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The Different Organizational Structures of Alternative Media: Through the Perspective of Alternative Media Journalists in Turkey and Greece

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses and compares the organizational structures of alternative media projects in Turkey and Greece; two countries that have recently witnessed networked social movements. Drawing on in-depth interviews with journalists working in six alternative media projects, we inform on the news production process, the news values and normative ideals adopted by these journalists while covering the news and explore if they make use of similar or different organizational structures. Our research invites a rethinking of alternative media to focus on their unique features and the differing experiences and values of their journalists. Our findings indicate that, alternative professional journalists' news production routines in both countries vary based on their organization's scale, normative ideals, the political and media contexts in which they operate. In this study, we reflect on what these different news production routines accomplish or fail to, and their broader implications for journalism.

KEYWORDS

Alternative media; digital journalism; mainstream media; organizational structure; news production routines; Greece; Turkey

Introduction

In 2010, Greece's streets were shaken by the rise of anti-austerity protests, which intensified following the EU bailout agreement and would continue in varying degrees of intensity between 2010 and 2015 (Karyotis and Rudig 2018). In 2013, protests also arose in neighbouring Turkey. These began as an environmental sit-in to prevent the uprooting of trees in Gezi Park in Istanbul, but would soon turn into a nationwide popular upheaval against the AKP government (Ozen 2015). Protests in both countries not only had an influence on the political structure but also provided voice to those on the social and political margins (Douzinas 2013; Akser and McCollum 2019). In Turkey, well-known journalists have launched alternative media projects, utilizing web-based news outlets with the aim of bypassing repressive government surveillance attempts; in Greece, alternative media projects have emerged to produce alternative

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narratives that contrast with the mainstream media with respect to austerity debates and solidarity movements (Siapera and Papadopoulou 2017).

We use the term ‘alternative media’ as suggested by Downing (2001, v) to describe media projects that contest the power of legacy media organizations and offer “alternative visions to hegemonic policies, priorities and perspectives”. As Holt, Figenschou, and Frischlich (2019) argue, the ‘alternativeness’ of a media project could manifest itself in its content, such as alternative interpretations of political and social events (micro level), its organizational structure, such as news production and dissemination processes (meso level) and how these relate to established professional institutions (journalist associations), regulatory systems and general media policy, such as press subsidies and regulations (macro level). Yet, various combinations of alternative-ness are possible – whereas some alternative media outlets differ from their mainstream counterparts with respect to their financial structure, others might be alternative to mainstream media in terms of their news production process (Holt, Figenschou, and Frischlich 2019). This study explores these diversities of alternative media projects at the meso level in Turkey and Greece. Since 2011, there has been a growing body of research into the organizational structure of the digitally networked movements in the two countries (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Tufekci 2017; Vatikiotis 2011; Vatikiotis and Yoruk 2016; Iosifidis and Boucas 2015), but few studies have analysed and compared the organizational structures of alternative media, which have also challenged dominant or accepted norms of society, culture and politics (Alevizou 2016; Ataman and Coban 2018; Akser and McCollum 2019; Vatikiotis and Milioni 2019).

This article contributes to this literature by analysing the routine production of news and internal power structure of alternative media projects in Greece and Turkey. To do so, we draw on in-depth interview data obtained from journalists employed in six projects and enhance our understanding of their perceptions, values, and practices. As noted by Fuchs, “journalists are actors who produce content, with the help of specific rules, procedures, structures, and technologies” (Fuchs 2010, 174). We assert that the structure in which journalists operate, as well as their news values and normative ideals have a significant impact on news production process. Thereby, while analysing the organizational structures of alternative media, we also focus on news producers and their news values and normative ideals. Our results highlight the diversity in the production of news and the internal structures of different projects in both countries.

Defining the Organisational Practices of Alternative Media

From the 1970s, a certain perspective on organizational matters emerged and has become dominant in the alternative media sector, which supports a model of collective organization in which citizens and community members take ownership of projects and proportionately affect decisions concerning it (Comedia 1984). Contrary to the state-owned, or commercial and large-scale, hierarchical structure of the mainstream media, news production is expected to occur in an interactive and decentralized manner within a small, non-hierarchical structure (Atton 2002, 2015; Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpentier 2008; Howley 2009). Moreover, alternative media are expected to offer ordinary citizens and marginalized groups space to generate their own news, become

the main actors therein, and produce content that is relevant to their circumstances (Traber 1985). Unlike the mainstream media, training and previous experience is also not seen as an imperative for reporting news (Fuchs 2010, 178).

This small-scale, collective media structure has later been criticized for being short-lived and failing to reach a broad audience. Citizen producers who lack marketing skills and expertise cannot ensure the survival of a project (Comedia 1984). The commitment to collective decision-making also prevents decisions regarding projects from being taken quickly. However, Khiabany's (2000) illuminating study reveals that broad-based, professionally produced publications are also not always successful enough to generate sufficient revenue to survive. Instead of being commercially minded, the primary norms of an alternative media journalist must be to serve the community and offer a voice to those marginalized by the mainstream media (Khiabany 2000; Atton 2002; Harcup 2003 and Rodriguez 2001). For Downing (2001, 15) too, who defines alternative media as radical media and its producers as activists, the organization does not necessarily need to be participatory, but activists should seek to develop a 'counter-hegemonic consciousness'. This countering role is often defined as producing radical content that seeks to challenge the commercial media industry and political domination, as well as the effects of patriarchies, sexism, nationalism, etc. (Fuchs 2010).

Recent studies have shown that there is often not an ideal type of "pure" alternative media (Holt, Figenschou, and Frischlich 2019, 861). With respect to sourcing, alternative media can provide a forum for marginalized groups, but only represents those that share the same aims and ideologies (Atton and Wickenden 2005). They may also adopt the professionalized newsroom routines of the mainstream media, and their internal structure may also subject to asymmetrical power distributions (Sandoval and Fuchs 2010; Platon and Deuze 2003). In terms of values, alternative media journalists may also value far right ideologies, rather than challenging the capitalist media industry (Figenschou and Ihlebeak 2019; Nygaard 2019). This diversity underscores how important it is to explore their unique structures and values.

New norms, practices, and communication models of digital media are also changing journalism. Not only activists (Lievrouw 2011) but also professional journalists increasingly launch alternative professional media projects that operate at lower costs in this commercialized context (Kenix 2015). This study focuses on this specific genre of alternative media, an in-depth analysis of which is still largely absent from the literature. Although the interactive structure of the Internet facilitates cheap and participatory media production, alternative professional media still require capital and time, and the Internet does not guarantee their visibility for attracting a broad audience (Atton 2002). It is therefore necessary to explore whether this new context shapes the values, norms, and internal structures of these projects and leads to a homogenization of practices (Kenix 2015).

What the influential earlier studies often do not take into consideration is also the dialectical relationship between the organization's norms and the social, political and wider media context in which they operate. The everyday practices of journalists and media structure in which they work can also be affected by the political context of the country (Ataman and Coban 2018). Hereby, we will also examine if the political and media contexts of both countries shape the news values and everyday practices of our interviewees.

Background Context: Alternative Media in Greece and Turkey

Alternative media operate “from a particular place and time, from a history and culture which is specific” (Hall 1990, 222). This section describes the political and media environment within which alternative media operate in the two countries, and offers insights into their development, especially post-2010.

Greece

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), the Greek media system belongs to the so-called Mediterranean or polarized pluralistic model, wherein the state has played an interventionist role in the sector through censorship, media ownership or subsidization. The Greek media landscape has been characterized by interlocking interests between private corporations, media organizations and sources of political power; a situation that has had a significant impact on the independence of journalism in Greece (Boucas and Iosifidis 2020; Papathanassopoulos 2020). During the last decade, the entire journalistic sector faced massive disruption, brought about by the rise of the new technological paradigm and the debt crisis (Siapera and Papadopoulou 2017). The financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures presided over major losses in advertising revenues and drops in newspaper circulation, which consequently led to layoffs and precarious contracts for journalists (Kalogeropoulos 2016). Yet, this crisis constituted fruitful terrain for new types of alternative media to emerge (Siapera and Papadopoulou 2017). Such media aimed to contest mainstream media discourse, highlight inequalities and express an alternative vision (Boucas and Iosifidis 2020). Most of these alternative media were founded by professional journalists (some of whom had lost their jobs), as well as newcomers, and operated as for-profit, non-profit, or co-operative entities (Boucas and Iosifidis 2020). Drawing on in-depth interviews with alternative media journalists in Greece, Vatikiotis and Milioni (2019) provided further explanations as to the emergence of these media. They argued that there are five main entryways into the alternative media landscape in Greece, which underpin the outburst of social unrest that “ignited a process of politicisation”; the organized social movement setting that also included actors from the ‘margins’ of the political sphere; sentiments of injustice triggered by the financial crisis; institutionalized civil society; and, finally, the need to offer an alternative to the mainstream media discourse (Vatikiotis and Milioni 2019, 4226–4229).

Turkey

After the 1980s, the media industries in Greece and Turkey developed considerable similarities. Turkey’s rapid economic commercialization in this period saw a transition of the media system from state-run to a more free market model, with privately owned newspapers and television stations (Christiansen 2007). As in Greece, clientelism was also observed between newspaper owners and politicians, as the former began to apply what pressure they could to politicians through their media organs and achieve political support for financial gains (Bek 2004, 376). Yet, this nexus between the state and media inverted in the 2000s, as power became increasingly consolidated by the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP). The state began to make use of the regulatory institutions, to restructure the media landscape and

bring the media on-side. Legislation was also used to silence and/or intimidate journalists (Farmanfarmaian, Sonay, and Akser 2018). The mainstream media reflected the features of a highly polarized media system and mostly supported the socio-political camps of the AKP, the Gülen movement or the Kemalists (Panayirci, Iseri, and Sekercioglu 2016). After the attempted coup, media institutions became increasingly homogenous and the variety of media perspectives declined (Farmanfarmaian, Sonay, and Akser 2018).

The revival period for alternative media began with these new restrictions, increasing concentrations of ownership, the diffusion of new media technologies and global protests (Bal, Bulut, and Baruh 2019). The first internet-based alternative media of Turkey, Bianet, was founded and operated after 2000, yet the surge in the number of alternative media occurred in the first half of the 2010s. Two types of alternative media emerged, one of which was formed by citizens who were discontent with the way the news was monopolized and subdued, and the other being an initiative of professional journalists who found themselves unable to report through their news channels during the 'Gezi Parki' protests and afterwards. Many were immediately fired or pacified through threats if they attempted to report news that conflicted with the AKP, whose media favoured the dominant values of family, the state, the nation and Islam (Farmanfarmaian, Sonay, and Akser 2018). Today, there are various internet-based alternative media outlets that continue to operate freely and provide alternative perspectives but there are only few studies exploring their organizational structures (Akser and McCollum 2019).

On the basis of the above literature, three research questions were developed and investigated in this study, as follows:

RQ1: Are there any similarities in the news production process and internal power relations within the alternative professional media projects of both countries? (By analysing internal power relations, we examine whether news producers have an equal say on the deployment of journalists and selection of news).

RQ2: What are their news values? (The criteria by which journalists in alternative professional media select their news)

RQ3: On which level (news values and normative ideals, producers, and structure) do alternative professional media journalists position their organisation as an alternative to the mainstream media?

Methodology

This study is part of a larger research project that draws on 23 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2019-2020 with journalists from 12 alternative media projects in Greece and Turkey. We grouped these projects into three general categories determined by Vatikiotis and Milioni (2019), namely: advocacy media, alternative professional media and information as commons. Within the scope of this article, we focus on a smaller sample, namely those alternative media outlets belonging to the alternative professional media category (see Table 1).

More specifically, with respect to the Greek sample, our discussion draws on three media outlets (with five interviews in total, as per Table 1), including *Efimerida*

Table 1. Greek and Turkish interviewees.

Context	Medium	Medium Profile	Identifier	Affiliation	Gender
Greek	Efimerida ton Sydakton (Efsyn)	Independent unionist daily newspaper (since 2012)	G.1	Staff	Female
			G.2	Staff	Male
			G.3	Staff	Male
	The Press Project W	Independent news site (since 2010)	G.4	Staff	Female
		Independent (Marxist) professional news site and radio (since 2006)	G.5	Staff	Male
Turkish	T24	Independent news site (since 2009)	T.1	Staff	Female
			T.2	Staff	Male
			T.3	Staff	Male
	Mesyascope.tv	Independent news site (since 2015)	T.4	Staff	Female
			T.5	Staff	Male
			T.6	Staff	Male
	Arti Gercek	Independent news site (since 2017)	T.7	Staff	Female
			T.8	Staff	Female
			T.9	Staff	Male

Sydakton, *The Press Project*, and a project that is indicated as *W* in the analysis to safeguard its producer's anonymity (as it is essentially a one-person operation). The selection of these outlets was based on their popularity in the Greek media field. For the first two, participants were identified by snowballing techniques. The Efimerida Syntakton (Efsyn-the Editors' Newspaper) is the largest of the Greek alternative media outlets. It is a co-operative print and online news medium that is run exclusively by its workers, including journalists, marketing and salespeople, technicians, and anyone else needed to run a newspaper off- and online. Most of the journalists at Efsyn lost their jobs when another newspaper – Eleftherotipia – closed down. Efsyn has grown substantially and reached second place in terms of national weekly circulation rankings (Siapera and Papadopoulou 2017). Efsyn's income is based on advertising and the newspaper's sales volume. The Press Project (thepressproject.gr) is one of the oldest and most established alternative media outlets in Greece. Despite its founder – Kostas Efimeros – having died in 2017 and being a relatively small-sized outlet, it continues to grow. The project is primarily funded by subscriptions, and much less by ad hoc activities such as concerts, parties, or the selling of TPP products. *W* is an independent alternative professional media project that provides a Marxist analysis of the news. It also produces radio programs and documentaries. The project is funded by reader donations and advertising revenues. All of the participants interviewed are professional journalists at different stages of their careers.

The Turkish sample includes *T24*, *Medyascope.tv*, *Arti Gercek* (with nine interviews in total, as listed in Table 1). The projects and participants were identified via snowballing techniques. *T24* is one of the oldest and most well-established Internet-based independent newspapers in Turkey and was founded by the well-known journalist, Dogan Akin, in 2009 (Yanatma 2017). Their income is based on advertising. *Medyascope.tv*, is a video-based online news site founded by another well-known journalist, Rusen Cakir, in 2015. It operates in six different languages (Medyascope 2017). It is funded by advertising, Patreon (support fees from readers) and international organizations. Both *T24* and *Medyascope.tv* have semi-professional studios

and broadcast over mobile live streaming applications and social media services like Periscope, Youtube and Vimeo. Having been more recently founded, in 2017, Arti media is still relatively small compared to the others. As the two businessmen who fund the project did not want to invest in media established in Turkey,¹ Arti was set up in Germany. It consists of an online newspaper, Arti Gercek, whose executive editor Celal Baslangic, is also a professional journalist, and a TV channel, Arti TV. Only the structure of the online newspaper is explored in this study. Of our nine Turkish interviewees, three were professional journalists who had once worked in the Turkish media and now wish to engage in independent and free reporting; four were newly graduated journalism students; and two were ordinary citizens who were discontent with Turkey's monopolized news media. One of them had started to work at Medyascope.tv, and the other at Arti Gercek (first on a voluntary, and then on a contractual basis). Both citizens mentioned that their writing skills were tested before they could produce news content.

Eleven interviews were conducted face-to-face and three using Skype. Their duration varied between 1 and 1.5 h. Drawing on old and new alternative media literature (e.g. Atton 2002; Downing 2001; Sandoval and Fuchs 2010; Andersson 2012; Nossek and Carpentier 2019; Holt, Figenschou, and Frischlich 2019; Vatikiotis and Milioni 2019), our interview guide broadly focussed on the following areas of examination: 1) news production routines and internal power relations; 2) news values, normative ideals and restrictions; 3) funding and financial issues; tracking changes over time; 4) technological implications; and 5) challenges and opportunities (issues of viability).

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed in Greek, Turkish and English for the purposes of coding. In conducting our investigation, we followed the six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2013). While analysing the news values of journalists, we benefitted from the eleven news values indicated by Harcup and O'Neill (2017, 1471). Finally, in order to guarantee the anonymity of our interviewees, participants were anonymised and identified with letters, as shown in Table 1.

News Production and Internal Power Relations in Greek Alternative Professional Media

In Greece, the news production structure of alternative professional media often changes in accordance with the number of staff working on a project. The smallest project in our study is the *W* project. The *W* producer entered the alternative media landscape from the mainstream media during a period of political and economic turmoil in Greece, characterized by shutdowns of established media organizations. As Vatikiotis and Milioni (2019, 4228) argue, "these journalists sought to create alternative new media outlets that would be editorially and financially independent and structured according to self-organizing and collective principles". In *W*, issues are selected and presented by its producer "G.5". As this project is primarily a one-man operation, there is no focus on 24/7 news reporting:

"W is not about investigative journalism in the sense of grand revelations. I try to 'translate' into lay language complicated academic views for a larger audience. In some cases, I do explore some topics in depth and write about them".

G.5 has many years of experience and personally selects the topics, writes the scripts, chooses the music and translates when needed. For purely technical aspects like the sound, there is another person who helps. There is also a collaborator on a part-time basis who sometimes assists with the translations and the website. G.5 is thus the sole decision-maker in the outlet's news production cycle.

In contrast, the Press Project is amongst the most well-known and respected alternative professional media in Greece. Its editorial team is composed of five journalists and copywriters who are on part time contracts but work full-time hours. The journalists participate in each stage of news production. Although it is a small group, the Press Project's staff value investigative journalism, something that a reporter in a bureau following a 24-hour news cycle often cannot enjoy (Bivens 2008). The team also produces daily news. Given the small number of journalists in the news production process and lack of time for research, the Press Project staff depends greatly on foreign and national news agencies for daily news, as well as freelancers to further enrich its content. They directly upload their news to the site unless they feel they need input from others. While there is some dependence on news agencies and second-hand journalism (Quandt 2008), as other studies have noted, The Press Project aims to provide "independent journalism, critical analysis and coverage in a professional manner" (Boucas and Iosifidis 2020, 149).

To enrich its content, the Press Project also operates a web radio and gives subscribers one hour per week to view its shows. In this manner, they engage with more voices through the outlet. As G.4 states, they have also created closer relationships with people who comment on their news stories: "these commentators are a big part of the project. They come to our events and become our subscribers". The involvement of members of a community in content production is considered central to this project.

The structure of the Press Project fits alternative media definitions (Atton 2015; Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpentier 2008), in that it challenges hegemonic power with its collective meetings, offers space for political subjectivities within or beyond existing political groups and, therefore, has the potential to create discussions. This indicates a shift from traditional gatekeeping to new routines in the newsroom that facilitate and circulate knowledge produced by the public. G.4 also explains that their website initially translated their news stories into English for the benefit of foreign correspondents, but this was not sustainable over time due to resource scarcity.

Unlike the Press Project, Efsyn started with a larger number of staff (around 40-50). It now has 120 staff, including journalists, admin staff and technicians. As the number of journalists in this project has grown, the emergence of a two-layer hierarchical structure is apparent. Whereas the lower layer is composed of editors who select issues to cover and write the content, chief editors in the upper layer control the line and content of these items. Who will take part in these two layers is collectively decided. G.1 explains how this two-layer system emerged:

"We all collectively elect our editors and chief editors. Then, they are accountable to our general assembly. The structure is vertical and there is a hierarchy. We do this because this facilitates our job of creating things faster. We are all equal, but we are not the same. There is mutual respect, but there are different responsibilities for those who have 25 years of experience compared to interns".

A new model of news production was thus introduced, wherein the hierarchical structure was formed with a collective inclination.

As in the Press Project, Efsyn journalists also mention that they value investigative journalism and conduct interviews to uncover background information about their stories. They also give space to their audience's voices. Yet, although the Press Project has created a much more engaging environment, facilitated by its more manageable size, Efsyn does so through more traditional pathways:

"We also publish letters from our readers. Almost on a daily basis, we dedicate a page to our readers". G.2

News Values, Normative Ideals and Restrictions

When the journalists described the news production process, they also expressed their criteria for selecting news items, their normative ideals and the extent to which they could be critical of mainstream outlets. At *W*, the producer (G.5) primarily focuses on stories about the dynamics of power and inequalities and maintains a steady and loyal audience. G.5 emphasizes that he has a clear political identity in that he offers a Marxist analysis of the news. In terms of restrictions, G.5 explains that although he was never censored, at least overtly, while working for a mainstream organization, he is now much freer to frame stories in a more critical way. He does not accept the characterization of journalistic activism in that he sees himself as a professional and, as such, views activism as opposing that. Nevertheless, he is suspicious of strict approaches to so-called journalistic objectivity and holds that journalists should be honest, but true objectivity is impossible:

"I do not believe in objectivity. I grew up with Howard Zinn's approach, in that 'you can't be neutral in a moving train'. Although reality can be objective, media coverage by a journalist will always be subjective. [...] and my audience knows what to expect from me".

On the other hand, when selecting news, Press Project journalists seek to select stories on which they can offer a different angle from that given by the mainstream media. For instance, when H&M attempted to change the contracts of its employees to a status that was unfavourable to them, the Press Project was first to cover the story about the working conditions in H&M. As G.4 underlines "thanks to its circulation through social media, the news story was also broadcast on a public channel (ERT) and became a hot topic of discussion in public discourse".

As in the case of the other two, Efsyn journalists also sought to present a counter perspective to the mainstream media, which had been supportive of austerity measures (Iosifidis 2016). They cover issues arising due to economic crises and, in so doing, adopt a human-centric approach:

"For example, when covering a topic about protests against redundancies of people on fixed contracts, we would aim to actually talk to one of them, visit their neighbourhood and their home. Similarly, with refugees we want the story to be told by them". G.2

The following quote is also important in emphasizing the marginalized issues that Efsyn focuses on and the potential of such frames to affect dominant news narratives:

"Along with Eleftherotipia being closed down, many issues disappeared from the news agenda [...], such as refugee issues, human rights, women's rights, amongst others. Similarly, the media coverage of the protests was also very negative towards the protesters. Our first circulation coincided with the massive protests in 2012, and our framing was completely different, in that we wrote that the riot police attacked the protesters with tear gas. Two days later, the narrative from other news sources had changed". G.1

When asked if they face any restrictions, all of the Efsyn interviewees agreed that they enjoy the absolute freedom in the selection of news stories and not being constrained by vested interests that potentially hinders the production of news in mainstream news outlets:

"Working in our medium, one can actually practice investigative journalism as one would never be able to if hindered by having to protect business and other big corporations or being afraid that the boss would not like the news article." G.2

Nevertheless, as with the other two Greek alternative media outlets whose employees we interviewed, they claim to have a clear political identity that leans to the left.

"We admit that we are a centre-left newspaper that sometimes supports the government; but we also stand critically against it, especially when we detect weaknesses or mistakes". G.1

This interview with G.1 was conducted when the radical left party SYRIZA was in power.

News Production and Internal Power Relations in Turkish Alternative Professional Media

The journalists that were interviewed in Turkey emphasized a gradual change in the number of staff and the news production process in all three alternative professional media projects that were analysed. For instance, just like the *W* producer, the founder of Medyascope.tv, Rusen Cakir, first reported news as a solo reporter from his office at a mainstream media organization. He then quit his post and launched the Medyascope.tv website with his two friends, which produced news programmes with voluntary staff who were mostly formed by enthusiastic journalism students and a few ordinary citizens who wished to work with Cakir. Cakir provided his staff with training in all areas of journalism. Having had no prior media experience, T.5, for instance, describes his journey at Medyascope.tv:

"First, I went to the production studio and worked there for a while. One day, Rusen Cakir asked me to write a news article. I guess he was checking my journalistic skills. They then asked me to work with the editorial team".

T.5's statement shows that Medyascope.tv's deployment of staff is predicated on expertise and authoritativeness, as are the mainstream media's sourcing routines (Atton and Wickenden 2005).

Although news production initially depended on these young journalists, as the project reached a larger audience, more experienced journalists began joining, which shaped the news production routine. As in Efsyn, a two-layer production process

emerged. T.4, who was a journalism student when she first joined the project, describes the news production structure:

"News production has transformed into a structure that we see in a mainstream media channel where the staff have more specific roles and rules and procedures while producing news. In our case, with the production director and owner of the channel (Rusen Cakir), there is another layer, formed by experienced editors. This has been necessary for our corporatisation."

The other two editors interviewed for this project agreed with this claim by T.4 and asserted that a hierarchical structure where experienced editors control the work of junior editors is necessary for preventing the spread of misinformation and maintaining the project's credibility.

The change in the roles and power of the staff occurred slowly and they were placed in strict roles corresponding to their skills/capabilities. Yet, unlike Efsyn, the staff do not decide collectively on their editorial roles. T.6, one of the chief editors of Medyascope, outlines this:

"Although every employee can join the daily editorial meetings at 10:30 AM, the directing team can no longer join the news production process, as sending them out for shooting was negatively affecting the stage direction. Some in the directing team are unhappy with this decision".

The non-resistance of staff to these changes is grounded on their belief in Cakir. Our two young interviewees, who began their journalism careers at Medyascope.tv, stated that they are influenced by Cakir and portray him as their mentor.

Despite this hierarchical structure, Medyascope.tv also embodies a culture of participation (Harcup 2011). For instance, 3000 videos from ordinary citizens have been broadcast on Medyascope.tv. Videos from Unsal Unlu, another alternative professional journalist, are also regularly shared on the website. Yet, whose videos will be shared and whether they conform to the ethical codes of journalism are decided by the editors (Avadar 2019, 50).

Another difference of Medyascope.tv from the mainstream media is its collective meetings, attended by each of its staff each morning. Only the founder, Cakir, decided to no longer participate in these meetings. The young editors praise this decision, as they believe they are more able to express their opinions in his absence, showing that even though the project's practices and structure seek to suppress hierarchy, it can still be formed within the minds of the staff.

The hierarchical production process can also be observed in two other journalist-led projects in Turkey – T24 and Arti Gercek. Like Medyascope.tv, Dogan Akin, who is the founder and executive editor of T24, started the project with a team of 18 young journalism graduates, two experienced journalists (who were friends of his) and three freelance writers. As at Medyascope.tv, the young graduates acquired training and were placed in roles according to their skills/capabilities. The number of staff has also gradually grown. Today, a large number of freelance writers who had to leave their positions at mainstream media outlets work as op-ed columnists for T24.

The news is produced in a two-layer structure with nine editors and three chief editors, including Akin. All editors and chief editors meet every morning to set the agenda for the day. However, two young T24 editors reveal that this two-level

hierarchical structure does not involve Medyascope.tv-style supervision. To catch up with the fast pace of technology, editors do not send their pieces to the chief editors for approval and rather post them directly online. One editor, T.2, justifies this approach, saying, “we want the public to first hear the news from us”. T.2 also adds that:

“We only approach chief editors and ask for advice if we are not certain about a topic. Also, if the chief editors spot any error in a published story, they tell us, and we fix it”.

The chief editors thereby still decide how the moderating practice should be performed, but do not moderate the news before it is published due to the fast information environment of the Internet.

Like T24, immediacy is an important value for another alternative professional media project in Turkey, Arti Gercek. Founded in Germany, Arti Gercek has seven editors, one chief editor, two reporters in Istanbul, one in Diyarbakir and one graphic designer. The project aims to be a 24-hour online news site and, despite having a chief editor, the editors select and directly upload their news to the site. The editor (T.8) adds that the commercial imperatives and lack of staff are factors that compel Arti Gercek to bypass the editorial routines/practices followed in the mainstream media. The fact that there is only one chief editor negates a second moderation process in the editorial structure. The editor also adds that the speed helps them attract traffic to the website, which affects the number of times the story is shared on social media. According to T.8, the first web link is always the most shared on social media and, both for prominence and financial reasons, they must be the first to share the news.

Like the Press Project in Greece, the routine pressures of deadlines and lack of resources also push the journalists to adopt a more autonomous style in the news production process than at other projects. As a result, they do not conduct morning news meetings to determine the daily agenda, which T.8 elaborates thus:

“We only meet on Thursdays and discuss the important news of the week. Everyone has a specific role. For instance, I am the foreign editor following German-language news. Therefore, everyone knows it is my job to select, translate and upload German-language news to the website”.

The staff is also expected to conduct different roles concurrently, as T.8 describes:

“I am the foreign affairs editor but I am also checking emails from the audience, translating the news and conducting interviews”.

To carry out all of these roles requires time and resources, but the entryway to the platform is restricted. When asked if ordinary citizens can join in the news production process, T.8 replied that they accept interns who are selected by the executive editor.

News Values, Normative Ideals and Restrictions

All our Turkish alternative professional journalists state that they seek to inform the audience about stories overlooked by the mainstream media. Medyascope.tv journalist

T.4 emphasizes that they broadcast programmes to reflect local voices during elections:

We did something that other media organisations didn't do during the election period. We went to different neighbourhoods in every part of Turkey and talked to the citizens and political actors of that city.

T24 journalists also state that they aim to share the news of marginalized groups in Turkey, such as LGBT groups, which are excluded in the dominant mainstream media (Ozturk 2017):

"We produce news about groups whose voice needs to be heard by the society. For example, LGBT news might even draw reaction from our readers, but we do not exclude them just because the readers are not interested in this news". T.3

Similarly, Arti Gercek journalists note that they aim to reflect the voice of everyone in Turkey, including dissenting ones, such as those of the Kurds, which are disregarded in the mainstream media.

The journalists also highlight that they value producing impartial news that is an alternative to that produced by the monopolized and polarized partisan mainstream media in Turkey. Although the journalists agree that they all have a political stand and a neutral, value-free representation of reality is often difficult to achieve, they pay particular attention to not sharing their political viewpoints while covering the news and aim to conduct balanced reporting by allocating equal space to opposing views. The chief editor at Medyascope.tv (T.6) claims that they are only partial when the issue concerns minority groups. They are also against racism, sexism and violence towards women.

Yet, the three alternative professional media's journalists are differentiated by their news selection practices and normative ideals. The T24 and Arti Gercek journalists stress the need for immediacy and value the timeliness of their stories. On the other hand, for Medyascope.tv, journalistic accuracy is more important than immediacy. Being the first to get the story to the public is not a priority. Similarly to their Greek counterparts, Medyascope.tv journalists explain that they select stories to which they can offer a different angle from that given in the mainstream media. This might also relate to the distribution format adopted by Medyascope.tv, which is a mostly video-based news outlet with staff working five days a week. On the other hand, T24 and Arti Gercek aim to be 24-hour online news organizations. This format introduces the journalistic norm of immediacy (Morlandsto and Mathisen 2017).

When interviewees were asked to what extent they could be critical in their writing and if their stories have always been published without any restrictions, they reported two types of censorship: 1) The censoring of certain words/expressions used in their stories; 2) self-censorship.

According to T24 journalist T.2:

"Those are regular words that you can use in a normal country, but with Turkey's current structure, for the continuity of the projects, they must avoid using certain words".

Similarly, a Medyascope journalist (T.5) mentioned that all of his stories had been published, but once in 2018, when Turkey sent troops to Afrin, a city in northern Syria, his phrase "Afrin war" was replaced by "Afrin operation", which was the

language used by the government at the time. T.5 approves of this decision by his colleagues. He believes the project expands the boundaries, creates a new public sphere in Turkey and, to create this, some renunciations are necessary. All Turkish interviewees also agree that the first task is to survive and build support:

"If the government sees us as a threat, they would not sue us for our news, but they would say, for instance, your fire safety measures (of your office) are insufficient, you should close this place down". T.6

On the other hand, *Arti Gercek* editor T.8 states that, to maintain their impartiality, they do not use some words preferred by the Turkish government, such as "terrorist", for members of certain groups like Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Rather, they use the definition preferred by each group in stories on them. Yet, despite this radical stance, T.8 admits that potential sanctions also have an influence on their coverage:

"We are in Germany, but we have an office in Turkey. We should be careful about our members there. In particular, news about Syria, Turkish forces and Kurds ... We should be very careful and balanced while covering the issue, giving both sides equal space".

The political context in Turkey also encourages journalists to self-censor their work. Our interviewees claim they often do this without even realizing it.

Discussion and Conclusions

This article first examines the organizational structures of Greek and Turkish alternative professional media, which remains largely absent in the alternative media literature, and explores whether there are any similarities in the news production process and internal power relations within the alternative professional media projects of the two countries. Our results indicate that news production in these projects changes in accordance with their scales. Large-scale projects in both countries, such as *Medyascope.tv*, *T24* and *Efsyn* value giving an equal say to their staff on the selection of daily news and organizing daily meeting in which all staff can participate. The journalists in small-scale projects like the *Press Project* in Greece and *Arti Gercek* in Turkey are obligated to operate in a more autonomous manner. Due to a lack of resources, they often skip the daily editorial meeting process and become the sole decision-makers when selecting news.

The editorial layout in Greece also changes in accordance with project scale. In small-scale projects, there is no layer in the news production process. *Efsyn*, on the other hand, with 120 staff, adopts the two-layer editorial process seen in mainstream media outlets. However, even at *Efsyn*, the journalists value the non-hierarchical relationships they share and collective decision-making during the sourcing process. The alternative professional projects' structures in Greece are therefore closer to the collective media structure.

Instead, the alternative professional media in Turkey exhibit characteristics similar to the mainstream media in terms of editorial layout and internal power relations. As ordinary citizens and new journalism graduates become engaged in news production at alternative professional media in Turkey, the necessity of hierarchical relationships becomes more apparent in the eyes of both professional and amateur journalists.

When there are enough staff to maintain the credibility of their projects, the editors operate in a two-layer, hierarchical structure in which senior editors check and modify the news produced by their junior counterparts. This hierarchy is also apparent in internal power relations. Although staff have an equal say in the selection of news, the deployment of inexperienced journalists by the Turkish projects is predicated on the expertise and authoritativeness of professional journalists. In order to ensure long-term survival of their projects, the journalists seek to appeal to a large audience. This commercial ideology does not conform to the socialist values articulated by collective media advocates and limits collective decision-making processes at alternative professional media (Khiabany 2000). The asymmetrical power relations in Turkish projects thus stand in stark contrast to the collective nature of the Greek ones, whose organizational structures reflect their ideological stance and the background of their journalists. As all Greek projects had previous experience with news production, their collective structure does not become a threat to the survival of their projects.

On the other hand, the news production processes of the alternative professional media projects in Turkey show variation, even within the projects themselves, due to their differing normative ideals. To be sustainable, T24 and Arti Gercek journalists value immediate journalism, whereas for Medyascope.tv, being accurate and educational is the key ideal. To produce news fast and receive clicks, the former two simplified the news moderation process, and the editors enter their news into the platform directly. This is not specific to the alternative professional media. A recent study by Morlandsto and Mathisen (2017) reports that traditional newspapers, such as the Norwegian regional newspaper Nordlys, also change their editorial routines for their online commentary sites and allow unedited utterances to be published in order to be able to produce the news fast. The rise of ICTs has thus blurred the distinction between alternative professional media and their mainstream media counterparts, and undermined the rising standards of alternative professional media (Kenix 2015).

This brings us to our second point: “what are the news criteria by which alternative professional journalists select their news?” We found, in accordance with Atton’s (2002) assertion, that alternative professional journalists from both Greece and Turkey prioritize giving voice to the marginalized and offering an alternative to mainstream media narratives on the issues surrounding social inequalities. When selecting news to report, they therefore select stories that subvert the predominant discourse in the mainstream media with a human-centric approach. Although their objectives coincide, they opt for different strategies for presenting their messages based on the political and media contexts in which they operate. In contrast to populist commercial mainstream media with an uncritical approach towards the state’s policies, the Greek alternative professional journalists aim to challenge the austerity measures introduced by the government. Consequently, they are compelled to practice more interpretive, partial forms of journalism and are sceptical of impartiality as a normative ideal for alternative professional media. On the other hand, their counterparts in Turkey differentiate their chosen news from that in the mainstream on the basis of their ideological viewpoint. Rather, they aim to present their news from an impartial position in response to the increasing polarization and partisanship in the Turkish mainstream media. They also believe that the first prerequisite for transforming the mainstream is

to maintain their sustainability, while continuing to operate as independent media channels. For this, unlike their Greek counterparts, they believe in the necessity of censoring their words or using the predominant discourse favoured by the state.

We also observed that audiences continue to have restricted access to alternative professional media (Downing 2003). The ideal of open publishing and active public involvement in the news selection process emphasized by Traber (1985) does not match the professional news production structures that characterize the projects analysed herein. The Press Project is the only platform that gives its readers direct access (for one hour per week) to its news selection process. Others practice a more traditional gate-keeping approach. For instance, Efsyn in Greece devotes one page to its readers' letters. Similarly, the projects in Turkey only process citizens' news with some journalistic control. Medyascope.tv values the participatory nature of the Internet and yet, only shares ordinary citizens' news on its platforms if it is first scrutinized by its editors; it is only then uploaded to the website if the editors found it reasonable (Avadar 2019, 50).

Our final research question concerned which level (news values and normative ideals, producers, and structure) alternative professional journalists position their organizations in order to operate as viable alternatives to the mainstream media. We found that, as all of the Greek journalists interviewed are professionals, the 'alternative' element is not emphasized by producers, but rather the news values and freedom that characterizes the news production processes. The projects in Greece strive to adopt a non-hierarchical structure and journalists collectively decide on how their organizations will be structured. By no means do alternative professional journalists perceive their work to be less professional than that in mainstream media organizations. It is important to highlight here that these interviewees belong to the category of alternative professional media, and as such their perceptions do not align with other alternative media journalists who may see themselves as political activists (Lievrouw 2011). In the case of our interviewees, activism is perceived to be an undermining factor in their professional practices. The growing distrust towards politicians, political parties and the mainstream media in Greece has created circumstances that have enabled the development of new forms of alternative journalism that is no longer confined to the margins. Thereby, our findings concur with the argument of Siapera and Papadopoulou (2017, 97), that "this radical journalism is looking to reclaim the mainstream rather than opposing it".

The alternative professional media outlets in Turkey differentiate themselves from mainstream media outlets through their producers and news content, rather than their organizational structures, which reflect many characteristics of the mainstream media. Instead, these journalists struggle to change the mainstream media from within and so, like their Greek counterparts, they seek to do this via alternative professional media. While creating alternative content, they maintain the traditional news production routines that they used to operate within. It can also be seen that they value self-sustainability, which necessitates commercially minded operation (Kenix 2015). Advertisers and corporations do not have an influence on alternative professional media, but that global corporations such as Google can still influence their editorial processes.

Yet, despite their structural similarities to mainstream media, alternative professional media play an important role in bringing diversity to an increasingly homogeneous media sphere and providing a platform for sacked journalists who can no longer continue their professions in the mainstream media. Even former ministers of the ruling party now use them as a platform, as these politicians are not allowed to participate in televised debates (Yanatma 2016). In line with Sandoval and Fuchs (2010) theory, Turkish projects show us that to serve the community, the alternative professional media's organization need not always be an alternative to the mainstream media. In countries such as Turkey, where dissident voices gradually decrease, even small differences in the content of the news can make big differences to the polarized nature of the mainstream media and in resistance to repressive measures.

Due to space limitations, and in order to provide a comprehensive and focussed analysis, this article only presents data pertaining to the news production routines, internal power relations as well as news values, normative ideals and restrictions of the projects. Future research needs to provide a detailed information about their funding, and the financial and technological issues they encounter in the digital age. Another limitation is that the findings are not generalizable to other alternative professional media in both countries. As is explained above, even projects of the same country could adopt different organizational structures based on their normative ideals. Finally, in order to build a comprehensive picture of the way in which alternative professional media projects enhance democracy, future research is also needed to analyse their news content, as well as audience engagement therewith, and ultimately to provide a broader focus on their impacts on communities.

Note

1. Interview with Arti Gercek editor, T.9.

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