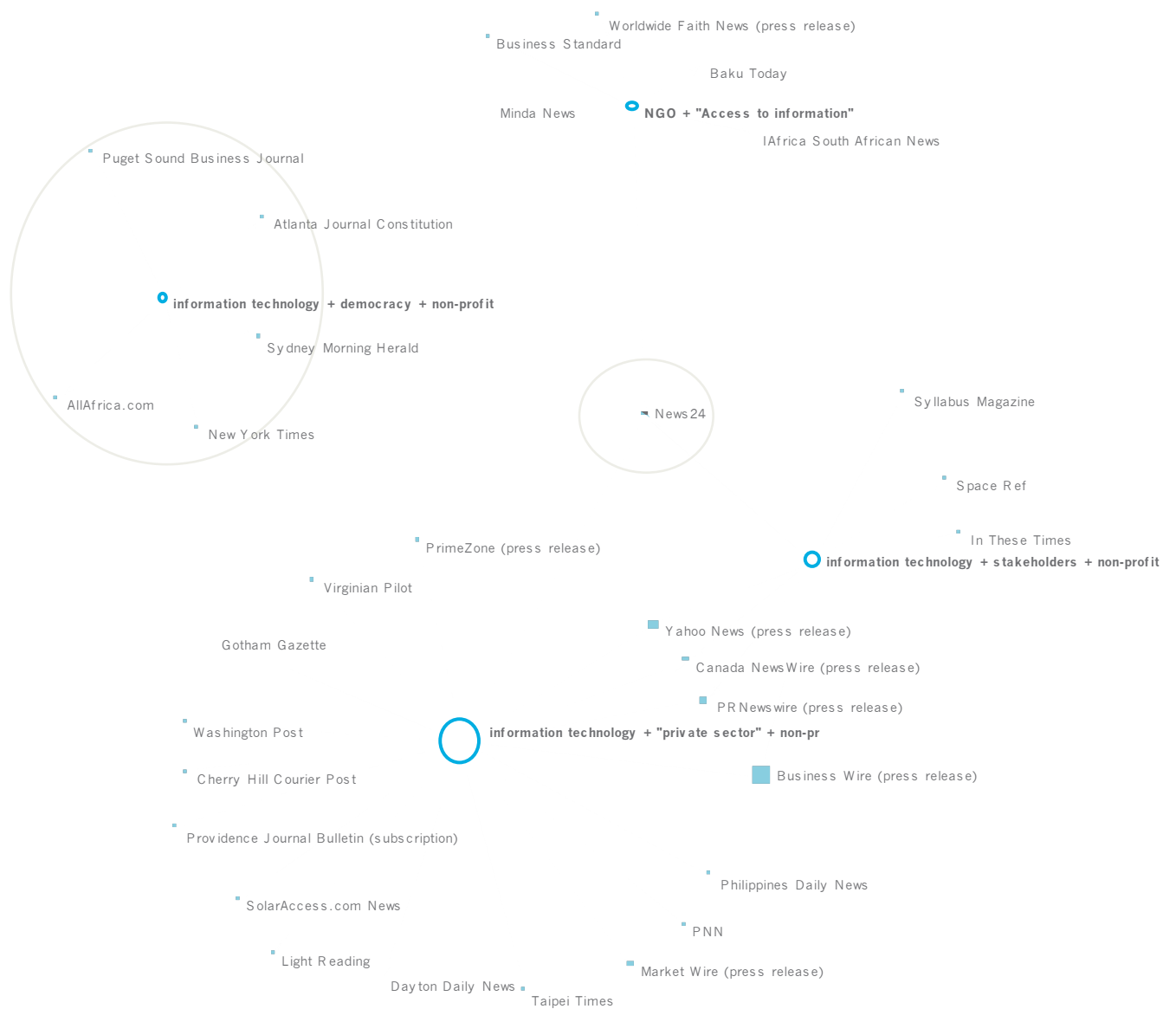


Figure eight. Depiction of Google News analysis for IT + key words, 12 October – 12 November 2003.

4. Trying to be less American. Where does the Ourmedianet Network get its issues? (Not from the U.S.)

Ourmedianet.org presents itself as a “global network of activists, academics, and practitioners working toward stronger alternative, community and citizen’s media.” Its mission statement, to be read in Spanish and English, reflects Ourmedianet.org’s wish to be “less American” than most U.S. media reform organizations. The alternative media platform gathers “scholars, practitioners, policy experts from currently about 30 different countries.”

We have been interested in learning whether its national diversity stands for the global reach of ourmedianet.org as a network. In the analytical undertaking, the initial interest shifted from mapping Ourmedianet’s social network –who is in it?- to the question of what the people in this network are actually talking about; that is, what are their issues? And from there, to ask the question of where do those issues come from? Do they come from the U.S.? If so, this would allow us to think about whether any US-based network can ever escape the U.S. (media) space.

We have used the Ourmedianet’s database of conference papers from the last few years, and analysed the titles, the abstracts, and the geographical zone attributed to each author.

As its mission statement professes, Ourmedianet.org, a dialoguing space for alternative media initiatives, centers on three particular issues: *community media*, *citizens’ media* and *alternative media*. We undertook the task of measuring the actual reach of Ourmedianet.org as a global network by substantively mapping their “issue-geographical” network, on the basis of these terms (and the others they discuss significantly in their papers).

The final database consists of about 40 papers presented by media practitioners, media policy experts and media scholars from all over the world over the last three Ourmedianet.org media conferences. The resulting map matches regions to key issues and amongst others, the issues mentioned by the organisation itself as being the focus of their interest and work.

By visually linking geographical spaces to issue spaces, the resulting map constitutes a fascinating travel itinerary through media reform ideas and places. Indigenous media, a term shared by Africa and the Australasian regions, is about paying attention to the sensitivities of cultural production (indigenous languages, indigenous cultural practices, indigenous story-telling). Community media, a major focus of Ourmedianet’s work (note the node size) is a particularly Australasian issue, where media should be about the communities it serves. Media democracy, a term that has travelled from the U.S. to Australasia, concerns being able to decide which media are on air. Media reform, one of the smallest of nodes, is purely American, and addresses media concentration as well as diversity of viewpoints. Radical media has made the trip from Europe to North America, and is about directly challenging the commercial media, even subverting it. Alternative Media, another European export, is travelling to Latin America, in order to provide separate, different media from the commercial as well as the public. Participatory communication, a

Latin American activity, is most associated with radio, and is about the active participation of people in making media, and broadcasting it. Finally, citizen's media is a special case. It is Ourmedianet's contribution to bridging a north-south divide, bringing in the notion that media is vital to a well-functioning democracy. Media should be for citizen-like activities.

By mapping, substantively, the issue-geography of Ourmedianet.org, we found out not only that media reform is a particularly American issue that is not travelling, but we also learned that Ourmedianet.org gets its issues from the world over. Ourmedianet.org draws its own media issue space within the U.S. media landscape.

Since Our Media is a global organization, where do their issues come from?

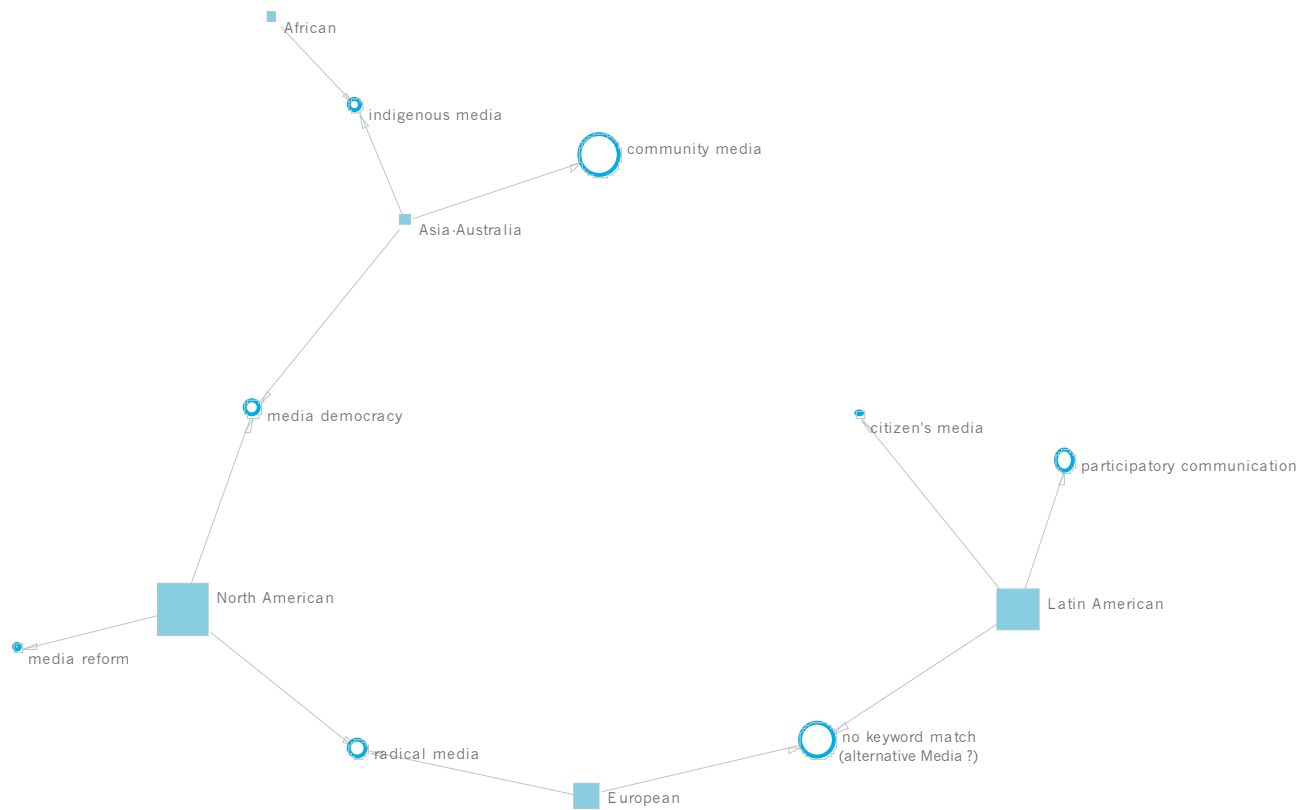


Figure nine. Depiction of analysis of the key words in the titles, abstracts and authors' geographical zone in Ourmedianet.org conference papers, 2001-2003.

5. Is Minority Media Ownership a Media Concentration Issue?

The News about Networks workshop took place one day after the conclusion of a major media reform meeting in the United States (the Madison, Wisconsin event), where the media reform movement gathered. A participant in that event from Indymedia asked us whether we could make a map of the participants at that meeting, using the IssueCrawler. Indymedia were interested in its place in the overall media reform movement. In other words, does the media reform movement recognize independent media (and specifically indymedia.org) as a vital ingredient to reform? (See figures ten and eleven.)

During our workshop we learned that a group of organizations belonging to the media reform movement were taking up the issue of minority media ownership – an issue that concerns minorities actually owning media, as opposed, for example, to media writing about and showing minorities and their issues. As was said at the workshop: “a minority-owned media station should be able to show Benny Hill re-runs all day long, if it so chooses.” Minority media ownership is fundamentally about ownership.

When one looks at the Madison Media Reform map, one notices that there is little or no representation whatsoever of minority media ownership groups on the map. (Figure eleven places two minority journalists in the ‘waiting room’ of the media reform movement, but no minority media owners.)

Instead of assuming that minority media ownership was a part of the media reform issue, we decided to make it an empirical as well as normative question. In fact, does minority media ownership belong to the media reform issue? Ought it belong?

To answer this question, we mapped the ‘core’ minority media ownership network, using starting points provided to us by an expert. (See figure twelve for the URLs of the organizations.)

Looking at the actors on the map, the network shows us that the minority media reform issue mobilises the US Constitution, the US Census as well as minority groups using proportional representation arguments to address the FCC (see figure twelve). These particular mobilisations, in turn, are not made by the Media Reform network. We thereby concluded that minority media ownership does not belong in the media reform space. It has its own.

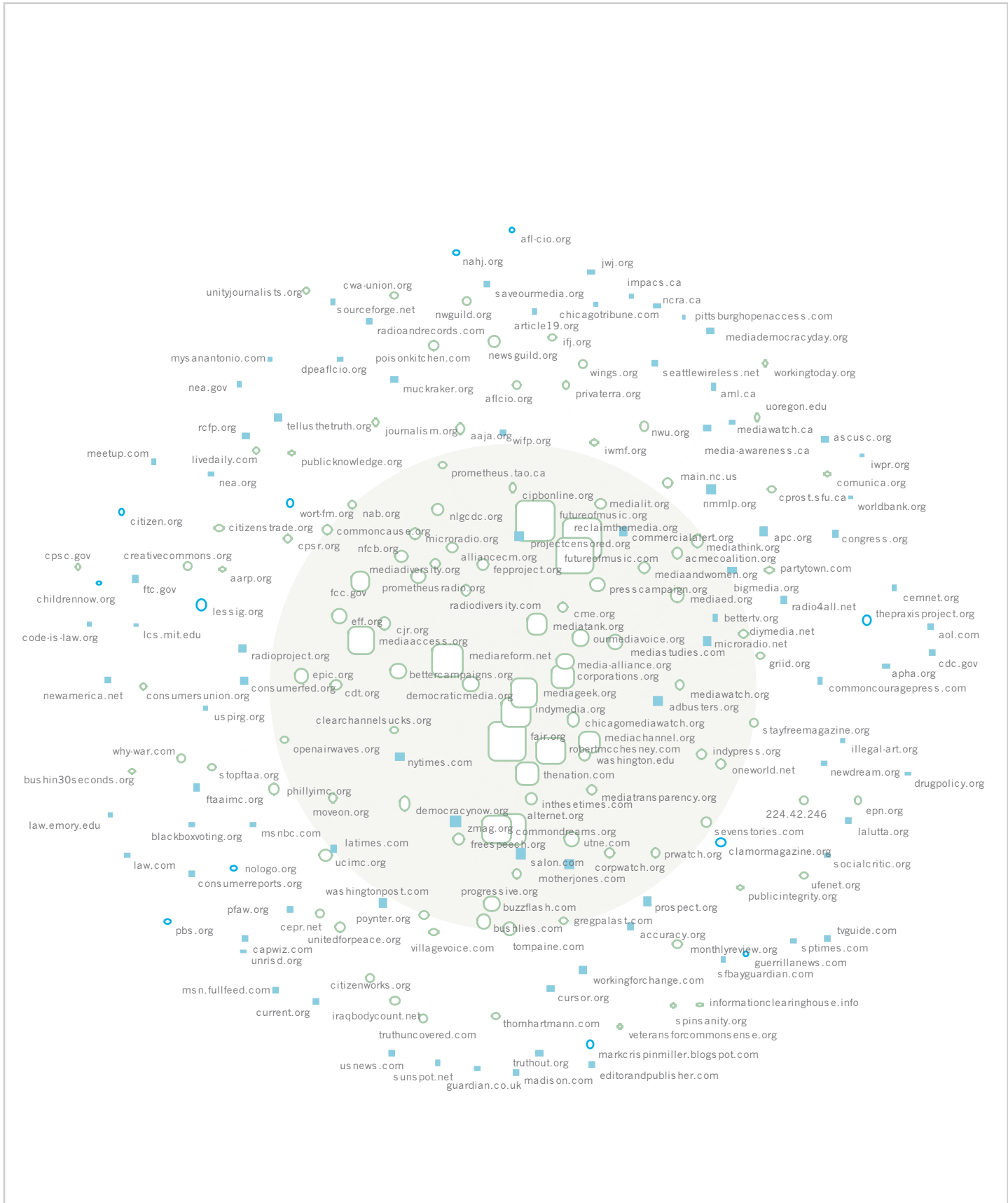


Figure ten. Depiction of the U.S. media reform movement. Co-link analysis of the Web sites of the participants in the Madison Media Reform event, November 2003.

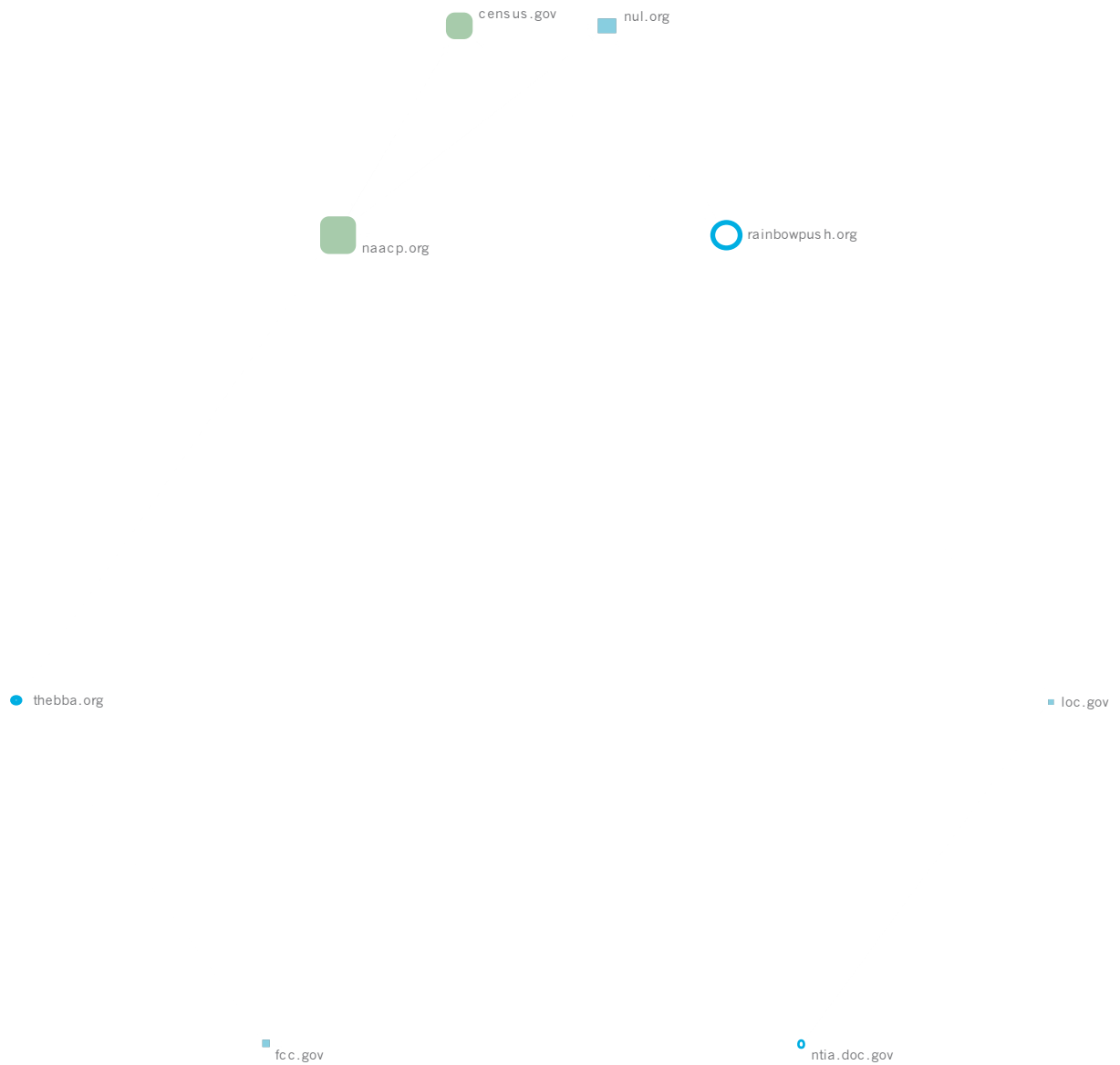


Figure twelve. The Minority Media Ownership Core Network.

<http://www.naacp.org/connections/assoc.shtml>

<http://www.ntia.doc.gov/opadhome/mtdpweb/resources.htm>

<http://www.rainbowpush.org/links/index.html>

<http://www.thebba.org/links.html>

6. The Spectrum: Doing quite well without news.

This is the story about the Spectrum. For many people, the spectrum or the airwaves and the policy around them are quite obscure issues. It is mostly through wireless Internet that people have been introduced to the spectrum debate or, at least, to the notion of spectrum policy. Via our Wi-fi card, we are able to access a little unlicensed portion of the spectrum, which allows us all to do wireless Internet.

Crucial for the development of new media technologies, the spectrum debate raises many questions, one of which is the extent to which it needs news for it to go 'well'. The related question concerns whether it is an issue in a news sense? The spectrum debate, contrariwise, may be run by a classic issue network, groupings of advocates, activists, academics and others. If it is run by an issue network, does the network need the news (for the issue as well as its players to know)? Additionally, do some network actors try to make it an issue by taking the detour of the press? In order to answer such questions, we generated two different maps, a spectrum news map and a spectrum issue network map.

The first map visualizes the issue network (as the Web sees it) around the spectrum debate (see figure thirteen). It shows a quite classic issue network comprised of activists, scholars, policy makers and some other professional associations. Three different, albeit closely related, spaces appear: the *policy*, *advocacy* and *digital commons* spaces. The policy space represents the traditional regulatory approach - detailed planning to coordinate conflicting uses and increase efficiency. It is moving towards mixed approaches (planning markets, open access). The advocacy space is organised around democracy and access. Spectrum policy should facilitate broad access and enable the widest possible communications. Present policy wastes enormous resources. Finally, the digital commons space represents visionary technology platforms. The digital commons will assure maximum benefits for society by unleashing innovation and creativity.

Central to the issue network map are different governmental and educational institutions (in bold): the FCC (Federal Communications Commission), the New America Foundation and Stanford (with the various Lawrence Lessig affiliations and initiatives). They galvanize those respective issue spaces. According to the issue network map, the traditional policy approach meets more challenging initiatives, and the digital common space.

The second map (figure fourteen) generated during the workshop visualises how news sources establish the centrality or periphery of the different spaces mentioned above. Such maps of the news space are generated on the basis of the data provided by querying Google News with key terms from the spectrum debate. In this news space about the spectrum debate, traditional policy issues dominate. Digital commons is not associated to the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) and constitutes a peripheral, almost independent space in itself.

Comparing the two maps and with some knowledge of the state of the official debate, we can say that the digital commons are doing well (on the Web as well as in policy documents) without news. Fitting the overarching theme, "doing without news", the spectrum, finally, is one such example.

In the news space, traditional policy issues dominate. *Digital commons* is not associated with the FCC.

Conclusion:
Comparing the two maps, the commons are doing well (on the Web as well as in policy documents) without news.

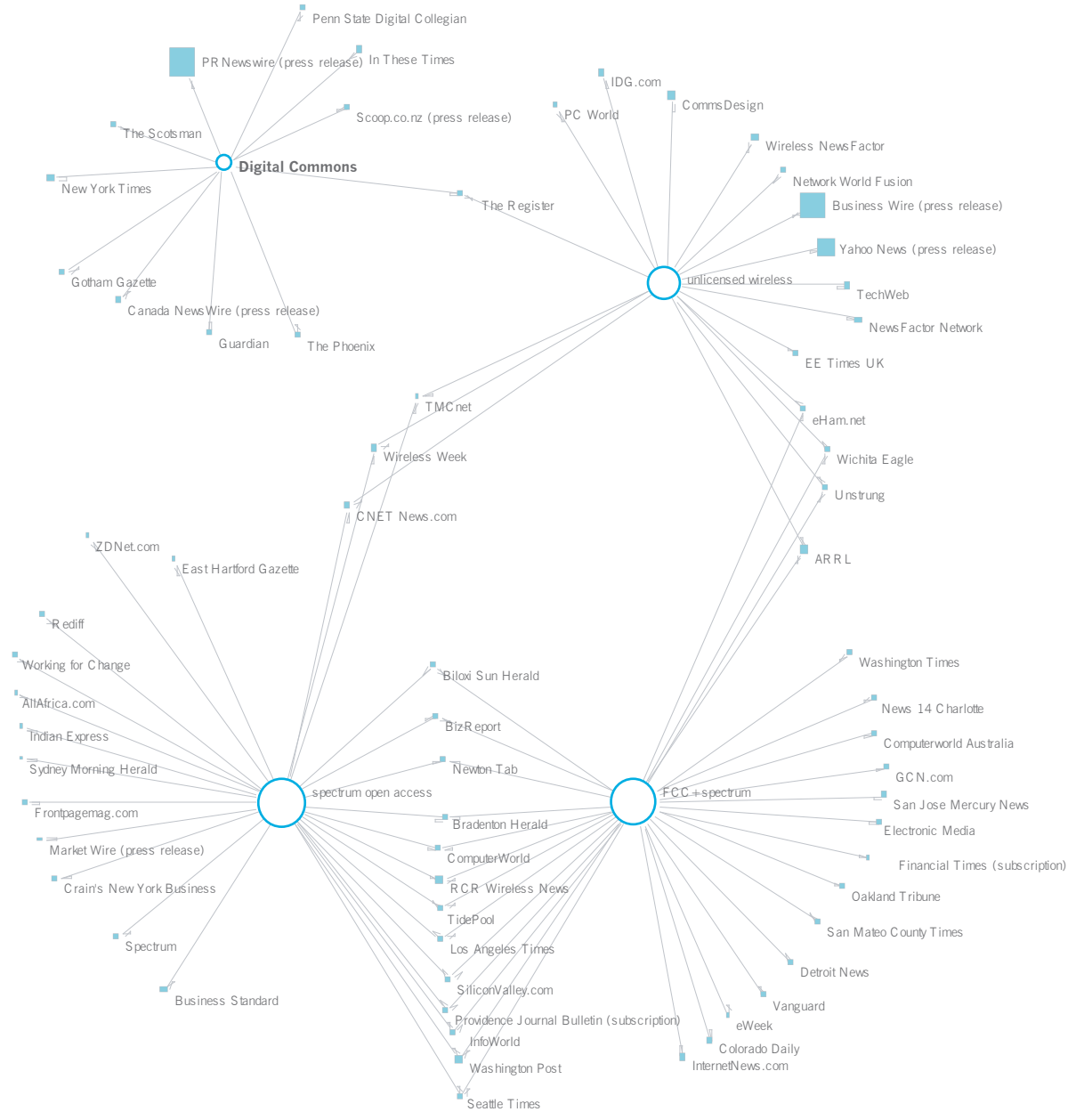


Figure fourteen. Spectrum in the news. Depiction of analysis of Google News, Spectrum + key words, 12 October – 12 November 2003.

7. North Korea (public and media attention permitting).

Not so long ago North Korea became the focus of U.S. media attention because of the threat its nuclear arms posed. Our questions concern how that threat, and overall issue of North Korea, are framed in the U.S. media space, as compared to a more international media space. We also are interested in the extent to which the U.S. framings are homogenous. (Thus our work also touches on the media concentration issue.) Is it always the same story or is it something else? Relatedly, what is the North Korea story outside of the U.S. media space? More generally, what other kinds of stories are possible, and where are they being told?

We queried Google News for North Korea + regime change, war, nuclear, axis of evil, reunification, human rights and famine. Visually, the map shows how the different news sources gather around and link those different key issues.

Introducing the map, we screened an animation from a significant site on the map, Frontpagemag.org. It is at the center of the map and makes an association between North Korea + regime change and North Korea + human rights. What is interesting is that the only other site which does so is the Whitehouse.gov site, in a press release. The animation is rather right-wing

Looking around the map at the pull text explaining the significant findings, we note that Fox News is one of a few outlets that connects war and regime change. (If you'd like to read about North Korea and regime change only, you have to take out a subscription to the *Financial Times*.) Only one source (CNN) is able to connect "famine" and "reunification," one of the more practical and meaningful associations between the issues of import on the peninsula.

Though most of the other "Stories from the Homeland" reflect the insularity of the American media and the American news space, the set of associations with North Korea does not entirely fit this picture. Contrary to our expectations and our fear to see media globalized with U.S. Formats and storylines, the American media space appears to be heterogeneous, but with certain limits.

That is, if you are reading and thinking about North Korea in terms of famine, reunification and human rights, and especially about stories that relate these terms you are probably not in the U.S.

APPENDIX

News about Networks Final Presentation Announcement

All-American Issues: Seven Stories from the Homeland

Friday, 14 November 2003
de Balie, Amsterdam
20u. (8pm)

17 Media advocates and academics

show infographics and a short video clip about Moveon.org

as they share their

Seven Stories from the Homeland --

1. Who doesn't believe in Bush Lies? (Fox News)
2. The Iraq War was inevitable. Exploring inevitability as a U.S. media format.
3. Trying to be less American (Ourmedianet.org).
4. Minority Media Ownership - Mobilizing the U.S. Constitution & the Census to 'own' media.
5. ICTs - What the rest of the world does.
6. Making the spectrum into a U.S. issue.
7. North Korea (time and attention permitting).

Presentations hosted by

Richard Rogers, Media Studies, University of Amsterdam
Noortje Marres, Philosophy, University of Amsterdam

with the News about Networks workshop special guests :

Johannes Bauer, Michigan State University (Spectrum)
Zachary O'Connor Devereaux, University of Alberta (North Korea)
Marieke van Dijk, Anderemedia.nl (Info-graphics)
Greg Elmer, Florida State University (Inevitability as format)
Richard Grusin, Wayne State University (Inevitability as format)
Don Hazen, Alternet.org (Bush lies)
Astrid Mager, University of Vienna (All stories)
Andrei Mogoutov, Aguidel.com (Analysis for all stories)
Mister Philips, Consumers Union (no stories)
Bart Preecs (aka Chuck Dill), Free TV 4 ever (Spectrum)
Kristin Shamas, Ourmedianet.org (Ourmedianet)
Catherine Somzé, Govcom.org (workshop producer)
Christine Stearn, Npower, New York (ICTs and the rest of the world)
Auke Touwslager, Anderemedia.nl (Info-graphics)
Andrés Zelman, Scientist (Ourmedianet textual analysis)

A co-production by de Balie, Center for Culture and Politics, Amsterdam
<http://www.debalie.nl/artikel.jsp?articleid=4473&podiumid=media>

and the Govcom.org Foundation, Amsterdam
<http://www.govcom.org>

More information on Govcom.org's workshop site:
<http://www.issueNetwork.org>

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