

From the Editor

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BY JOHN HATCHER*

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It's an honor to be the guest editor for this special, joint issue of *Grassroots Editor* and *Community Journalism*. These two journals represent the oldest (*Grassroots Editor* first published in 1960) and the newest (*Community Journalism* first published in 2012) periodicals devoted to the study of the complex dynamic that exists at the intersection of journalism and community.

When I was invited to oversee this project, it didn't take me long to think of the topic I wanted to be its focus: *International perspectives on community journalism*.

In many ways, this project is the answer to a question that I first asked three years ago. In fact, it's the answer to several questions.

In 2012, my colleague Bill Reader and I published *Foundations of Community Journalism*, a project we hoped would aggregate as much of the research that our authors could find on the topic of community journalism. I was tasked with exploring the international perspective of this endeavor. I learned that there was a dearth of research looking at community journalism in countries outside of the United States and a handful of other developed nations. The first question I asked was whether there were others out there studying the relationship between journalism and community in different cultural settings.

The answer — or at least the beginning of that answer — comes in this project: 14 authors from 8 nations presenting their analysis of community journalism in 10 countries.

The second question I asked came as a reaction to ideas that were dominating the research agenda of the time. Led by the important work of Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004), the prevailing theories were that globalization and technology were all but erasing any cultural distinctions in journalism. Media homogenization was sweeping across the globe like an invasive plant species, overwhelming any of the locally unique aspects of journalism. But, as is often the case, the research focus was

aimed at larger national and international media — overlooking local and hyperlocal media. I wondered: Were these forces having the same effect in the community media landscape?

The answers from the contributors of this journal suggest that, for a number of reasons, the global community journalism landscape may be much more complex. In the Philippines, inspired by the pioneering research of Crispin Maslog (1985, 1993), a team of scholars documents efforts to encourage a style of deliberative, civic journalism amidst the backdrop of challenging economics and a climate of violence against journalists. In developing nations in Africa and Central America, we learn in a collection of essays produced by Bill Reader and colleagues, that the lack of reliable internet access means that the cell phone coupled with community radio have allowed journalists to create a style of citizen journalism in which public officials are held accountable for social problems. In Australia, a country with a rich history of community journalism, scholars Kristy Hess and Lisa Waller provide a comprehensive summary of the community media landscape as they draw on critical-cultural theory to help us to see “community” as a powerful force that can have both negative and positive effects.

Of course, while you will find many answers in the articles that are part of this special issue, great scholarship always leaves us with new questions. And it is the hope of everyone who contributed to this project that this work will inspire others to take these ideas and move them forward, deepening our understanding of community journalism on a global scale.

In conclusion, I'd like to both thank and acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the two people who made this collaboration happen: Dr. Chad Stebbins, executive director of the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors headquartered at Missouri Southern State University; and Dr. Chip Stewart, editor of *Community Journalism* and an associate dean at Texas Christian University, home of the Texas Center for *Community Journalism*. Stewart and Stebbins work tirelessly to encourage research and work devoted to community journalism. And, while my work on this one-time endeavor is now complete, these two men are already thinking about the next issues of their journals.

Works Cited

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