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**POSITION, STATE OF DEVELOPMNET AND  
ROLE OF SEXUAL MINORITY MEDIA**

**HUNGARY, THE NETHERLANDS AND SLOVENIA**

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## **Introduction**

In present day European social scientific research, topics like prejudice, xenophobia and authoritarianism are of central importance, especially in the context of groups being ethnically and culturally different from the majority society. One of the main motivations of these research projects is to promote the delicate balance between the effective social integration and the maintenance – or in some cases the achievement – of a self-identity of groups or persons by revealing and analysing pre-existing or possible sources of social conflicts. Conducting social scientific research on sexual minority media can be seen as part of this broader research stream.

The main goal of my research project was to provide a comparative overview of the functioning of sexual minority media in three European countries: my home country, Hungary – where I have been conducting research on sexual minorities for some ten years – depicted as one of the most homophobic countries of the region in the early 1990s (cf. Inglehart et. al. 1996); the Netherlands, often perceived as being an exemplary society concerning social tolerance towards sexual minorities; and Slovenia, a model country of peaceful "post-transitional" modernisation in Central Europe.

Sexual minority media content is typically produced by sexual minority groups: mainly gays and lesbians. These minority groups usually share a common "mainstream media fate" with other relatively powerless – for example, ethnic – minority groups, which can be characterised by low visibility and stereotypical representation. Therefore sexual minority media products can be seen as means of creating a symbolic environments where people belonging to these groups can feel at home (cf. Gross 1991). It is also important to emphasise that the position of sexual minorities differs from that of "traditional" minorities in two aspects: they are usually not marked by their bodies – for example, by their skin colour –, thus they are not recognisable at first sight; and their existence challenges the "natural order of things", thus their media appearances can become problematic. Still, their media products can be perceived to be documents of, as well as tools for promoting the successful social integration of relatively powerless social groups, and – in some cases – struggling against social intolerance.

## **Hypothesis**

The anticipated differences in the functioning and in the roles of sexual minority media in the three chosen countries reflect different social perception – and acceptance – patterns of sexual minorities by their societies as well as by themselves. The history, the resource-management, and the main issues of these media products tell us a story of how certain - previously or presently - stigmatised social groups can create and use their media means to represent their interests. Here stigmatisation can be interpreted in general as a social symptom reflecting the rejection of the right to be different – not just sexually, but also by belonging to a different ethnic, religious, political etc. group. In this context my research can provide data to indicate the general "difference-tolerating" levels of the examined societies.

## **Applied methods**

After examining the pre-existing theoretical background and consulting the

international literature focusing on sexual minority media issues, I concentrated on sexual minority media products and their creators as well as the social environment of sexual minorities reflected by the legal system and the existing findings about social attitudes towards them.

The empirical part of my project was based on qualitative research, mainly interviewing and archive research. I have conducted interviews with individuals working – or who used to work – in sexual minority media production and representatives of organisations promoting the publication of these products. My intention was to find interviewees who can be characterised by a certain – preferably a high – level of active involvement in sexual minority production. Altogether 25 interviews were collected: 10 from Hungary, 6 from the Netherlands and 9 from Slovenia.<sup>1</sup> In Slovenia all of my interviews were conducted in person. In Hungary 3 interviews were conducted by telephone, 7 in person. I could conduct only one Dutch interview in person, the others were made via e-mail.

The main points of the interviews covered the social context and the history of sexual minority media of the given country, the description of their network of support and resource-management, their main goals and grievances. Archive research meant making use of local information centres – primarily the Dutch Homodok, and the home archive of the Hungarian *Mások* magazine – in order to describe the variety and the profile of sexual minority media products.

In Hungary and in Slovenia I was able to cover –almost –the whole scope of sexual minority media, while in the Netherlands I had to narrow down my focus mainly to the printed press (because of the relative abundance of sexual minority media products). In the Netherlands my main source of information included published and unpublished studies and other material (collected in the Homodok), and my interviewees provided me with additional, illustrative information. On the other hand, in the two other countries the interviewees – including almost all of the main actors of sexual minority media creation<sup>2</sup> – provided me with the substantial part of the necessary information. Consequently, qualitative data gained from my interviews can be seen as much more "representative" in the cases of Hungary and Slovenia, than in the case of the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Interviews were conducted with Tatjana Greif, Roman Kuhar, Bostjan Lajovic, Bogdan Lesnik, Ales Pecnik, Tadej Reissner, Natasa Sukic, Miran Sulinc, Suzana Tratnik (Slovenia); Péter Ambrus, Gábor Bencze, János Kerekes, Gyula Kroutil, László Láner, László Mocsonaki, Sándor Opopovszki, Balázs Pálfi, Judit Rózsa, Bea Sándor, Sándor Steigler, Gábor Szűcs, László Török (Hungary); Denis Bouwen, Remco van Dam, Adri van Esch, Gert Hekma, Christiaan Swart, Dennis van der Veur (the Netherlands). In fact, one of my "Dutch respondents" (Denis Bouwen) is actually Belgian, living in Antwerp and working for the Dutch *Gay Krant* as a free-lance contributor as well as being the editor-in-chief of the Flemish *Het Maagnet*. He also gave me insight into the state of development of sexual minority media in Belgium.

I would like to thank all the interviewees for their cooperation. I would also like to thank Judith Schuyf for her observations and advice.

2 During my Slovenian fieldwork I was not able to interview Brane Mozetic, one of the central figures of the Slovenian GLBT movement. However, he sent me an interview he gave to Kinoeye in 2001 which I was able to use (cf. Pozun 2001).

3 Here I use "representative" in the sense that in Hungary and in Slovenia I succeeded in gathering information personally from the main actors, while in the Netherlands I was able to attract the attention of only a few people with active (past or present) involvement in sexual minority media creation.

This difference in methodology can also indicate the different levels of sexual minority media infrastructure in the Netherlands on the one hand, and in the two other countries on the other hand. In the Netherlands there are already books<sup>4</sup> and studies written about this topic (though not too many), while in Hungary and in Slovenia there are very few – if any – publications available in this field.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that in the two *transitional* countries there are very few original publications available about homosexuality, the lives of gays and lesbians or the history of GLBT movements in general.<sup>6</sup>

As it will turn out from my findings, there are methodologically comparable findings gained from Hungary and Slovenia where my main points of references were my interviewees. The Netherlands was treated as a model: perhaps it is not a misinterpretation to see 'the Dutch example' as a possible future model for the other two countries.

## Findings

In this part of my paper I will present my findings gained from the comparison between the examined countries based on the analyses of their sexual minority media production. This examination also aims to reflect the different social situation of sexual minority groups and the ways how they articulate their interests, their rights to be achieved and oppose discriminative acts in their society.

This project is about sexual minority media. In order to be able to make relevant statements about the subject I had to start with examining the terminology, especially the meanings of the terms *sexual minority* and *sexual minority media*.

### • definition of sexual minority

Before starting my research, it seemed to be a smart idea to dedicate this project to *sexual minority* media research. Originally I chose to use the term sexual minority because of practical considerations: to reflect a – maybe very Hungarian – model of gay and lesbian activism which has as one of its main goals "to persuade authorities to define gays and lesbians as a minority group, and thus to ensure funding for their projects".<sup>7</sup> However, in the course of conducting my research sometimes I ran into difficulties with using this term. For some of my respondents sexual minority seemed to be an "empty term", not really being in use, for some others it seemed to have a too broad scope to include groups which should not be included (such as pedophiles). I am certain that everyone understood what I meant by sexual minorities as a typical reaction of my respondents was to say "do you mean gays and lesbian, don't you?". However, I could also sense differences in interpreting the possible meanings of sexual minority. For example, one Dutch respondent expressed a certain level of discontent: *this minority word implies ... powerlessness ... I'd rather speak about LGBT people or*

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Schedler et. al. (1989)

<sup>5</sup> In Hungary three articles can be mentioned: one was written about the Hungarian gay magazine *Mások*: (cf. Takács 1993), and two short ones were written by gay journalists (cf. Lánér 1997, Pálfi 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Among the few exceptions we can mention a Hungarian (cf. Tóth 1994) and a Slovenian book (cf. Kuhar 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Equality for Lesbians and Gay Men. A Relevant Issue in the EU Accession Process. A Report by ILGA-Europe, Brussels 2001. Chapter 5: Hungary (by Bea Sándor). p.34.

*community (DV, NL). 8*

In general we can say that sexual minority groups or sexual minorities were decoded in the interviews as *holebi* (in Dutch: homo's, lesbiennes, biseksuelen) or in Slovenia as *Le-ge-bi-tra* (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender) or in Hungary as MLBT (GLBT). However, there were some more inclusive – all-inclusive? – definitions given, too:

*Everyone who engages in sexual practices of the minority. Assuming that the masses go up and down in heterosexual pairs, than this includes anybody who does not do that: transsexuals, homosexuals, sadomasochists, partner swapping, fetishers, pedophiles, etc. (RD, NL)*

*Anyone who does not conform to the traditions of how people should behave sexually, so, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, maybe very unorthodox heterosexuals, why not? (AP, SI)*

*Anyone who might be oppressed by the sexual 'moral' majority. (CS, NL)*

Difficulties to define the term sexual minority seemed to have different sources in the Netherlands and in the two other countries. In fact, in the Netherlands the use of sexual minority (*sexuele minderheid* – in Dutch) does not seem to make too much sense. Minority can be seen as a useful – political – concept in a society or in a phase of socio-cultural, historical development when/where non-conventional sexual interests have discriminative consequences. In places where normative heterosexuality is losing its social organising power sexual habits, interests, orientation based identities are not forced to develop, or at least not likely to develop into *threatened identities*.

Here we can refer to theories of social identity and social representation as the broader framework of analysis. These theories emphasise the social constructedness of social reality, which is represented by social representations constructed in social interaction processes (cf. Moscovici 1976). The common sense content of social representations reflect the ways in which individuals and groups interpret reality, and these reality interpretations serve as a base for building up individual and group identities. The interaction of social representations and identities is a central feature of Breakwell's theory on identity processes: in order to understand identity threats – hindering the effective functioning of identity processes – and strategies applied to cope with these threats it is necessary to examine social representations (being synonymous with social beliefs and social attributions). Breakwell emphasised the importance of those factors which can endanger the basic principles of identity processes (i.e. assimilation-accommodation and evaluation). Therefore in the case of developing threatened identities the distinctiveness and the continuity of one's identity, one's self-esteem or in some cases one's desire for autonomy can be threatened (cf. Breakwell 1986:23).

If we interpreted, for example, same-sex desire or non-conventional sexuality as possible bases for developing threatened identities, the social representation of homosexuality plays a very important part in this process. From previous research findings it turns out that the social category of homosexuality gains its identity constructing capacity mainly from the negative contents of the social representation of homosexuality, which negative contents appear as identity threats (cf. Takács 2002).

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8 When quoting from interviews the first letters refer to the initials of the respondent, followed by a country indicator: SI or NL or HU.

In this context homosexual identity seems to be much more a social fiction produced by social discrimination than one of the main supporting pillars of individual self-identity.

In comparison with the Netherlands, Slovenia and Hungary can be characterised by more threats to cope with when realising one's non-conventional sexuality. Therefore in these places the political concept of minority can be applied when trying to create a more tolerant, identity threat free social environment for people with same-sex or non-conventional sexual desires and experiences, developing – sometimes changing or fluid – identities based on these desires and experiences.

Though my Slovenian and Hungarian respondents realised that the term minorities usually referred to ethnic or national minorities in their countries, they also recognised the equal rights opportunities and anti-discriminative guarantees that can be gained by applying the minority concept to gays, lesbians, and other non-heterosexuals. However, the usage of the minority concept has several disadvantages, too. It does not only imply the acknowledgement of the relative powerlessness of the social group in question but it also has to operate with fixed – identity – categories (as if anyone could come up with "the correct" definition of being gay, lesbian, transgender etc.).

Let's have a look at some examples reflecting the ambiguity of using the minority term (and concept):

*... did you notice, when you speak about minorities, usually it's about ethnic minorities. In some countries, in Hungary and also around Hungary, there are programmes for minorities or minority councils. They never include a gay or lesbian person or a disabled person. It would be interesting to extend it much more, to other minorities, I feel, and to learn from each other. (DV, NL)*

*It is always hard to define who belongs to a sexual minority. Usually we are talking about gays and lesbians, but then there are bisexuals as well, and transsexuals and transvestites. Transvestites are often not considered a sexual minority. ... It is always the question where to set a border. Now we are living in times of fluid identities. ... we have an Ombudsman and he considers gays and lesbians as a minority which should be protected. ... (RK, SI)*

*Well, sexual minority when I first heard it, it was a bit funny. Here in Yugoslavia we are always talking about national minorities, like in Slovenia there is an Italian or a Hungarian national minority... and I think, sexual minority is something else, something more flexible and it is also a very broad term. For me it is gays and lesbians and transsexuals and transgender persons and even women can sometimes be a sexual minority (ST, SI)*

*We are hoping that it [sexual orientation] will be included [in the antidiscrimination policy] after all. But this is simply so embarrassing for them [the policy makers]. It is very easy to write down that minority refers to national and ethnic minorities in general. Nowadays age and disability start to appear too – but sexual orientation only very rarely ... It is very hard to define who counts as a sexual minority. But it exists here after all. Because here this sexual identity issue is not really challenged, not like in Western-Europe in the 1960s, 70s ... in certain ways this identification thing happens now: that we are gay and we have to come out, that we should become visible*

... (SB, HU)

*After the system change in Hungary a minority law was created which listed exactly who should be counted as minority. From this time on it became the norm. But it excluded not only sexual minorities but also a lot of other minority groups ... From this aspect sexual minorities are in a strange position because they are not too often mentioned at all, and if they are mentioned, it is done in a discriminative way. ... people having or struggling for or wanting to do something with gay identities or non-heterosexual identities belong to this group. Also bisexuals, though we don't speak about them too much – and transgender, transsexual people, transvestites and people with changing identities, too. Their social visibility is very relative – relative to that of homosexual men. This used to be the case with lesbians, too, but nowadays they are starting to present themselves as an independent entity. (PB, HU)*

Interestingly, the point that some sort of normative framework was formed within sexual minorities was echoed in a different way by another Hungarian respondent:

*The question is ... how to define what healthy means and what illness is. And from this point on the category of illness is distanced from us. ... we do the same as society in general. There is this sexual minority, a GLBT community –but it is not a coincidence that we do not use this sexual minority too often because it brings up problems with definition: because what should we do with the 'bad ones', with pedophiles or whoever, people having sex with dead ones. Thus we rather use GLBT community. (ML, HU)*

At this point I have to admit that there are several problems with using the sexual minority terminology. This term reflects a practical political strategy to gain equal rights and – at least temporary – shelter from discrimination, and naturally it makes more sense in a social context where there are still a lot of things to fight for. Thus it is probably not a coincidence that the sexual minority concept was most often referred to in Hungary where the anti-discrimination policy makers are still not sure whether to include explicitly the forbidding of sexual orientation based discrimination into the new law (and where the discriminative age of consent for homosexual relationships was abolished only in September 2002). The minority concept still makes sense, though not very often used, in Slovenia where the antidiscrimination policy exists – at least on paper, as some of my Slovenian respondents pointed out with discontent – and explicitly includes sexual orientation. However, for example, there are no legal frameworks for same-sex cohabitation. Probably for Dutch people the term sexual minority sounds quite strange – and perhaps a bit empty – because it is lacking the political connotations that Hungarians and Slovenians are still quite familiar with.

#### • **definition of sexual minority media**

The first question of my interviews was about the definition of sexual minority media. I was interested in the aspects that make this media different from other type of media. Though the definition of sexual minority raised quite a few theoretical problems – as we could see, – here the answers referred to actual media products and practical experiences.

The most typical answer for this question was that sexual minority media is made for and by members of sexual minorities.

*There is definitely a difference between mainstream programmes that pay attention to gay and lesbian issues and separate LGBT sexual minority media ... made by and for gay and lesbian people. ... It is important because it is good to look through the eyes of a gay person, or a lesbian person, how we observe the world around us. (DV, NL)*

*We are dealing strictly with the question of social exclusion, in connection with sexual minorities, especially about GLBT population in all senses. So it means we are dealing with political aspects, social aspects, and with cultural aspects of the GLBT population in general and also we are dealing with some other deprived groups. We are very well connected with disabled people in Slovenia and with others, so we are also dealing with refugee questions sometimes, but in the main we are focussed especially on GLBT issues. ... I believe it is important [that gays and lesbians create it], because we have experience on a daily basis, so it means we know what discrimination is like in every day life. (NS, SI)*

*It focuses on issues connected to this existing group which cannot really be defined ... it is not an essential thing who makes it, but it is characteristic that it is more important for us (SB, HU)*

Most respondents pointed out the importance of sexual minority media being created by sexual minorities not only because of their special perspective but also because of the special language they have to use:

*It is a special language we use. We have a special lifestyle, and only we know what our needs are. We have special jokes. (MS, SI)*

On the other hand, different opinions were also expressed in connection to media creators:

*It is not a necessity that only GLBT people can make GLBT media. What is important is being able to identify with them, to understand their situation. Of course, it helps if you are gay, but on the other hand I don't think that just because you are gay you are able to create good quality gay media. (ML, HU)*

*... when you write from a gay or lesbian or feminist standpoint, you have a localised knowledge and you write from within. According to my experience, it is mainly gay and lesbian people, but there were always some straight people who had some important contributions, who wanted to say something, then if it is a good issue, of course, it is good, because it also brings some diversity into perspective. (ST, SI)*

Some respondents also emphasised that sexual minority media should have a broader target group than "only" GLBT audiences:

*It is not good if it is only for gays and lesbians, it should be open, much more open – that was one of my motives that we should treat gay people as any other type of people so they should have an opportunity to express their opinions on the national radio, and also I don't believe that it should be very narrow, they should be open, they should talk about everything, about sports, music, anything. (BLa, SI)*

*Obviously it was to make a quality type of magazine or journal, that would bring the relevant topics for gays and lesbians as well as for other people. It (Revolver) did*

*target the general audience as well. I am not sure that it can be seen in it, but the idea was that it should be one of the cultural journals that was available at the time. So it was not targeting only the gay and lesbian audience although it did have almost exclusively gay and lesbian teams. (BLe, SI)*

*For me this is a symbolic space where, by assuming one's own identity one can communicate with people who are interested, irrespective of their sexual identity. For me it is very important that I am making my programme not only for gays but also for straights, for the majority members of society. In my view, it is a very important function of gay media to integrate gays into society instead of building up walls of ghettos. (PB, HU)*

In summary, if we want to define sexual minority media in general then it seems to be an important expectation concerning the creators and the target group that they belong to sexual minorities. In specific cases definitions can vary. For example, a Slovenian respondent described their paper in the following way:

*We do take care that each issue can be shown to parents. Not to say that it is sterile (but parentproof?) Yes, that's a very good word. But we do not specifically target parents even though we do sometimes ask parents to write about their experiences as a parent of a gay person. Our prototype target person is a teenage boy or girl who is still coming to terms with his or her sexuality... (TR, SI)*

According to a Hungarian respondent: *A magazine cannot do everything, an organisation can do more. But if there is a gay or lesbian magazine that is for gays or lesbians, then we shouldn't expect it to target other publics [like the general public]. (SB, HU).*

From my findings it also turned out that while respondents speak in general about gay and lesbian, or GLBT media, in practice – especially when examining the printed press – gays and lesbians seem to prefer establishing their own specialised media. At present in the three countries I could find only one publication (the *Legebitrina Oznanila* in Slovenia) that was for mixed audiences. Specialisation can be seen as an indicator of development. In the Netherlands most printed GLBT media products are specialised. In Slovenia there is one mixed publication and one mainly lesbian magazine. In Hungary the only gay magazine targeted lesbians, too when it started, but it has now become – according to its editors – "98% gay". However, for example, the Slovenian *Revolver* was founded and produced by gays and lesbians together. One of the founders of *Revolver* explained it in the following way:

*This is mainly done, when it has been done, for practical reasons. Because it is obviously easier to make one magazine than two. This was only a practical matter which lasted as long as *Revolver* lasted. Immediately afterwards, or even before *Revolver* stopped coming out, *Lesbo* was founded, an exclusively lesbian journal, and on the other hand *Kekec*, which was a kind of newspaper for young gays, they were exclusive. This has practical reasons, gays and lesbians together, as well as of course, political, because you can then somehow concentrate on addressing the authorities together. (BLe, SI)*

- **main functions of sexual minority media**

Functions of media products can vary according to their specific goals, missions, target groups and creators as well as their social contexts. As one of my Slovenian respondents emphasised:

*I do not think there is a list of tasks the media should fulfil, I think this question should be asked analytically, in the sense that, for example: 'how was it in this case?', because in general I do not think anything is necessary. ... We can say that it depends on the actual situation in a country or a place, legal and social situation, attitudes towards homosexuality. ... It obviously has a different function when a community is growing, than when it is already well established. When it is already well established it has a more commercial function. Also ideologically it produces something: styles, values, etc. (BLe, SI)*

Probably the most "stable" function of sexual minority media is the information function. It is stable in the sense that the importance of this function seems to be independent from changing socio-cultural contexts. While the importance of other functions – such as community building, helping people in their coming out process or entertaining them – can change according to the changing social environment.

If we look through the answers given about the main functions of sexual minority media we can sense difference between the "western" and "non-western" approaches. First, let's have a look at some Dutch answers, where the scope of sexual minority media is more extended, including issues of activism or emancipation as well as those of entertainment and promoting certain lifestyles and – even artistic – trends:

*Informing about developments in the gay community, both concerning news (politics, health, culture, religion and such) and lifestyle (fashion, products, trends). (AE, NL)*

*Functions: distribution of information on emancipation matters, associative life, opportunities for going out, GLBT festivals, enhancing political and social awareness  
Future: I am afraid that, as gays and lesbians get more and more emancipated, the emphasis in their media (if they continue to exist) will shift to entertainment and lifestyle (an evolution which I would deplore but, hey, who am I? ...) (DB, NL-B)*

*The first thing that comes to my mind about the function is basically for young people who are in the process of coming out to get more or less objective information from sexual minority media themselves to form their opinion, to identify. ... That is what I see a lot around me. There are so many examples in countries where there is no positive identification, role models and so on. The other thing is ... mainstreaming LGBT from sexual minority media in terms of making people acquainted with what is going on in our circles. ... To be honest, most media is about fun, entertainment, sex, love, drugs, rock and roll. Of course, in our magazine, which was XL, and now there will be another one, there will be attention for activism, because it is basically our own work to promote it. (DV, NL)*

*To spread gay info and produce gay visibility-producing relevant specific info, building group identity (and criticising this), entertain. Info on anything from movement and politics to recreation, sex and health. ... In the future it could be more about pleasure, art and style than about politics and movement. (GH, NL)*

In Slovenia and in Hungary we can find the dissemination of information, the promotion of – both individual and group – identity formation as well as community building among the most important functions:<sup>9</sup>

*To promote the self-respect of gays. To see this in its natural way, in its beauty, not as being immoral, or a queer oddity, a curiosity. (LL, HU – gay magazine)*

*The most important function is to inform ... and the community organising force (SS, HU – internet portal)*

*When I was able to accept myself, I thought that I should let other people know about that feeling, too. The primary function is to help people to accept themselves. Beside this: to spread information that cannot be gained in other places. It is also important to introduce life models, because socialisation is not about how to live as a gay. For this reason we try to invite gay couples. ... Our goal is to demolish stereotypical approaches. Thus we try to provide information about everyday people, for example, about a gay couple, about feelings, not just about sex. ... If they get a bit closer, it is easier to understand the situation. (SZG, HU – internet radio)*

*Within the community it has a great self-assuring function: providing a positive image of the self – not illness, not crime. (ML, HU – GLBT organisation)*

*For people from the countryside it is important that they get something each month that makes them feel that they belong somewhere ... programme offers ... consciousness raising by making propaganda for conscious lesbianism and feminism (RJ, HU – lesbian newsletter)*

*It has a kind of bridging function: trying to help gays to come out and let straight people know that gays are the same people as they are. (AP, HU – community radio)*

*To have a dialogue, to promote social integration and the acceptance or social embeddedness of gayness or homosexuality. (PB, HU – public radio)*

*The mission is to disseminate information which is very useful for GLBT people, and for people in general, the mission is to analyse our situation, the mission is consciousness raising of GLBT people, the mission is GLBT visibility in wider society. We can also mention the promotion of positive role models, exposing stereotypes, and combating discrimination, these are all interconnected. (NS, SI – lesbian magazine)*

*The main function is that they should keep telling to the so-called normal people that they exist. Normal people should know every day from different media, they should get the message: we are here, we are people like you are so we should live together (BLA, SI – public radio)*

*To help them to be part of the community. ... To find a gay identity, to help them to socialise, to contribute to the common objectives. (MR, SI – former gay magazine)*

*I think the most important function is spreading information because when we give this magazine to women for a lot of them this is the way to find out what's going on.*

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<sup>9</sup> In this section I also indicated the type of media product.

*Because they are not there, or they don't live here (in Ljubljana) or they are not activists. The other thing is to build a sense of community somehow, a lesbian community. It is also important for consciousness raising because you see there is something written, it is material, it is history, it is important ... To see that there is a diversity of lesbians, there are many ways to be lesbian, that lesbians are everywhere (ST, SI – lesbian magazine)*

*I think a very important element is informing the people who have not yet come out of the closet. That's a very important thing and any newspaper needs to have a section dedicated to these people. ... I am convinced, in the more remote areas away from the big cities people are still not using the internet enough. So we need to reach out to these people through a gay newspaper and that is definitely one function. The other obvious function is to inform the gay community of events taking place and also to provide an avenue for members of the gay community to communicate between each other directly or indirectly through the media. Basically connecting various parts of the gay community with the interested public. (TR, SI – GLBT youth newspaper)*

*The mission is to provide the target population and the general population in Slovenia as well with information. Additionally we must address consciousness raising, promotion of human rights, equal rights, equal opportunities, LGBT culture, art, everything which is connected with the status of the LGBT population in the given country. ... and promotion of equal rights and equal opportunities for gay and lesbian people who mostly think that it is their own fault that they are being discriminated, but it is not, society is responsible as such. (TG, SI – lesbian magazine)*

- **activism**

From the findings it is quite clear that there is a strong connection between GLBT activism and sexual minority media production, though this connection seems to be stronger in Slovenia and Hungary than in the Netherlands. This difference can be explained mainly by the different social contexts (which will be examined in detail later) and consequently the different life strategies of GLBT people in the three countries. Activism can provide the background for sexual minority media production: "While many groups and interests are ignored or distorted in the media, not all have the same options for resistance. The opportunities for opposition are greatest when there is a visible and organised group that can provide solidarity and institutional support for the production and distribution of alternative messages." (Gross 2001:19).

Several years ago I wrote a study about the role of gay media in articulating the social expectations of homosexual communities (cf. Takács 1994), in which I compared the Dutch and the Hungarian situations. As I saw it, in the Netherlands homosexuality was not approached as a social problem to be "solved", therefore activists could pay more attention to specific issues such as same-sex marriage and adoption, instead of focusing on media creation. On the other hand, in Hungary, homosexuality as an issue presented in the general political arena was quite unthinkable so media creation as a mobilising force seemed to be an important target. In the article I emphasised the possible interaction between media in general and the meaning management of the socio-political issue of homosexuality. On the one hand, there are social groups concerned with the formation of a socio-political issue (in our case the 'homosexuality issue' i.e. introducing the problems of homosexual people into the political agenda), on the other hand there are media – both competing for the attention of society. Media can

mobilise messages, but they can also control the meanings by suggesting priorities for the general public as well as for politicians (cf. McQuail 1987). Unfortunately, in a lot of cases mass media are unable to mediate the special needs and claims of GLBT people (cf. Pierce 1973), therefore special media segments must be created by the concerned groups in order to provide their constituencies with positive reference points for identity formation. The main issue of gay media politics was, and still is in a lot of places, whether these social groups are able to undo the rigid framework of the normality concept in their society and make or claim space for themselves in social reality.

On the basis of the present findings we can state that GLBT activism still plays an important role in several sexual minority media organs. Though in the Netherlands it has somewhat become a thing of the past:

*In general they play an important role in terms of identity, information and contacts. I do fear that there is hardly any GLBT youth activism left in this country (the Netherlands) unless they are obscure squatters' groups. In these the media only have a minimal role. Youth is more focused on going out, sex and fashion (I fear). I get this impression when I look at ExpressZo. (RD, NL)*

*These media can strongly enhance the togetherness of GLBT groups and support the movement in its struggle. I must admit, quite recently I started to doubt about the 'reality' of a (true) gay and lesbian community. Maybe it's more of an ideal than a hard fact. Parts of the GLBT media seem to want to forget about equal opportunities and focus on life-style, having a good time, going out etc. (also to get more advertising income, for example). (DB, NL-B)*

*If you are an activist, you speak up, and out. If you are an activist, you are keen to spread your word. Naturally alternative or minority media are always instigated by activists, who can also 'make things happen'. If this is generally true, then it must also be so for GLBT. I suspect it is. (CS, NL)*

Interestingly, the same phenomenon – i.e. becoming less activism oriented – can be discerned in the course of Mások's, the Hungarian gay magazine's 12 year history:

*At the beginning we really had to come up for our own interests ... in each situation we had to find lawyers or journalists who could help ... we had to issue appeals to the Constitutional Court against discriminatory laws ... we had to organise events to be able to write about them ... but today we have experts for almost everything, for example, we have specialised organisations providing legal aid ... the situation is now more comfortable as we can report on events without having to organise them first ... at the beginning it was an activist's journal, rough, confronting, and militant – but who needs this nowadays? So Mások became a more readable, more entertaining magazine with short stories and amusement. Well, it is entertaining – but the market rule dictates that (LL & BG, HU)*

In contrast, in present day Slovenian sexual minority media GLBT activism is still a significant – if not the most significant – motivating force.

It is also interesting to observe the predictions about the future. According to some respondents, both in Slovenia and in Hungary, the ideal end game would be that sexual

minority media would no longer be necessary as an autonomous entity, the mainstream media would encompass the various sexual minority media products, thus nullifying the distinction between sexual minorities and the majority:

*It would be ideal, if at one point it would not be necessary to have separate gay media but it would become a part of media ... these separate media islands are there because otherwise who the hell would talk about these things (ML, HU)*

*My wish is for my radio programme to be finished. (SZG, HU)*

*In an ideal case, it would not have any functions. It should not exist. Or it would exist only to the extent that homosexuality is perceived as a problem in a country or region. (PB, HU)*

*I guess the informative function will stay the same. Coming out and identity problems will remain, unless we are talking about the future maybe one hundred years from now when perhaps it will not matter whether you are gay or hetero or these sexual identities will be pretty much irrelevant. (Are you hoping for that?) I am fighting for that. I think the main goal is reducing the importance of whether you are gay or straight. (RK, SI)*

#### • evaluation of the situation of sexual minorities

In order to evaluate the situation of sexual minorities in a country we have to take several – social, cultural, legal etc. – factors into consideration. Here I will focus on the legal factors – including laws covering sexual activity, anti-discriminatory legislation and partnership recognition –, the history of the GLBT movement and, of course, the views of my respondents.

This is probably the best point to see why I like to refer to the Netherlands as a model country. In the Netherlands there are no anti-gay or anti-lesbian provisions in the Penal Code. The age of consent is 16 years for heterosexual as well as for same-sex relationships. Though it is not explicitly mentioned in the Dutch constitution, sexual orientation is covered under Article 1 of the Constitution. In 1983 the previous constitution, which was in operation from 1815, was replaced by a new one. According to Article 1 of the new Constitution: "*All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or any grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted.*" where "any grounds whatsoever" includes sexual orientation, too (cf. Waaaldijk 1987). The General Equal Treatment Act has been in force since 1994 prohibiting discrimination on grounds of their race, religion, personal beliefs, their sex or their hetero- or homosexual orientation, and defining it as an offence against public order.<sup>10</sup> Dutch laws enabling same-sex partners to marry and adopt children have been in operation since April 1, 2001.

In the Netherlands the first decriminalisation of homosexuality – i.e. abolishing laws penalising sodomy – occurred in 1811 (cf. Tielman 1982). Sexual acts between consenting adults of the same-sex were allowed until 1940 when, with the start of the German occupation, all sexual conducts between men became illegal again. In the

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. <http://ruljis.leidenuniv.nl/user/cwaaldijk/www/NHR/tranl-anti-discr.htm>

meanwhile between 1911 and 1940 homosexual contacts between adults and minors (people younger than 21) were penalised again. This criminalisation of same-sex relationships affected both men and women (cf. Schuyf 1987). Finally, in 1971, homosexuality was decriminalised, when it became "generally accepted that homosexual 'seduction' was not possible after the age of 16" (Tielman 1987:13).

The Dutch Scientific Humanitarian Committee (NWHK), the first organisation in the Netherlands dedicated to accomplishing political and social equality for homosexual men and women, was founded in 1911. The first – homosexuality oriented – periodical *Levensrecht* (Right to Live) was established just before the second world war. In 1946 the editors of this periodical became the founding members of the Cultural and Recreational Centre, the COC, which became the national Dutch organisation fighting against the social oppression of homosexuality (cf. Tielman 1987). In 1971 the first "separatist lesbian movement", the short lived Lavender September was established (cf. Schuyf 1987). From 1973 COC is officially recognised and subsidised by the Dutch state. From 1977 centres for the study of homosexuality appeared in Dutch universities.

To explain these quite unique developments I would like to refer to two factors. The first one is a scientific one: it seems that in Dutch research on homosexuality there was more attention paid to the social reaction to homosexuality (discrimination) than to homosexuality itself. In the Netherlands from the late 1970's scientific approaches "began shifting from homosexuality as a sexual deviation to homosexuality as an expression of sexuality which, to a greater or lesser extent, has socially discriminating consequences" (Naerssen 1987). Dutch researchers of homosexuality, from the very beginning, focused more on "the causes of, and the possible ways to change discrimination", than on, for example, subcultural lifestyles. The second factor is a social one: it seems that "pillarization",<sup>11</sup> the unique development pattern of Dutch society, provided a special tolerant environment, not only for people with different religious and cultural backgrounds, but also for people with "non-conventional" sexual interests. As a Dutch researcher pointed out: "The integration of homosexuals into Dutch society has been facilitated by the fact that Dutch society is subdivided into a relatively large number of political and religious groups, divisions, which can be encountered in all fields of public life." (Naerssen 1987:4).

In Slovenia homosexual acts between consenting adults already became decriminalised during "Yugoslav times", in 1976. The age of consent is the same for heterosexual and same-sex relationships (14 years). The Slovenian constitution prohibits discrimination grounded on sexual orientation only implicitly: under the heading of "other personal circumstances". However, there is anti-discriminatory legislation explicitly referring to sexual orientation (Article 141 of the Slovenian Penal Code).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, there is no legal framework established for same-sex cohabitation or partnership.

Slovenia was the first country in the "non-western" part of Europe to see, in 1984, the

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<sup>11</sup> "pillarization" (verzuiling) = "the splitting up of society into socially separated denominational sectors, each taking care of his own social, state-subsidised provisions (education, mass media, hospitals, housing, and so forth). This pillarization profoundly affected Dutch society in such a way that socio-political majorities could subsequently exist only through coalition of minorities, all of which wanted to be as autonomous as possible." (Tielman 1987:10)

<sup>12</sup> Equality for Lesbians and Gay Men. A Relevant Issue in the EU Accession Process. A Report by ILGA-Europe, Brussels 2001. Chapter 12: Slovenia (by Tatjana Greif) p.69.

establishment of a homosexual organisation, Magnus. In 1988 LL (Lesbian Lilit) the first Slovenian lesbian organisation was founded.<sup>13</sup> Gayzine, the first gay media publication, appeared as early as 1985. Revolver, the most influential gay and lesbian magazine of the region, was published between 1990 and 1997.

In Hungary homosexual acts between consenting adults became decriminalised in 1961, but a discriminative legal differentiation between the ages of consent in heterosexual and same-sex relationships remained in operation until September, 2002. There is no general anti-discrimination policy in Hungary defending people from sexual orientation based discrimination. Though Hungary has national laws prohibiting discrimination, such as the Constitution, the Law of Labour, and the Law of Health Care, only the latter explicitly prohibits sexual orientation-based discrimination. In all other cases, the question whether sexual orientation is included under the heading "other situations" – usually ending the list of discriminatory forms based on "race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, circumstances of wealth and birth",<sup>14</sup> – is a matter for interpretation. Same-sex partnership has been legalised since 1996 (though it is closer to "common law marriage" than to registered partnership): "It is a factual legal relationship, which comes into existence without official registration; thus it has underlying problems of proof".<sup>15</sup>

The first Hungarian homosexual organisation (Homeros) was established in 1988. The first independent lesbian organisation, Labrisz was founded in 1999. In 1989 the first unofficial issue of the only Hungarian gay magazine, Mások came out, which was followed by the official establishment of the magazine in 1991.

If we compare how the different respondents evaluate the situation of sexual minorities in their country, we can see that the Dutch answers reflect a much more developed situation than the others. The Dutch seem to be content with their achievements, though they can also sense certain lack of acceptance. As one Dutch respondent pointed out: *it is still a straight culture where gays and sexual minorities are tolerated, but not a full-fledged ["volwaardig"= full-fledged, proper, legitimate] part of societal functioning (GH, NL)*. At the same time some might also agree with one opinion according to which they are "spoilt in a way". Certainly, they have to face different problems than Slovenians and Hungarians: such as dealing with the attitudes of immigrants.

*Quite satisfactory. On a legal basis all is as good as done. Yet there are still negative excesses, for example in secondary schools and in the churches. ... The Netherlands is the first country in the world to have opened civil marriage to couples of the same gender. There is extensive anti-discrimination legislation. ... Homosexuality is a great problem among ethnic immigrants and their descendants. A good and constant dialogue must be established between ethnic and gay organisations. (AE, NL)*

*For homosexuals, it is not ideal, but O.K. It is harder for transsexuals, harder still for pedophiles. (RD, NL)*

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<sup>13</sup> History of Gay and Lesbian Movement in Slovenia cf. Slovenian Queer Resources Directory. [http://www.kud\\_fp.si/siqrd/history.php](http://www.kud_fp.si/siqrd/history.php)

<sup>14</sup> Hungarian Constitution, 70/A §

<sup>15</sup> Equality for Lesbians and Gay Men. A Relevant Issue in the EU Accession Process. A Report by ILGA-Europe, Brussels 2001. Chapter 5: Hungary (by Bea Sándor). p.30.

*Problematic. ... [positive things:] Legal near-equality (opening marriage for gays and lesbians, no specific mention of homosexuality in criminal law etc.). Equal rights is not the same as equal access to public space that remains defined by straight. [negative things:] The level of social discrimination and violence. This discrimination should be targeted by the relevant authorities (schools, police, cities etc.). They are slow to enhance the visibility and safety of sexual minority groups. (GH, NL)*

*Usually it is not a big issue. My neighbours in Amsterdam know that I am gay, that I live with my boyfriend, it is not really an issue, it is not a problem. But it easily leads to indifference in a way and of course, it is different when you live in the countryside. ... Dutch people I think, are sometimes a little bit proud that we have a very high profile on gay and lesbian issues. Whenever I work with Dutch embassies abroad, they are always extremely helpful to help me in my work. And they are even used sometimes as a way to distinguish themselves as embassies from other embassies. ... And that is really the biggest difference I see with any other embassy, there are no other countries that dare to take a high profile with this. But that does say something, because they do represent the whole Dutch society. ... What we certainly miss in gay and lesbian circles, we take things for granted, we are spoilt in a way. (DV, NL)*

*The situation is quite good at the moment, I would say. Gay and lesbian couples can enter into an officially registered partnership. Their legal position when it comes to inheritance taxes etc. was improved (less discriminatory treatment vis-à-vis straight married couples). Belgium's federal government promised to open marriage to homosexual couples, but changing the law has been stalled because of some opposition or, better, manoeuvres to delay this change. It will come soon, I guess (probably in 2003, before the next national elections). Awareness is bigger in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. ... In general gays and lesbians are quite well accepted by large parts of the population. ... Obviously there will always be a group of people that don't like 'us' very much. Marriage has still to be opened. Political opinions on allowing homosexual couples to adopt children can be quite different (no consensus in the federal - Belgian - government at the moment). An extreme right-wing party as the Vlaams Blok [Flemish Block] doesn't like homosexuals too much and opposes full equality. Homosexuality also remains a controversial topic in parts of the (Islamic immigrant) community and for conservative Catholics/Christians. (DB, in this case referring only to Belgium)*

Slovenian and Hungarian answers reflect more discontent concerning especially the level of GLBT emancipation. However, their perception of the situation is not completely negative. Let's have a look at some Slovenian views first:

*On the positive, the legislation is quite O.K. The problem is that this legislation is a dead letter on paper. For example, when we had outbursts of intolerance, hatespeech and so on, we tried to prosecute someone for it and it was decided by the Prosecutor General that it was not a crime, that hatespeech itself was not a crime. (AP, SI)*

*... in theory they are treated equally but in practise they are not. ... Legal discrimination we cannot talk about, but social discrimination is quite rampant. If you ask normal Slovenes if they want to have a neighbour who is gay they would say no! I believe that Slovenian people are quite homophobic ... the Catholic church, they have a big influence on public opinion in connection with issues like prostitution, sexual*

minorities etc. ... The good thing is the legal system which is equal for everybody. The bad things are that they are not so active, not so visible. They should really grab their opportunity, they should start working. (BLa, SI)

We are still not visible enough. Things are changing and this year we made a big step forward, but we are still too invisible. ... There is still a lot of work to do. They are ignoring us. ... You can translate this as hate silence. Small town mentality. ... We don't have a well-organised infrastructure. (MS, SI)

The bad thing is, we are constantly repeating it, that Slovenia is a small country, two million people in total. So there is a small gay and lesbian community. That's one part. ... It is not common to get a lot of support from the masses. So in that sense it was quite a wonder that we already had two Gay Prides. ... What is positive, is that we have had a left-wing government for more than ten years, with the exception of some four or five months. In 1990 they signed a special declaration: 'The Right to be Different'. The majority of parties that are now in the government or in the parliament signed this statement saying that Slovenia will support gays and lesbians and everyone has the right to be different. In that sense we have some kind of support from the government, but then nothing happens. We have this theoretical support, homosexuality is not prohibited here, we can live our homosexual lives, but when it comes to action, to deeds, there is a problem. (RK, SI)

... in 1991 in the new constitution there was this article forbidding discrimination but sexual orientation is not explicitly there. We wanted to write that everyone is equal irrespective of sexual orientation, and they did not want to write that in, they said no, no, it is irrespective of personal circumstances or something like that. It is implicitly written ... the argument of the politics was no, no, we should not write that, people are not ready. That is what they say all the time: people are not ready, the public is not ready, they are never ready. But in fact it means that politicians are not ready. ... I am not especially interested in marriage but partners should be able to make arrangements, because now they really cannot. For example, now if one partner dies, his family can make claims because you are nobody, you are not a relative, and usually you lose a lot of money. It would be very practical to prevent this somehow and have security. (ST, SI)

... on the political level, we are just as oppressed, because there is the problem of silence in the political circles about the big issues like adoption, like marriage, registered partnerships which is like a step down from marriage, and things like inheritance or insuring your partner, things like that are just being ignored on the political level. We have asked the government direct questions about this and on more than one occasion we were just completely ignored. ... I think the homophobia is there, it is just not visible. ... I think there is a high tolerance threshold of the Slovenian public in general, they just do not get involved up to a certain point. But when this threshold is reached, they will make up for all of the silence with loud protests usually about God and family. ... [the catholic church is influential] in too many areas of everyday life. ... it is a very powerful control mechanism, especially in the countryside where the peer pressure is most important. It comes out really strong. Every Sunday people are being brainwashed by members of the clergy who preach sermons on which party to vote for, even though this is strictly prohibited by law. It is a breach of the pre-election silence. But they still do it because they are not a political organisation as such. I think it has a huge influence and I think the strongest weapon against it is

*prolonged exposure to liberal ideas. (TR, SI)*

*The negative aspect is ... that the legislation is not developed enough. It does not protect the GLBT population in a proper way. ... On the positive side, the GLBT movement started some twenty years ago, it is quite well developed in the Slovenian capital, Ljubljana, there is a fairly well developed GLBT infrastructure, unfortunately, there is nothing in other cities. (NS, SI)*

*I cannot really complain. Of course, we do not have the resources we would like to have, we could have, if we were maybe better organised in a sense. On the other hand we are much better off than anything in the East. In this respect we are really in the middle between East and West. ... homophobia is just a normal experience for a gay man, maybe even more so than for a lesbian in one sense ... Homophobia does not come isolated. I think it comes in a pack together with some other manifestations of hatred. And I think what is underneath it basically is hypocrisy. This is really a very hypocritical country, hypocritical culture I should say. ... We could start quoting reasons, historical, sociological reasons, one tentative answer just for discussion is that it is a small country in which everyone knows everybody. ... If you want to achieve something you have to go against persons you know. ... This causes false, devious strategies, strategies that take as a basis the hiding of your purposes, your intentions: the displaying of those that are expected, that are publicly acceptable and so on. This also has to do with the fear of being rejected. You are so easily rejected in such a programme and everybody knows you and then you do something or ask something that is unacceptable and you get rejected. Social control is terrible. You can not just move to an other place, you have to live with it. (Ble, SI)*

*I think we have a lack of education, starting with schools, and a lack of all kinds of state supported programmes which would fight against all kinds of intolerance in society like other countries have, like Scandinavian countries and countries which developed action programmes and activities with regard to eliminating or combating discrimination. ... I think that there is a bad influence of the Roman Catholic tradition here in Slovenia. Not that we have so many active churchgoers. According to statistics 80% are catholic, but not all those are active, just baptised people. The ideology and Catholic thinking is influential and the message people get from the Roman Catholic church hierarchy in Slovenia is against all alternative lifestyles ... This is the other negative factor which blocks the development of tolerance and culture in general. ... Slovenia is very confused in a way, because basically we have better legislation than most EU member countries, leaving aside registered partnership which have not been legalised. ... These are the good things but the problem is that people are still afraid to make use of these laws. (TG, SI)*

As we could see the key words of my respondents in their evaluation of the Slovenian situation included: relatively good legislation, which is poorly applied; decreasing legal discrimination, still existing social discrimination; "hate silence" on the part of society, ignorance by political actors, but supportive left-wing governments believing – at least theoretically – in "the right to be different"; small country "syndrome" sometimes supplemented with small-town mentality, hypocrisy, negative influence of the Catholic church; relatively well developed GLBT infrastructure – but only in the capital.

The Hungarian answers included the following views:

*Year by year we go on with small steps. On the gay pride marches I always try to talk with straights and they seem to become more and more tolerant. ... Naturally, there are still a lot of things to do to achieve that this topic could appear not only in soap operas but also as part of normal everyday talks. (SZG, HU)*

*We were just talking about it which direction should the Hungarian gay movement take. Should we aim for marriage? Or adoption should be a target, too. ... Marriage is important because same-sex couples should have the same rights as a cohabiting heterosexual couple ... we have to try increasing social acceptance, that of the older generation especially, because as I see it, it is much more well received by younger people (OS, HU)*

*It is a mixed situation. I am already in a situation where everyone knows it about me, I am working with it, I dare to put these writings into my CV ... and I have a big circle of friends, and there are places and organisations ... and I am afraid a lot of people have this kind of misperception that they forget that there are people for whom it is not so easy. I am aware of the it but still sometimes I am really shocked (SB, HU)*

*It is not only policy making what matters, but also the practical application of laws ((law enforcement?)), the way how this is influenced by prejudices. ... once legal emancipation is realised, you can hear voices saying "I can't understand this hysterical reaction. We are not discriminating anyone." It is more difficult to tackle social discrimination than legal discrimination. ... We grew up in homophobia, in hating ourselves. Things change slowly. By now there are better quality places where you can meet others. Gays are no longer locked into the world of cruising areas, bath houses and public toilets. Nowadays they are "allowed" to visit the gay bars, situated in the basements of side-streets. A lot of people have peace with this situation: at night I run around the five gay bars, there are gay discos, I can go to a private party organised in the countryside. But it is still that level very close to practical sexuality, an instinctual level ... it is like masturbating ... but to live together with another man, to integrate this into my everyday life? That is too much yet. It is still under the surface. ... This is opportunism. From a radical queer perspective we can call this sly opportunism ... It is still hiding. It is not a real life, not a full one. It is a crippled life. (ML, HU)*

*People's way of thinking – that should be changed and that is hard to change. Now comes the small-scale tiring work. (PB, HU)*

*When one is a member of a minority group, one has to accept certain things ... I am not a fighter ... Still, in my view there is some sort of comfort already, it is not so dangerous anymore, there is no "which hunt" against us any longer (KJ, HU)*

*The situation is improving, thanks to those who are working and fighting for it. ... It is important that there are more and more media programmes about homosexuality. There are foreign reports on gay prides, marriages ... so people can see that it is not a problem in other parts of the world (TL, HU)*

In comparison with the Slovenian views, the Hungarian answers seem to be somewhat more positive or hopeful, which was a bit of a surprise for me. This might be explained by the fact that at least in the field of legal emancipation Slovenians achieved more and

did that sooner than Hungarians. Therefore Hungarians might get used to a relatively slower development. Also Slovenians might feel more like "westerners" and prefer to compare their own situation to Western countries, while for a lot of Hungarians it is still hard to make sense of their "piggy in the middle", "neither eastern- nor western-European" positions when trying to find reference points for evaluating their own situation.

In both societies we can witness the functioning of identity politics. GLBT people, especially gays and lesbians, are still "organising and trying to manifest an identity and a lifestyle publicly" (Bech 1993). Identity politics is a system-specific concept: it can hardly be interpreted in anti-democratic political systems characterised by the extensive erosion of private identities, the rigid and forced separation of public and private identities. The "natural" context of identity politics is civil society, the field of social self-organisation, being the framework as well as the guarantee of modern identity formations (cf. Erős 1994). The different levels of civil society development can also explain the different self-perception of the Slovenian and Hungarian respondents. In Slovenia civil society initiatives appeared already in the 1980s, while in Hungary involvement in civil activities still counts as a relatively new – and not at all wide-spread – experience. A Hungarian respondent described this situation in the following way:

*The self-organisation of this [GLBT] community is also a process of consciousness raising. For this an outside pressure is necessary: the experience of being excluded and stigmatised brings people together. But there is something else in present day Hungarian reality. People now start to take their life into their hands, they start to feel that in certain ways they can indeed have a say in the development of their own lives. (ML, HU)*

#### • general overview (and the main actors) of sexual minority media

Comparing sexual minority products in the three examined countries can be begun with a simple quantitative comparison. If we have a short overview of the printed press part of sexual minority media, we can realise that in the Netherlands there are many more publications available than in the other two countries. Also in the Netherlands there is a much longer history of publishing gay and lesbian magazines regularly. For example, the Gay Krant has a 23 year long history:

*23 years ago the Gay Krant was the first to appear. It was started as a joke. It turned out that the paper met a demand and quickly grew to be a trend setting medium. The paper took an active part toward several milestones, like the legalisation of civil marriage for same-sex partners. At the moment there are more GLBT periodicals in the Netherlands including a glossy and a youth magazine. ... The Gay Krant is with its 110 000 readers (circulation almost 30 000 copies) the largest gay paper of the Netherlands and Belgium. The founder and editor of the Gay Krant, Henk Krol, has played a very significant role in the realisation of gay emancipation in the Netherlands. A lot of our staff could still be called activists, although we do try to report objectively and to the point about what concerns the gay community, both in the Netherlands and in Belgium, and also in Europe and the rest of the world. (AE, NL)*

As I have already mentioned, in the Dutch sexual minority media I focussed only on the printed press which included the following publications:

the **expresZO** (no-budget glossy for lesbian, gay and bisexual youngsters, having its 14th volume),  
 the **Gay Krant** (the oldest – and we can probably say "the leading" – gay magazine/newspaper in the Netherlands, established 23 years ago) ... *magazine, general info very male oriented, conservative (RD, NL)*,  
 the (Dutch-English) bilingual **Gay News** (having its 11th volume), the also (Dutch-English) bilingual **Gay and Night** (gay magazine from the Netherlands and Belgium, founded in 1997) ... *free monthlies in Amsterdam, owned by bordello owners who want to advertise gay Amsterdam for tourists and locals (GH, NL), magazines mainly focussed on clubbing and fashion for men (RD, NL)*  
 two relatively freshly established fanzines: the **Butt – Fag Mag** (founded in 2001) and its female counterpart, the **Kutt – Dyke Zine** (founded in 2002) – *queer/art, popular in the alternative scene (GH, NL)*,  
 the **La Vita** (a magazine for lesbian and bisexual women, having its 2nd volume),  
 the glossy **sQqueeze** (founded in 1996),  
 the **Zij aan zij**, lesbian magazine (in its 11th volume),  
 and the **XL**, the magazine of the COC, the Dutch national gay and lesbian association, which had 11 volumes altogether (as its publication ended in the summer of 2002).

Besides these printed media products there is a gay and lesbian radio programme on the national radio (**Roze Rijk**) and a local radio and television station for gays lesbians based in Amsterdam (**MV/S**). In the past there were numerous radio programmes on smaller radio stations. Given the high density of cable networks in the Netherlands it is quite probable that there are initiatives similar to MV/S in other cities. There are several GLBT internet portals, too.<sup>16</sup>

In Slovenia there are only two printed publications, the **Lesbo** (established in 1996, re-established in 2001) and the **Legebitrina Oznanila** (founded in 1999 as the information bulletin of Legebitra, the first Slovenian youth organization established in 1998). Both Lesbo and Oznanila are free and not available to the general public. The first sexual minority publication, Gayzine came out in 1985 and was followed by Lesbozine, the bulletins of Roza klub (a political association founded in 1990), Revolver, Pandora, and Keke(c). There is one radio programme (broadcast by a non-commercial independent radio) called **Lesbomania** and one very informative (unofficial) internet portal, the **Slovenian Queer Resources Directory**. In the past (between November 1991 and June 1992) Roza Val was broadcasted by the Slovenian public radio. Revolver was probably the most influential Slovenian sexual minority media product: it was published between 1990 and 1997 and distributed in Slovenia as well as in Croatia.

In Hungary – besides two newsletters of gay and lesbian organisations, which are not available publicly – there is only one gay magazine, **Mások** (founded in 1989, officially published from 1991). There is also an advertisement leaflet-like monthly publication, called **Na végre! 100% GAY** (published from 2001 by the owner of a gay fitness centre). In 1997-98 four issues of the lesbian **Labrisz** zine were published. There are four Hungarian GLBT radio programs: the **Önazonos** (broadcast from 1995 on the national radio), **Pararádió** (from 1997 on a non-profit internet radio), **Szappanopera helyett** (from 1998 on a non-profit alternative radio, during 2001-2002 available only on the internet), **Ki más?!** (broadcast from 1997 on a non-profit

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<sup>16</sup> The exact information is outside the scope of the present study.

community radio). There are two main GLBT internet portals: the **gay.hu** (from 1996) and the **pride.hu** (the "first Hungarian gay portal", an officially registered internet portal, established in 2001).

By looking through the sexual minority media choice offered by the three countries, we can see that in the Netherlands there is the largest range of – and probably the most specialised – printed GLBT media products. Among the three countries GLBT television programmes are made only in the Netherlands. Hungary has a fair range of GLBT radio programmes. It is important to note that producing radio programmes can be very cost-effective compared with publishing, printing costs on the one hand and television programme producing costs on the other hand. Slovenia is the only country where there are only free printed GLBT products which reflects a conscious political decision from the side of the media creators. In the other countries there are also free magazines available but these are business ventures, gaining income from advertisements. In Slovenia the main problem with free magazines seemed to be distribution: the fact that they are not available publicly (for example, at newspaper stands) narrows down the number of people they can reach.

In the Netherlands GLBT printed press is produced by lesbians and gays respectively: there are more GLBT products targeting specifically gay men than lesbian women but there are several lesbian publications, too. At the first sight concerning the present situation Slovenian lesbians seem to be more active media producers than Slovenian gays or even Hungarian lesbians. In fact, Hungarian lesbians are quite active in publishing but at a certain point when they were granted a substantial amount of money by an American foundation (ASTRAEA), they decided to start publishing a book series instead of starting a "proper" magazine. There were attempts to establish a Hungarian lesbian magazine in 1997-98, but after four issues these stopped. Therefore nowadays Labrisz, the only independent Hungarian lesbian organisation (established officially in 1999) regularly publishes a minimum budget (photocopied) newsletter primarily to inform their members and a book series (on lesbian themes). In the past, during the seven years of publishing *Revolver*, Slovenian gays and lesbian were able to work together quite effectively. This was never the case in Hungary. Though in theory *Mások* was – is – open to lesbians, in practice it became an almost exclusively gay magazine, made almost exclusively by gay men. Therefore on the basis of these we can emphasise again that specialised publication seems to be an indicator of development, or at least the preference of GLBT media producers.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, it is interesting to mention why the Slovenian *Revolver* and the Hungarian *Mások* got their names. The choice of names in these cases reflected certain "messages". According to one of the founders of *Revolver* their message was quite radical:

*there are some what we call revolver medium, a tabloid. ... That was part of it. It was meant to be penetrating ... (A weapon in your hand?) Yes, yes, yes, it meant to be penetrating, to penetrate through all the obstacles and also it was subtitled 'a magazine with a homosexual bullet' or something like that. It sounded better in Slovenian than in English. (BLe, SI)*

The editors of *Mások* mentioned that if they were to start a gay magazine today, they

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<sup>17</sup> For more details see also the **definition of sexual minority media** section.

would choose a different name. But at the very end of the 1980s and the very beginning of the 1990s Mások ("Others") seemed to be the right choice:

*Nowadays people have a very different approach to this than then. It became a part of everyday life that gays exist in the world, too. But when we started, it was a completely different world. During the last ten years the situation changed so much that there is no reason to choose such a name now. If we would look for a new name for the magazine, I am sure that we would not call it "others" because it has a totally different meaning now. At that time it meant that we had to assume our identity, but nowadays it rather suggests separation. So this is a very different world now. (BG, HU)*

#### • perceptions of the official media policy

When I asked my respondents whether they think that their country's official media policy is "sexual minority media friendly". Most views about "sexual minority media friendliness" I received from Slovenia, where Article 8 of the Mass Media Act (2001) is about the prohibition of incitement to inequality, which can also be applied to sexual minorities, at least in theory: "The dissemination of programming that encourages national, racial, religious, sexual or any other inequality, or violence and war, or incites national, racial, religious, sexual or any other hatred and intolerance shall be prohibited." 18

In the Ethics Code of RTV Slovenija (the Slovenia national radio and television)<sup>19</sup> there is also a special clause about the portrayal of sexual minorities, which represents – in my view – an exemplary treatment of these issues. Consequently, – as certain institutional frameworks were being provided – I could sense a certain level of awareness of their rights to correct media portrayal in the Slovenian answers:

*We have some trouble with stereotypes about GLBT people. Sensationalism is very strong in the media. They publish photos and write articles for instance about gay pride parades all around the world, because they can show some people wearing costumes and so on. Sensationalism, populism, such kinds of images, one-sided representation, so, too much entertainment (NS, SI)*

*In those media there are always articles which are looking for sensation. We are never introduced in a proper way. If they make an article they will always put some strange picture in as well, they never talk about normal gay people. ... some magazines are still ignoring us, because we are not such an important issue in society, but from some media we have a good response. (MS, SI)*

*I would say that journalists, generally speaking, are open to the topic. Maybe they are open to it because it is still, in a way, exotic. ... just a few weeks ago, there was this piece on television, on a commercial channel, in a show called Extra, a show built on*

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18 The English text of the Mass Media Act was provided by the Peace Institute.

19 "Homosexual people can be particularly subject to thoughtless and offensive stereotyping. These stereotypes might be even consolidated if programmes allow offensive assumptions or generalisations, while the approach of truthful portrayal might help to change them. In portraying sexuality, we have to avoid simplification, stereotypes and personal judgement. Homosexual relationships should be portrayed accurately and impartially as compared to heterosexual relationships. Be sensitive to the effect of language. We must not confuse homosexuality with transvestitism or trans-sexualism." Radio Televizija Slovenija – Professional Standards and Ethical Principles of Journalism in Programmes of the RTV Slovenija. Ljubljana, 2000.

sensation. They were secretly filming what was going during the night in a park where the cruising area is, and the journalist presented himself as the one searching for sex. It was terrible, all these dark shots, you could only see the legs of people, you know, I call this homosexuality without a face. It was typical of the seventies here in Slovenia. Usually, if I think about pictures in magazines or in newspapers, there were pictures taken from behind, no face, or through a tunnel, just a silhouette of two girls or two men. ... Sexualisation of homosexuality is still very much present. I remember this article from 1995 ... the article was actually about human rights questions and gay rights questions, but then the pictures were pornographic, there was a picture of oral sex. ... So, generally speaking friendly and supportive, certain kinds of media, there are newspapers that would not cover that kind of thing, or would not be too eager to cover it. You can send an invitation to a press conference and usually the beginners come, homosexuality, that is one of my conclusions I would say, is a topic for beginners, just like the questions of drugs and alcoholism, something that is not serious enough for a journalist with a name and a reputation. This is because homosexuality is understood as sexuality only, not as a question of rights or as a political question. (RK, SI)

I still think that there is only very little media coverage that I would say, is really good. It is a lot of sensationalism. Sometimes I really cannot believe it when they make some articles or writings because they are just the same as 15 years ago: the same questions, like now it is an interview with a lesbian, a woman who loves a woman, and they always ask if "there is a chance that you will ever be with a man again", it is a very often asked question, and then if the woman says, "I don't know, maybe, I don't care" then the headline reads: "lesbian may fall in love with a man", and this is an article about lesbianism (ST, SI)

I would not say that it is friendly. There are some individual journalists who are more educated and more open to LGBT issues, but generally they all report very superficially, they don't go into depth and mainly they are interested in personal stories, in negative experiences, in scandals, in sensational news, gossip, all more suitable for tabloids (TG, SI)

If you had asked me this question before the Sestre scandal, I would have said that the media generally do write favourably about gay issues. ... The scandal was that men, dressed up as women would represent the national colours, now that was outrageous. The public sees men dressed up as women all the time in comedy shows, or in entertainment evening shows. They think that is the place to put them, but once they are forced to cheer for these freaks, that's a very touchy subject. Again I am surprised at the actual level of homophobia in my country. (TR, SI)

According to the Hungarian respondents Hungarian media policy is "neutral" about sexual minorities. Some of them pointed out that recently there are more and more television programs (especially American style Hungarian talk-shows) about same-sex relationships, which – like it or not – can be very important in influencing the general public in a positive way.

The tabloid media has a relatively positive attitude towards this topic, but on the other hand they won't restrict themselves if there is a good story ... For example, on the gay pride march among the 3000 who march 85% are totally ordinary people, and about 15% are very spectacular, feminine, transvestite, and the like – and what will be shown

*on the evening news program? These latter ones. I know that they have to sell their magazine and they won't sell it by showing an ordinary guy – it is easier with a scandalous transvestite... (KJ, HU)*

Not very surprisingly, Dutch respondents seemed to be relatively content with their media policy situation:

*The past few years the mainstream media (newspapers, television) have started extensive coverage of news around the gay community. Much of it was positive and open. (AE, NL)*

*Neutral. There is little or no censorship (only in the case of pedophile pornography). On the other hand there is no official financial support (which I can understand as it is no longer quite so necessary any more). (RD, NL)*

*Gay media are a normal part of the media landscape, but rather marginal. Sometimes the general media pick up news from Gay Krant. (GH, NL)*

#### • **attitude of the general public towards sexual minority media**

Because of the limited scope of sexual minority media it is very hard to make assumptions about the attitudes of the general public towards sexual minority media in Slovenia. Therefore we cannot say that, for example, Lesbo has a great influence on the general public, but according to Lesbo's creators in a limited circle it can have positive effects.

*A member of parliament asked : 'does your magazine still exist? Oh, send me a copy please'. And the students of course. Several publics which are more open minded and aware. If you go to some villages and ask there, they probably won't be. (TG, SI)*

*In the last issue of Lesbo we published interviews with Slovenian presidential candidates. It means they take us very seriously, because they give us interviews. It is obvious that they take us pretty seriously. Also the mayor of the city reads the magazine and some people in parliament. They don't think that Lesbo is unimportant. (NS, SI)*

According to a Slovenian journalist, if the general public would know these media products, they would be hostile, at least at the beginning:

*Their attitude would be hostile at the beginning but I believe that it should be a long process. After a few years of publishing a magazine like Revolver, maybe the general opinion would also become different. (Blo, SI)*

Surprised, somewhat hostile reactions at the beginning, getting used to it at the end – this was the experience of a Hungarian radio program maker:

*The big surprise is over, they can accept it by and large ... When it started, it was a big issue: should it be allowed? is it really necessary? Nowadays it is very rare that they question the reason for its existence. They got used to it. They don't like it but they got used to it. ... Some political circles, from the right wing, they were very much against it. (PB, HU)*

One Hungarian internet creator mentioned a positive example:

*Because of the tone we use, because we do not publish sex pictures and sexual content, straight people also like to visit our portal ... we receive letters from straight people, that they like the portal and that they were surprised about it, because people strongly have the stereotype that if it has something to do with gays then it is dominated by sex. (SS, HU)*

Still, the general experience of Slovenian and Hungarian GLBT media makers about public attitudes can be summarised in one word: silence. Let's see two examples of experiencing this silence:

*We wanted to put Oznanila into all of the high school libraries and again we came upon the most terrible opponent of sexual minorities: silence. We sent out applications, we sent a free sample and a memo asking if we could keep sending it for free if they would just offer it somehow in the library. We got twenty answers. (out of 120) Ten were pro, ten were contra. The problem here is that this falls under the jurisdiction of the librarian of the school. And we were surprised that more than two or three of the positive answers came from places in the country, not from the big cities. The majority of the negative ones came from the big cities. Everyone else just kept quiet, because nobody wanted to be bothered. That paints a very realistic picture of the attitude of the general public. As soon as it becomes formal, as soon as their children are somehow influenced then things become very defensive and silence here is the most important defence. (TR, SI)*

*It is not proper ... it is taboo. ... Once I took the gay magazine to my workplace to show them how it was. ... they seemed to have an aversion from it, they just put it aside. They had to face something that was not talked about for decades. (ML, HU)*

Among the three countries Dutch answers reflected the least problematic situation:

*There is little resistance against the Gay Krant in the Netherlands. Our paper is respected and well known. (AE, NL)*

*No, there is no action against the media. They are too much group-bound for that. Extreme Christians don't see it as they are not looking for it. The rest, the general public, is reasonably acceptant. (RD)*

#### • **sexual minority media as "powerful operators"**

In Hungary and in Slovenia partly because of their limited scope, partly because of the relatively low level of social tolerance of same-sex relationships, GLBT media could hardly be seen as "powerful operators" in influencing their public in certain social or political issues or in their consumer behaviour. However, the fact that in Hungary there is a free advertisement leaflet, existing for one and half years suggests that at least certain business men aim to reach their gay market via a gay publication. In Slovenia – contrary to its limited availability – Lesbo seems to have some potential for intellectual – rather than marketing – influence.

*They can if they are like Gay Times, this kind of magazine. It depends on how big the*

*target group is, how the pink economy is working, because if you compare Great Britain and Slovenia, then it is completely different in a sense of influence. Of course, I think our media are influential. Actually in the last few years they are becoming influential, a lot of academics are reading Lesbo and taking it abroad when they go to conferences and they are realising the importance of these media and the role that they have. (TG, SI)*

As far as possible political influence is concerned, one Hungarian respondent pointed out the following:

*In more complex questions of identity formation, or in ideological questions that are not about fashion, there is no homogeneity. In this group there are right wing supporters as well as left wing supporters and everything else. So there is no way to mobilise these in political matters. This "let's be liberal, let's be left-wingers" attitude is a characteristic feature only in the organisations ... but what is going on in the bar scene, I don't know. ... sometimes I think that we would be surprised if we knew. (SB, HU)*

From the Dutch answers we can assume that there are at least two fields where GLBT media had the "powerful operator" role: marketing and GLBT emancipation.

*... the cultural aspect must not be overlooked: the minor media can be effective avant garde trend setters who remain invisible to the wider public until someone from mainstream media notices and does something similar. Thus the message 'it's uncool to be a bigot' was interwoven in a lot of products I was involved with. I think this cultural pressure is at least as important in the struggle against discrimination as legislation. (CS, NL)*

*For opinion forming you have to go to the big daily papers, radio and television. Yes, as far as consumer information on sexual enjoyment, clothing and going out. (RD, NL)*

*Gay media are not powerful actors except the Gay Krant, which has been active in suggesting and promoting the homohuwelijk (same-sex marriage). I doubt that gay men consume the products advertised in the gay media because they advertise there. I don't remember a gay boycott in the NL. If they (gay people) want to be influential, they write for the general media (where they can publish in many cases). (GH, NL)*

*The Gay Krant played a major part in GLBT activism during its 23 year existence and much has been achieved. ... Partly because of the Gay Krant a broad basis of support has been created, both politically as well as socially towards, among others, the Law for Equal Treatment (anti-discrimination legislation) and the availability of civil marriage for same-sex couples. (AE, NL)*

#### **• financial background and resource management of sexual minority media production**

Earlier we could see that in two countries there were GLBT publications which made – at least part of – their living from advertising. It counted as a relatively new phenomenon in Hungary, but not in the Netherlands. Acknowledging GLBT people as worthwhile target audiences for advertisements can be interpreted as an indicator of social acceptance. Companies will advertise products for GLBT people only if their

social visibility is relatively high. (The next step is to target GLBT consumers via mainstream media which is not an unknown case in the Netherlands and in other western countries.)

In general there are two main ways to finance GLBT media: to get some funds (from the state or civil organisations) or to make money by advertising, by selling the product an/or using the income of another auxiliary business venture of the owner.

The first case (getting funds) applies to present day Slovenian sexual minority media products. Lesbo has been financed by several foundations (including the Dutch HIVOS and Mama Cash, the American ASTRAEA) and the Slovenian Ministry of Culture. Legebitrina Oznanila is supported by a student organisation, and Lesbomania by Radio Student. In the past Revolver had a lot of problems with finding financial resources: for a short while it was supported by the city council of Ljubljana but they stopped this because they said it was a pornographic magazine. Roza Val used to be financed as any other regular program on the national radio.

In the Netherlands the general pattern is self-maintenance, though some products can count on other resources:

*In principle these media should be able to support themselves, through subscriptions and advertising. In case of difficulties an appeal can be made to the Press Trade Fund, which supports a pluriform press in the Netherlands. Some gay media in the Netherlands are connected with organisations or firms. XL and Expreszo (youth paper) are [/were] (financially) connected to COC. Gay & Night is financed by the largest male prostitution firm in Amsterdam. The Gay Krant is independent and manages on subscriptions, sales and advertising. (AE, NL)*

*The only paper to get any subsidy was XL. That was the COC's own paper. The Pink Realm (Roze Rijk) radio programme is paid for by NPS, which is an official media body. The remainder is private and is sponsored through the scene ([pink economy] bars, saunas, pornoproducers). I don't know about circulation figures. Radio penetration and viewer numbers do count, but are not watched too much by NPS. A [TV] comedy like Will & Grace is of course contingent on good viewer figures. (RD)*

In Hungary we can find a mixed pattern of financing sexual minority media products. The Mások gay magazine has been struggling for self-maintenance from the very beginning: they have advertisements, they sell copies and very rarely get some financial support from NGOs or state institutions (mainly for promoting AIDS prevention). They obtain a certain amount of money from the "one percents", too. (In Hungary taxpayers can decide which NGO they want to support with 1% of their annual personal income tax). A special type of support for Mások is that certain gay businessmen advertise in the magazine more as a token of their appreciation and philanthropy than as a rational business decision. Na végre! is financed mainly by advertisements (and by other business activities of its owner). The costs of the two newsletters of the gay and lesbian organisations are covered by their organisations. The Labrisz book series is financed mainly by an American foundation (ASTRAEA). The costs of the local community radio programs are covered by their host stations that are non-profit radios, usually run by NGOs with the help of foundations and some state support. Önazonos is financed as any other public radio programme.

In Slovenia and in Hungary sexual minority media creators are typically volunteers who do not get paid – or compensated in any way – for their work. In some cases they have to cover the direct costs of their media production from their own pocket. So sometimes instead of getting paid they have to pay. Therefore enthusiasm, creativity – and dedicated involvement in GLBT activism – seem to be important characteristics of these people. With the words of a Slovenian respondent: *we are obviously maniacs – enthusiasts. It is really nice when we have made an issue, so the creativity is very important for the people here. (NS, SI)*. Volunteer work is also part of Dutch sexual minority media production, though probably not such an essential part as in Slovenia and in Hungary:

*I always feel that there should be a certain passion in it. Money should not be the driving force. ... I do believe, that for most people motivation is the driving force, it's not money. (DV, NL)*

#### • the "pornography" issue

I asked the question "should/can images of naked bodies, seen by some as 'pornographic', and sexual minority media content be mixed?" for two reasons. First, images of naked bodies can – allegedly – sell certain GLBT publications, therefore this aspect can become relevant when thinking about finding financial resources for a media product. Second, images of naked bodies seem to be normal parts of gay publications but are not really preferred by lesbian audiences, which can reflect a basic division between gay and lesbian media consumption and perhaps a division between gay and lesbian cultural politics.

By comparing the three countries we can say that this "issue" was not really perceived as an issue in the Netherlands, or at least not by my gay respondents. According to them naked images do deserve a place in sexual minority media, specifically if the media product in question is specialised.

*Of course it has a place. It is something that binds us, that love for the beautiful man (woman) and sex. I hope that it often appears in the paper, because it keeps the paper readable: nice men and beautiful women in their natural state. Pornography is legal excepting pedophile pornography. I do not consider it to be a problem, better still, I find it an enjoyment. The only problem is there in the mixed media. Lesbians don't like dicks and gays don't like pussies. (RD, NL)*

However, quality content papers seem to be careful with naked pictures also in the Netherlands:

*It is legally allowed and yes, it does sell. However, the Gay Krant decided to have as little naked material as possible, because we want to be evaluated on the basis of our news and lifestyle reporting. Readers who do want to see naked images can opt for the combi-subscription: the Gay Krant plus Freshmen (bimonthly). Freshmen is our Dutch edition of the equally named American naked mag. (AE, NL)*

The Hungarian and the Slovenian answers reflected several interesting and important issues connected to my question. For example, some (gay) respondents emphasised the "it sells" aspect:

*That sells the magazine. ... You are limited by the law as well. ... If it is pornography you have to pay extra tax as well. ... First we send the magazine to the ministry of culture, I think, and then they decide the level of tax. (MS, SI)*

*Previously it was absolutely something to raise the number of sold copies. At that time, when it wasn't so easy yet to sit down at your computer, go on the net and download several thousands naked pictures (TL, HU)*

On the other hand, the necessity to publish naked images can be challenged on the basis of relatively easy access to the internet:

*If I was an editor, I would not put them in. These kind of images can be accessed very easily through the internet. I see no reason for providing this through a magazine. I think – speaking for the Slovenian context – that we have more important issues to deal with at the moment. (RK, SI)*

Other respondents emphasised the "lesbians don't really like this" aspect:

*Unfortunately Mások is mainly for men. Most lesbians are shocked because of these pictures. We have to admit that Mások is very GAPFILLING but we do not want to see dicks. That is a very different type of culture. (RJ, HU)*

*... there are sharp oppositions here. Publications made by men focus more on the body than those made by women. Lesbian media are maybe more intellectually oriented and those who make it are usually aware of the fact that it is very difficult to reflect on issues whether porn is good or bad ... the problem is that women's bodies are used this way. Cover pages of magazines are full of naked women, and the papers are full of sexist attitudes which can determine women's place, so we won't publish naked women in a reified way – even if a lot of people like to look at naked women (SB, HU)*

*It is obviously not a coincidence in the world that magazines made by men and women are separated, and very different in style. If the magazine is mixed, it has some restrictive consequences. It seems that lesbians consciously ... and always want to emphasise that fat people, ugly people, old people are of the same value as the others. And in theory they are completely right, and I agree with them that we should not show beauties all the time because this way we develop inhibitions in people, because it is a kind of exclusion, too. Still, people have this desire for this. I, as a gay man, have the desire for it ... (LL, HU)*

The Slovenian GLBT youth magazine applies a very sensitive approach to "body use":

*We don't publish naked male or female bodies because that would promote a more sexual image of the youth group than we want to promote. ... the student organisation wouldn't protest, because they funded much more controversial projects, but I think our target group would be in danger. The people who really need our help might feel intimidated by graphic images of perfect bodies. ... They might feel that they don't measure up to it. There would be this barrier that would suggest that we are selecting only the good ones ... When I was young, I always looked at the coverpages of Revolver in the shop windows. I never dared to buy one. I always saw pictures of naked men and this gave me the impression that this was a porn magazine for gay porn, so I had this added fear of actually going into the store and buying it. It felt just*

*too wrong. I didn't need that sexuality in a magazine, I really needed insightful thoughts, interviews, which of course were in there, but I never got to see them. (TR, SI)*

According to one respondent showing naked bodies has the danger of oversexualising gay culture:

*We don't like to strengthen this sex centred image. Sex-centredness is a problem because for many homosexuality equals sex, penetration. While it is a way of thinking, a lifestyle, culture. (PB, HU)*

Several respondents emphasised that it is hard to define what counts as "pornographic" – as everything depends on the context:

*I have nothing against images of naked bodies in any magazine, not even in those that are highly pornographic. I don't have anything against it. I don't think pornography is something bad at all. It depends on what you understand as pornography. If pornography is only the pictures of naked people then it's O.K., but if we are talking about exploitation of the people who are involved, then of course I am against it. ... if it does not give the message of exploitation and misuse of power, then it is O.K. for me, but if there are pedophilic messages or exploitation of women, included in the picture as a context, then of course I would be very much against it or if there is violence involved. (TG, SI)*

*It is hard to say where the border is. In Lesbo we have very liberal concepts. We are against hard definitions about what pornography is. ... What I can say is that we have very open concepts. You will see what I mean. We published many photographs of naked bodies, but in an artistic context. So it's not pornography, it's art dealing with naked bodies. (NS, SI)*

*It all depends on the justification. The justification must be implicit enough, implicit in the sense that the reader can see it and does not need to be told about it. For me personally it had too much resemblance to the heterosexual journals that usually had female images and double pages ... There was a journal called Start in Croatia decades ago, just like a regular culture magazine, a good one actually textwise, but it had these women centrefold and stuff, I never thought much of it, I never thought it was necessary. It is something that basically appeals to the same kind of mentality as heterosexual journals of the same kind, that had the centrefolds with women in. (Ble, SI)*

*It causes aversion, distancing. It makes the magazine repulsive. But bodies are not disgusting by themselves. If these pictures come out in straight products – no problem. In this context it is a cause for aversion. (ML, HU)*

*At the beginning in Revolver there were some photos of naked man, of course they wanted to have more of them, especially the readership. I was not very keen on it but then I thought that's part of it, let them have it because I don't know, images of naked women were not so interesting for us as lesbians, it is not what we wanted, what you have in every magazine ... when the city council said that it was a pornographic magazine, then I was really angry, because they have this pornography in every straight magazine, there are so many women's bodies, and nobody sees a problem with*

*this, and I think it is just hypocritical, because they are afraid of male bodies, to see them – and then I said, yes, you should mix pornography and politics, it's possible (ST, SI)*

Images of naked bodies – or, as we will see in this case, a certain body part – can constitute a part of a political message, too. At least this was the case with the first issue of Mások:

*In our first printed issue on the inside cover page there was this picture of a huge erect penis. Awful, if I think about it now, it was truly awful. But at that time we thought about it as the expression of our ars poetica: that this is exactly one of the main functions of this magazine that we don't have to hide and pretend any longer, that we don't have to pretend to be different from what we really are. Sexuality is important, and we like good looking guys, let's speak openly at long last ... (LL, HU)*

## **Conclusion**

Examining minority media in general can become important once we realise that "[w]e are all colonized to some degree by the majority culture. Those of us who belong to one minority group or another will inevitably have absorbed many mainstream values, even when they serve only to demean us. [...] Recognizing these patterns is a first step toward demanding more even-handed media representation of all cultural groups. Yet this does not, in itself, guarantee a solution." (Gross 2001:17). Concerning media visibility in comparison with "traditional" ethnic or religious minorities, sexual minority groups are in a special position. For example, "[m]uch has been written about TV's portrayal of ethnic and cultural minorities, and its historically negative impact on the self-esteem of young people in those groups. Distorted images of gay lives have a similar effect on lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. But unlike children in most minorities, whose family and friends can serve as role models, gay youth historically had only stereotypes to tell them who they were." Therefore "visibility, role models, and fair broadcast depictions were [are] too important to dismiss as just a luxury." (Capsuto, 2000:xiv).

The main goal of writing this study was to tell a story – in fact, several stories – about how certain social minority groups can create and use their media means to represent their interests. By examining several aspects of sexual minority media production in Hungary, in the Netherlands and in Slovenia we could see how the state of development of these media reflected different social situations and "difference-tolerating" levels of the examined societies.

According to my findings minority can be seen as a useful – political – concept in a society or in a phase of socio-cultural, historical development when/where non-conventional sexual interests have discriminative consequences. In places where normative heterosexuality is losing its social organising power sexual habits, interests, orientation based identities are not forced to develop, or at least not likely to develop into *threatened identities*.

In comparison with the Netherlands, Slovenia and Hungary can be characterised by more threats to cope with when realising one's non-conventional sexuality. Therefore in these places the political concept of minority can be applied when trying to create a more tolerant, identity threat free social environment for people with same-sex or non-

conventional sexual desires and experiences, developing – sometimes changing or fluid – identities based on these desires and experiences.

Though my Slovenian and Hungarian respondents realised that the term minorities usually referred to ethnic or national minorities in their countries, they also recognised the equal rights opportunities and anti-discriminative guarantees that can be gained by applying the minority concept to gays, lesbians, and other non-heterosexuals. However, the usage of the minority concept has several disadvantages, too. It does not only imply the acknowledgement of the relative powerlessness of the social group in question but it also has to operate with fixed – identity – categories.

This term reflects a practical political strategy to gain equal rights and – at least temporary – shelter from discrimination, and naturally it makes more sense in a social context where there are still a lot of things to fight for. Probably for Dutch people the term sexual minority sounds quite strange – and perhaps a bit empty – because it is lacking the political connotations that Hungarians and Slovenians are still quite familiar with.

Sexual minority media was seen to be made for and by members of sexual minorities but it did not have to be exclusively so. The peripheral of the target audience necessarily interfaces with mainstream society – through, for example, parents, friends and colleagues – and some sexual minority media producers take this into account. As sexual minority media productivity matures there appears to be a trend towards specialisation: mixed media – i.e. media produced by gays and lesbians working together, for an aggregate gay and lesbian public – tend to become more homogenous: either lesbian or gay only. Specialisation is an indicator of development as it turned out from the review of the various sexual minority media products in the three countries. Media product specialisation does not imply that cooperative networks stop functioning: joint events, like pride and film festivals, will continue to be organised by a broad spectrum of GLBT activists working together.

Probably the most "stable" function of sexual minority media is the information function. It is stable in the sense that the importance of this function seems to be independent from changing socio-cultural contexts. While the importance of other functions – such as community building, helping people in their coming out process or entertaining them – can change according to the changing social environments. In Hungary and Slovenia identity building seemed to be a primary media function, and there was a strong connection between GLBT activism and sexual minority media production. In places where mainstream media are unable to mediate the special needs and claims of sexual minorities, special media segments must be created by the concerned groups in order to provide their constituencies with positive reference points for identity formation. In the Netherlands media producers with a GLBT outlook were able to use mass media to project GLBT cultural elements into the mainstream. This was possible because the level of social discrimination in the Netherlands twenty years ago was rather less than in present day Hungary or Slovenia. This explains the emphasis on lifestyle over identity building as present day Dutch GLBT emancipation concerns are rather lifestyle issues.

Hungarian and Slovenian activists seem to be eager to complete the identity building and follow the Dutch model. Their ideal would be that sexual minority media would no longer be necessary as an autonomous entity, the mainstream media would encompass

the various sexual minority media products, thus nullifying the distinction between sexual minorities and the majority in this respect. At present we can still witness the functioning of identity politics in both societies. The "natural" context of identity politics is civil society, the field of social self-organisation, being the framework as well as the guarantee of modern identity formations (cf. Erős 1994). The two countries can be characterised by different levels of civil society development which can also explain the advantage Slovenia seems to have over Hungary in respect of sexual identity politics. In Slovenia civil society initiatives appeared already in the 1980s, while in Hungary involvement in civil activities still counts as a relatively new – and not at all wide-spread – experience.

As regards perception of official media policy, the Slovenian case showed that although there is a good official policy in place there is still substantial stereotyping in practice. Again, social discrimination is a harder nut to crack than judicial discrimination. However, social discrimination does not translate to a negative attitude of the general public towards sexual minority media, largely through ignorance. While in Slovenia and in Hungary the lack of reaction can be often interpreted as "hate silence", in the Netherlands the quietness is more a sign of peaceful acceptance. Consequently, GLBT media can be seen as powerful operators in the Netherlands in influencing certain important societal issues such as same-sex marriage, in Slovenia sexual minority media can be influential only within a restricted elite. Because of the well-developed Dutch "pink economy", GLBT media can also be powerful in the commercial sense. In Hungary, having a significantly larger market than Slovenia, sexual minority media have started to exert influence on a commercial basis. This also explains why the sexual minority media products had to be financed by NGOs and foundations, and could not operate on a commercial footing. Once sexual minority media production outgrows the no-budget, self-financing, small scale stage, further expansion is only possible either through commercial financing or through grants. This usually implies that a choice has to be made: commercial financing can lead to compromises in politics, while grant option faces the problem that grants are hard to find. Activists dream of large grants with no strings attached, but market rules can force their hand too. So, whereas in some cases only the philanthropic finance option is possible (Slovenia), in other cases a commercial approach may be the only option for survival (Hungary).

Concerning the printed press, a final look at some naked material is appropriate. There were cultural indicators for including erotic material, particularly in gay specialised magazines. Additionally there were commercial reasons for doing so. On the other hand, there were cultural indicators against the inclusion of naked images:<sup>20</sup> some tried to struggle against (over)sexualisation, some wanted to avoid intimidating their public with picture-perfect bodies, some protested against the exploitation of women. Finally, it was noted that the distinction between pornography and cultural eroticism is a hard one to make objectively.

On the basis of my findings no "one size fits all" recommendations can be given, as all examined factors interconnect. The diversity of sexual minority media development in the three countries is both a symptom and a cause of the fact that GLBT media function in a very social-context-specific way. In all three countries sexual minority

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Richard Dyer's thought provoking article about the cultural aspects of gay pornography (Dyer 2002)

media provided a cultural contra-weight against societal oppression, albeit in different manifestations. Ultimately these type of media must be of a transient nature as they are in a way working towards making themselves irrelevant politically, but on the other hand, they advance themselves culturally doing so. Given the great strides taken in the Netherlands, our "model" country, and the very concrete results achieved since transition in Hungary, and from even before that in the case of Slovenia a clear recommendation is that this development must be continued.

I applaud the makers of sexual minority media products, because they put into practice the theory that "the most effective form of resistance to the hegemony of the mainstream is to speak for oneself, to create narratives and images that counter the accepted, oppressive, or inaccurate ones" (Gross 2001:19).

### **Policy recommendations**

GLBT people can/should use the political concept of minority (usually applied to ethnic minorities) in places where they still have to fight against legal and social discrimination.

In places where mainstream media are unable to mediate the special needs and claims of sexual minorities, special media segments must be created by the concerned groups in order to provide their constituencies with positive reference points for identity formation. Example of missing practices: lack of regular lesbian magazine in Hungary, lack of regular gay magazine in Slovenia.

Own media have a cultural impact. Minority media content does tend to filter into the mainstream media, hence to society at large. In the long run culture is at least as an effective emancipatory agent as legislation. This is a reason to support such cultural activity financially. Example of good practice: the Slovenian LESBO.

Cross-fertilisation between groups of activists and minority media organisations can lead to good results. Example of good practice from Slovenia: film festival ⇒ Magnus ⇒ Revolver.

Advances in computer and communication technology in the past twenty years have made it much easier to establish low-budget media (print, radio, internet). Initiatives like courses and workshops designed to allow activists to make optimum use of the new technologies are likely to yield a good return on their investment. Examples of good practice: the Slovenian Queer Resources Directory and the pride.hu portal.

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## **Summary**

The paper provides a comparative overview of the functioning of sexual minority media in three European countries: Hungary – depicted as one of the most homophobic countries of the region in the early 1990's; the Netherlands, often perceived as being an exemplary society concerning social tolerance towards sexual minorities; and Slovenia, a model country of peaceful "post-transitional" modernisation in Central Europe.

The anticipated differences in the functioning and in the roles of sexual minority media in the three chosen countries reflect different social perception – and acceptance – patterns of sexual minorities by their societies as well as by themselves. The history, the resource-management, and the main issues of these media products show us how certain stigmatised social groups create and use their media means to represent their interests. Several aspects of sexual minority media production in the three countries are examined to show a relation between the "difference-tolerating" levels of the examined societies and the state of development of these media.

In all three countries sexual minority media provided a cultural contra-weight against societal oppression, albeit in different manifestations. Ultimately these type of media must be of a transient nature as they are in a way working towards making themselves irrelevant politically, but on the other hand, they advance themselves and their constituencies culturally doing so.