Creating Multiple Global Publics: How Global Voices Engages Journalists and Bloggers around the World

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<u>**Project:**</u>
Global Voices: http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/

<u>**Summary**</u>
Since its inception in 2004, Global Voices has developed as a major hub for a worldwide network of people speaking about their local situations to a global audience using the tools of citizen-generated media. The site features a central blog that offers aggregation of and commentary on outside blog content, available by region, country, and language, on such topics as politics, governance, and human rights. It also hosts several additional blogs, including advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org, as well as blogs for each language the editors translate content into. In addition to providing content, Global Voices has become a voice for freedom of speech in the international blogosphere and a source of technical information about how to avoid political restraints on net-based free speech—central concerns for the health of a growing international public sphere.

While not created under the auspices of a traditional public media outlet or program, the site demonstrably engages publics that cohere around particular regions and issues, as well as serving journalists and a broader public of readers interested in international coverage itself. The engagement of these publics in the site is demonstrated through volunteer contributions, comments, outside coverage of topics raised on the site, and participation in annual conferences. The success of the site in promoting knowledge and action is documented below through a variety of methods, from an analysis of the site's mission and evolution, to a discussion of its structure as a participatory media platform, to analysis of the site's outreach efforts, including internal and external metrics, polling, and comparisons with similar projects.

This case study is part of a larger project by the Center for Social Media titled Mapping Public Media (http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/mpm). The project highlights innovative public media projects—defined by the center as media that engage publics to communicate about shared issues and act upon them—and compares different methods for mapping the resources, circuits of circulation, and connections that sustain the public media field.

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<u>**Primary Platform**</u>
Online blogging site

<u>**Other platforms/formats:**</u>
Online video sharing, podcasts RSS feeds

<u>**Budget**</u>
Annual Budget, 2006: $530,000

<u>**Funders 2006**</u>
Reuters: $450,000
MacArthur (part of general support to Berkman Center): $70,000
McKnight Award: $10,000

<u>**Awards**</u>
Grand Prize for Innovations in Journalism, Knight-Batten Foundation (2006)

<u>**TIMELINE:**</u>

2004
December   Global Voices founded at Berkman Center's Internet and Politics conference

2005
April   Current site launches
September   Global Voices participates in World Summit on the Information Society in Tunisia.
December   Global Voices holds first annual conference at Reuters HQ in London.

2006
January   Global Voices receives unrestricted grant from Reuters allowing for major staff
                      expansion.

September   Global Voices Online Awarded the Grand Prize for Innovations in Journalism from
                      the Knight-Batten Foundation

December   Global Voices holds second annual conference in Delhi.

<u>**Background:**</u>

Global Voices emerged from a conference "Votes, Bits & Bytes," held at Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet and Society, December 10 and 11, 2004. The conference was funded by the Open Society Institute Information Program and Spirit of America. Both U.S. co-founders of Global Voices have backgrounds working internationally and had recent experience with the emerging world of the blogosphere. Rebecca McKinnon had previously been the CNN bureau chief in Beijing. Zuckerman had a background in information technology–related development work in Africa. At the conference they brought together a group of bloggers from around the globe.

Based on sentiments expressed at the initial meeting, Zuckerman and McKinnon set up a simple blog using a content management system (CMS) called WordPress. They then followed up with a wiki site, allowing participants to co-create the first Global Voices Manifesto and develop a mission statement and a value statement. This core group issued a manifesto that evinced a frustration with traditional mainstream media's lack of context and information about the developing world and that called for a global conversation on the level of citizen media. It named no names, but postulated a global conversation in which citizens could speak from their own point of view rather than being restricted to passing information through mass media outlets, whether commercial or government-owned. As the manifesto suggests, "Thanks to new tools, speech need no longer be controlled by those who own the means of publishing and distribution, or by governments that would restrict thought and communication."

With a spontaneity typical of new online formations, Global Voices began, not as a highly organized movement, but as a group of like-minded people interested in helping people in the developing world to "take control of their own story." The dynamism of the group excited the faculty at Harvard, where it was based. They worked with the director of the Berkman Center to apply for a McArthur grant, which came in the summer of 2005.

By April 2005, Rebecca McKinnon recalls, she decided to "see what happens if we post roundups of the blogosphere." Global Voices began building up their capacity as an aggregator, working with local "bridge bloggers," a term they appropriated to describe bloggers who were already aggregating content from or linking to other bloggers locally in different regions of the globe. [See Bridge Bloggers Section below] Over the summer of 2005 the team grew, employing an intern to do the daily roundups of the global blogosphere that appeared on their Web pages.

By the fall of 2005, Global Voices had enough activity to keep six regional editors busy, each paid $500 per month to keep track of their regional blogospheres and highlight relevant posts.
The feedback from bloggers in different parts of the world was positive. Bloggers liked the exposure on the Global Voices site; this meant there was a "pull effect" that encouraged globally relevant blogging coming from local blogospheres. In other words, according to McKinnon, bloggers started to write their posts with an eye to an arena larger than their local blogosphere because of the Global Voices connection.

Global Voices as Advocate for Free Speech Online
Global Voices' role as an advocate for free exchange of information got a boost in September 2005, when support from HIVOS, a Dutch development foundation, allowed the group to participate in the International Telecommunication Union's World Summit on the Information Society in Tunisia (http://www.itu.int/wsis/index.html). For Zuckerman, this was a critical point in their development, allowing them a platform to talk about what was really going on in the "online freedom space" of the global blogosphere. Efforts to discourage Global Voices' participation on the

part of the Tunisian government were thwarted only by timely intervention by the Dutch ambassador to Tunisia, further highlighting their new role as an advocate for online free speech.

First Annual Conference
Global Voices held its first annual conference at the end of 2005 at the Reuters Headquarters in London. At the time of the first conference, it became clear that Global Voices had the momentum of a growing "movement," expanding beyond a role as an aggregator to the point where the existence of Global Voices seems to support a flowering of a blogosphere in countries like Cambodia and Burma. In fact, at the conference, bloggers from Cambodia joined the Global Voices network, while others reported a flourishing blogosphere in otherwise repressive or controlled media contexts, such as Iran or Egypt.

Partnership with Reuters
In April 2006, Reuters announced a partnership with Global Voices which increased the project's funding support extensively and allowed them to expand from six to ten regional editors. They also added seven language editors, a podcast editor, and a second managing editor. The relationship between Global Voices and Reuters is not typical of a commercial news contract. Reuters has no exclusive use of Global Voices material, nor exclusive access to its sources. Reuters does have a feature of its online news that contains links to Global Voices bloggers. This is a custom feature which Global Voices calls "reblogging," essentially a syndicated "reprint" of the blog as it appeared on the Global Voices site. In addition, Global Voices personnel participate in various Reuters Forums, as well as less formal discussions about how Reuters can or should relate to the world of blogs and citizen media.

Global Voices 2006 Delhi Conference
The second annual Global Voices Conference, held in December 2006, focused on two main agenda items:
* How do we bring more unheard, ignored, or disadvantaged voices into the global online conversation?
* How do we help people speak and be heard—even when powerful people try to stop them from doing so?

While some of the issues (such as language translation) that emerged during the discussion in reference to the difficulties of creating a truly "global" conversation could be seen as "technical problems," what is significant is that they can also be seen as reflecting a growing need for a dialogue within Global Voices that can move directly from region to region, not necessarily traveling though the English language or the United States or the United Kingdom. This emerging need reframes the typical "digital divide" discussion.

McKinnon, reporting from that meeting, noted that *Time Magazine* had made the anonymous "citizen journalist" its "man of the year." She also noted that the problems raised at the conference suggested just how utopian the idea of a true global conversation remains, given the barriers to access (both economic and political) and the problems of language and literacy.

Dueling Approaches
A key to understanding Global Voices is that it plays two different roles as a space for providing information. On the one hand, it is an aggregator of what is "most interesting" in the blogosphere outside of Western Europe and North America. This information is available to interested parties in the English-speaking world. In this way, Global Voices serves to offer global citizens' media to the

Western press. On the other hand, Global Voices is a bloggers community whose members are interested in each other. One important question going into the future is whether the tension between these two roles is antagonistic or beneficial.

Changes in the Organization
As Global Voices has grown, the stresses associated with having a global organization based at Harvard and managed by Americans have, as McKinnon sees it, started to show. As of spring 2007 the Global Voices group was moving to change its venue, and by September, was in the advanced stages of incorporating as a *Stichting,* or foundation, under Dutch law.) In addition, both founders are looking to step aside. Although for any nonprofit, losing its visionary founders can be a death knell, both McKinnon and Zuckerman feel sanguine about the future of Global Voices. For McKinnon, who, while still involved, has left to teach in China, losing its American identity is crucial for Global Voices's continued legitimacy, particularly for bloggers in areas such as the Middle East and Latin America.

Site Structure
Regional Editors
The structure of Global Voices is built around regional editors who receive modest salaries to aggregate information from their geographical region. Understanding the role of these regional editors is key for understanding how individual blog posts can be aggregated and read globally while retaining local nuance, context, and flavor.

The role of the regional editor is to cull the blogosphere in his or her region of responsibility and represent that result both to the region and to the global feed. The structure of Global Voices is such that a great deal depends on the sensibility—what in journalism would be called 'news sense'— of these editors. This contrasts with other online 'news sites' that depend to a larger extent on various types of self-publishing, such as the IndyMedia sites (www.indymedia.org). What appears on Global Voices is specifically chosen by the regional editors. There is room for dissent and expressions of unhappiness on the part of bloggers who feel slighted by Global Voices.
An interview with two of these editors—Georgia Popplewell, from Trinidad, who is the Caribbean regional editor, and David Sasaki, former Latin American region and Spanish-language editor (see "An Example of Bridge Blogging" box below)—reveals some of the dynamics of the site production.

Popplewell's, region, the Caribbean, is a very nascent part of the blogosphere. Bloggers are part of a small elite in an island culture characterized by isolation and a lack of intra-island communication and exchange. For example, it is easier, she points out, to fly from Trinidad to Jamaica via Miami than directly. This isolation is further exacerbated by language differences between islands that are part of a Spanish or English Caribbean, or even a French or Dutch one.
She also suggests that the Caribbean cultural context is conservative. She doesn't see the kind of concern with political issues on the part of bloggers that she sees in other parts of the world, nor does she see an interest in bloggers on the part of politicians, who are still more likely to pay attention to local radio hosts as arbiters of public opinion.

A look at the list of countries whose blogosphere are part of Global Voices suggests that, despite Popplewell's modesty, the Caribbean is a source of blog posts in numbers larger than might be implied by the small populations of the region. When asked about any specific issues currently to be found in the Global Voices Caribbean blogosphere that might be of larger political interest,

Popplewell suggested that a current controversy over the placement of a particularly noisome aluminum smelting plant in a Trinidadian nature preserve was a case in point. She noted that coverage of the smelter story on Global Voices had lead to its discovery online by a group facing a similar problem with the same company (Alcoa) in Iceland. The upshot was that groups from the two island nations coordinated a joint demonstration against Alcoa in London, October 27, 2006. For Popplewell, the problems she faces in the Caribbean mirror other problems of development across the globe. Promoting a general Caribbean dialogue is difficult, she suggests, as communication patterns follow the postcolonial patterns of economic links to former colonial masters and contemporary tourism travel routes. Although the Internet can make interisland dialogue easier, it cannot readily create a dialogue that didn't previously exist, particularly when infrastructure problems associated with poverty and isolation compound challenges to establishing online communication paths.

Bridge Bloggers
The "bridge blogger" is a concept popularized by Global Voices; the term was previously broached by Zuckerman and Berkeley's Xiao Qiang in 2004, and further expanded upon by Iranian blogger Hossein Derakshan. In a simple sense, bridge bloggers are people who are talking about their country or region to a larger audience. In addition, they are also typically on top of what other bloggers in their area are writing. The regional editors, often bridge bloggers themselves, are dependent on these "subaggregators" for much of their content. The region that bridge bloggers monitor can be a linguistic one as well as a geographical one. For instance, blogger Ndesanjo Macha translates posts from Kiswahili to English and amplifies the posts of bloggers from East Africa. In some cases—such as that of Juan Arellano, who covers Peru—bridge bloggers are also local aggregators, maintaining local aggregator sites for their country or their area. Arellano is one of the operators of blogsperu.com, an aggregator of Peruvian bloggers "dedicated to news, novelties and a bit of gossip about Peruvian bloggers." While not always aggregators, bridge bloggers must be on top of events in the local blogosphere and capable of providing a regional editor with a rundown on blogs in their particular area, whether it be an individual country or a subregion. Bridge bloggers are unpaid volunteers who contribute to the Global Voices site. According to Zuckerman, while not the "alpha blogger" in their region, they are well respected and known in their blogging community.

The Global Voices Web site suggests how to become a bridge blogger:
- Start publishing a roundup of your own country, region, or community's blogosphere on your own blog, translating posts into English.
- Let us know about it, so the editor who covers your region can put it in his or her aggregator and link to it when appropriate.
- Volunteer to represent your country's blogosphere on Global Voices by writing regular feature posts.

For Zuckerman these bridge bloggers are rare individuals; although the number of bloggers around the globe is now in the tens of millions, and Technorati was tracking some 55 million blogs at the end of 2006, for him the number of people who might serve as bridge bloggers is only in the hundreds or thousands.

AN EXAMPLE OF BRIDGE BLOGGING:
On Thursday, March 1, 2007, the top story on the home page was "Peru: A Minister's Departure &

War with Chile?" A quick scan of this piece suggests that it is a survey of Peruvian bloggers looking at a scandal involving the Peruvian minister of the interior, in which the writer, blogger Juan Arellano, has culled quotes from three other Peruvian bloggers. The post also offers a look at cross-border tensions between Peru and Chile, including extensive quotes from two Peruvian bloggers and two responses from Chilean bloggers. In each case, links allow readers to track back to the original blogs easily to get more information

As a regional editor, David Sasaki explained, he did several things to make the story more accessible. For starters, the entire piece is translated, with several long paragraphs available both in English and the original Spanish. In addition, the story has been "tagged" in a variety of ways, with reference tags that describe the content of the post: Americas, Chile, Peru, Governance, Media, War & Conflict, Politics. A look at the Peru topic string suggests that Arellano is the main source of blog posts on the Global Voices page coming out of Peru, other than the regional editor himself. This pathway of information, from individual local blogger, to national bridge blogger, to Global Voices regional editor, is typical of how information arrives on Global Voices pages. Sasaki has since been named the site's outreach director.

Producing the Daily Round-Up
Typically, an item, otherwise known as a blog post, moves through Global Voices in the following way:

1) *Aggregation*
The first person in the chain is the regional editor, who is constantly scanning and culling the blogosphere in his or her region. The editors find, aggregate, and post from five to ten blog posts per day. It is up to them to make the decision about which blogs speak to the areas of general interest that merit mentions on Global Voices. [Note: See Appendix I, "Global Voices Topic Cloud."] This material is placed in a "Daily Roundup" section of the Global Voices site. The blog entries that are posted are themselves typically surveys of the local blogosphere done by the bridge bloggers who are the heart of the Global Voices methodology. Because of the nature of blogging any blog mentioned in a digest or survey can be easily read in its entirety via hyperlink to the original source.

2) *Links*
In addition to the "Daily Roundup," which is the main blog on Global Voices, there is a sidebar called "links." This section offers another route to various local blogospheres. The posts are generally written by authors rather than by editors. Authors are unpaid, managed by the editors, and are responsible for a single country.

3) *Comments Thread*
Blogging is a two-way street. Any story on Global Voices can be commented on by readers whose name is required, as is their email address, although this latter is not published. Those comments will appear on the Global Voices site, subject to moderation that filters for hate speech. Alternatively, a reader can go to the original blog post, which is hyperlinked from the Global Voices Web site, and comment on the blogger's own site locally.

Community tools

Global Voices has a Wiki site in addition to its Web site, which was initially used to organize the community. Now the site uses a variety of other tools for communicating with those interested in participating in Global Voices, including an internal blog, Google groups, and an IRC chat channel.

Strategic Outreach
While the core of Global Voices information is still blog posts, the site has ventured into multimedia both alone and as part of partnerships. Georgia Popplewells' "Global Voices Show" features podcasts from all around the world, based on her use of the entire Global Voices network. This can be seen as an effort to promote a more transregional dialog.

In addition to the partnership with Reuters mentioned above, Global Voices partnered with the human rights media group Witness on a beta version of the Witness Human Rights Video Hub. Called the Human Rights Video Hub pilot, the beta drew upon Global Voices editors and authors as resources to help find locally produced videos that documented human rights abuses from all parts of the globe. Here, the flow of content moved in a very different way than normal Global Voices information. The Hub pilot was designed around advocacy groups, for instance, and had one central collection point, both of which imply a very different set of local to global connections than the blogpost model used on the main site.

A look at this site showed, for instance, a blog entitled "Forced Evictions in Guatemala: Whose Land is it Anyway." Dated March 4, 2007, this blog featured a linked YouTube video under a Witness Video Hub banner.

This partnership lasted about six months, and then Witness decided to start its own, independent, video hub. But the effort was significant as part of a consolidation of efforts around human rights in general, and the free speech rights of bloggers and citizen media-makers, specifically.

Outcomes and Impact
As an ongoing experiment in international participatory public media, Global Voices is unprecedented. As such, the project has generated multiple and unexpected impacts, some of which are measurable by conventional means, and others which are emergent and inspire further research and action.

Promoting Free Speech in the Blogosphere
According to the founders, Global Voices' involvement in the area of protecting free speech online is one that has emerged as part of their mission due to their relationship with bloggers in countries where Internet use is controlled. The two biggest examples would be Iran and China; both countries have thriving blogospheres, but blogging on political issues from within the countries can result in various kinds of repression and censorship. Zuckerman notes that they were particularly moved to engage in this arena by the arrest and detention of Hao Wu, the site's North Asia editor.

Global Voices appointed Sami Ben Gharbia as advocacy director in February 2007, with funding from the Dutch NGO Hivos. Ben Gharbia uses Global Voices authors and editors as resources for his posts on censorship and Internet filtering. His role represents the first example of a "topic editor" on Global Voices, falling outside the normal local-to-regional-to-global pattern of information movement on the Global Voices site. Gharbia is also responsible for editing and producing the site's guides on online security, as well as coordinating meetings and contacts between people in the online free speech movement. This initiative speaks to Global Voices' growing role as a defender of bloggers' right to free speech on a worldwide basis.

Facilitating Anonymous Blogging
Anonymous blogging is a method of using intermediary secure servers to hide the IP address of a computer being used for blogging. Global Voices has worked with other groups, such as Reporters without Borders, to make anonymous blogging technically possible and has co-published a booklet with them on this topic, the *Handbook for Bloggers and Cyber-dissidents* (http://www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=542). Blog posts can be linked to a specific user, as the IP address, unique to each computer, is traceable. An ISP, or Internet service provider, can, either willingly or under pressure, reveal the connection between that IP address and an individual on behalf of a government or other entity. This means that bloggers can be tracked and sanctioned. While not common this has happened in several countries, such as China and Egypt, where one blogger, Karim Nabil Sulaiman, was given a four-year jail term for defaming Islam and the Egyptian government in his blog in February 2007.

While Sulaiman did not blog anonymously, some bloggers do. The existence of anonymous blogging means that a blogger such as "Zimpundit" can blog from Zimbabwe with relatively little fear of being quashed, or at least tracked online, by the authorities. According to Zuckerman, this question of whether to blog anonymously or identifiably is a flashpoint for discussions of political stance in several countries.

Another aspect of Global Voices work in this area is to promote campaigns to free bloggers who are arrested, as has happened in China and the Middle East. In February 2006 the documentary filmmaker and Global Voices Northeast Asia editor Hao Wu was arrested. Global Voices promoted a campaign for his release, which occurred some five months after his arrest.

OpenNet Initiative
Another important aspect of Global Voices work is the project's involvement with the OpenNet Initiative (ONI), a partnership between the Citizen Lab at the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto, the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School, the Advanced Network Research Group at the Cambridge Security Programme at Cambridge University, and the Oxford Internet Institute at the University of Oxford. This project has as its goal fighting Internet filtering and censorship both on a technical and on a policy level. HIVOS, the Dutch NGO, is a funder interested in this area, as is the Open Society Institute. While Global Voices is not an official ONI partner, project staff assist their Berkman colleagues in trying to find people in nations under censorship to test for filtering.

Promoting Understanding across Language Barriers
In his previous role as a regional editor, Sasaki explained that he saw outreach as a key part of his work. A North American, he strove to promote the concept of blogging to Latin Americans who are not part of the young, wealthy, and educated demographic that characterizes the Latin American blogosphere (as it does most others). He also regularly translated and contextualized blog posts to get other perspectives across the North-South language barrier.
Zuckerman noted the work of Taiwanese blogger Portnoy Zheng, who began translating Global Voices posts into Chinese. That project, using volunteers to translate posts into other languages, was the core of the idea of the Lingua project (http://www.globalvoicesonline.org/translations/), which is now managed by Alice Backer.

These efforts at translation into languages other than English speak to one of the two core missions

of Global Voices: that of promoting a truly global conversation. While Global Voices has been successful at creating an information flow from a global elite to the mainstream press, these other efforts are more difficult. They mean both finding ways to reach out to people who by definition have less access to the tools needed for blogging, and finding ways to inexpensively translate material into a variety of languages. Neither is an easy task.

Facilitating Cross-Regional Conversations

All of the Global Voices interviewees shared McKinnon's sense that, while they've put a lot of thought into how to facilitate cross-regional conversations, they have yet to find an answer. They look constantly to see what motivates cross-regional posting, what issues are the ones that spark interest, and follow those leads.

For Sasaki, who does the roundup "Global Voices Today," a syndicated RSS feed, it is a complex problem to find bloggers who shed light on local issues for a global audience. This difficulty speaks to the biggest problem with trying to foster a global conversation: What will is of shared interest? According to Sasaki, only rare events evoke interest locally in all regions of the world. One such event he remembered was World AIDS Day. He feels that thematic posting and tagging and judicious contextualization that "creates a framework for mutual understanding" will eventually pay off in terms of a broader cross-regional conversation. Currently, a typical blogger interested in this sort of communication is an expatriate national—such as the case of a discussion of the Evo Morales government by a U.S.-based Bolivian blogger who can speak knowledgably about Andean issues in English and in a North American context.

Notably, according to Zuckerman, one theme that brings out a "bridging mindset" is exactly the repression of free speech. Thus, the censoring of bloggers in Pakistan over the publication of the anti-Islamic Danish cartoons led to support from Indian bloggers. Conversely, when the Indian government blocked bloggers there, Pakistanis pitched in. This last example speaks to the general sense that some of the most likely starting points for global conversations are topics of shared interest and that the topic of clearest shared interest for bloggers is blogging.

Promoting Dialogue in Regions of Conflict

One significant aspect of Global Voices' value as a space of public debate lies in its efforts to promote dialogue in regions of conflict. Global Voices has an Israel regional editor and a Palestine one as well. The use of English in this case works as a kind of neutral platform, as posts in Hebrew and Arabic are seen as automatically partisan, according to remarks by one Israeli contributor, Lisa N. Goldman, at the first Global Voices conference. Both the Hebrew and Arabic sites feature English with chunks of Hebrew and Arabic pasted in. A quote from a Lisa Goldman blog post dated July 18, 2006 reads as follows:

> This is probably the most blogged conflict in the world. The post contains links to Israeli and Lebanese blogs that are hosting ongoing conversations between commenters and bloggers from both sides of the border. This is possibly the first time in history that citizens of two countries at war are able to maintain direct communication and express their feelings to one another in real time.

According to Zuckerman the only real "solution" to a lack of dialogue is for the bloggers and the regional editors to actually know each other personally, something that is at least possible given the intimacy of blogging as a communications form.

The Relationship with Journalistic Outlets
Zuckerman feels that this relationship has been a mutually beneficial one and that it has not resulted in any pressure on the type of information produced by Global Voices. "We're not Indymedia; we're not in this because we think mainstream media is evil," he says. "It would be pretty inconsistent to take money from Reuters if we felt that way. What we do believe is that the media falls down in serious ways when it comes to getting information from the developing world, and we try to fill those holes." For Zuckerman, having Reuters as a client helps Global Voices meet this goal. "They've really allowed this to become a newsroom," he says.

There is clearly a value sufficient for Reuters to pay to support for Global Voices for nonexclusive rights to "reprint" blogs on the Reuters site out of its commercial operating budget, rather than its grant programs. The spring 2007 inauguration of Reuters Africa, where each country page offers links to Global Voices bloggers, supports this idea.

One NPR program based in Massachusetts, "Open Source," has also routinely used Global Voices bloggers as sources of stories and as on-air guests. On one program documented by the Center for Social Media (http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/videos/many_to_many/), a Bolivian blogger connected with Global Voices spoke via ISDN line with development expert Jeffrey Sachs about the role of international financial institutions in Bolivia.

Fostering Citizen Media
Global Voices is an aspect of the developing world blogosphere, and a significant one. In this capacity, it is not a news organization *per se*. As Zuckerman noted:

> This is citizen media, not citizen journalism. There's a strong distinction . . . Our core mission is to share with people what are the conversations actually going on on the ground.

This means that for Global Voices' founders, the purpose of the Global Voices site is to offer information about people, about what they are thinking, about what is important to them. "Saudis aren't talking about Bush or Israel, they're talking about gender and sex. It may not be newsworthy, but it's tremendously useful for anyone trying to understand Saudi society. We do that better than breaking news," says Zuckerman.

For McKinnon, this information is an important antidote to mainstream coverage of foreign affairs. "Mainstream journalism tells what happened in a context of generalization. When people get generalizations, they tend to reinforce stereotypes," she says. For her, her original fascination with the blogosphere was exactly its idiosyncracy, its detail, even its poetry. "I was uplifted by the nature of human individuals."

Gatewatchers, or Gatekeepers?
Do Global Voices editors act like gatekeepers as well as gatewatchers? In other words, is there any tendency for the managing editors to decide what stories might be "newsworthy" and solicit them, rather than simply culling a pre-existing blogosphere? According to Zuckerman, the managing editors rarely ask regional editors for blog posts on any specific story or topic. One of the few examples that he could think of was his request to the Southeast Asia regional editor for any blog reactions to the controversial YouTube posting of the video of a Burmese general's lavish wedding in late 2006.

In general, though, the tendency for Global Voices to "professionalize" is, according to one of its founders, limited. It is important to consider whether the dual role of Global Voices creates a tension that is mutually reinforcing or one that is centrifugal, pulling the group in different directions.

AN EXAMPLE: THE PULL TOWARD ONLINE JOURNALISM

In addition to regional editors, language editors also solicit aggregations. For example, when Alice Back was the French-language editor, she sought out contributing authors, such as Jen Brea. Now the site's Francophonia editor, Brea wrote articles about all of Francophone Africa, not just a single country. This suggests a way in which Global Voices contributors may be pulled toward a kind of online journalism. Jen Brea bills herself in a way that suggests she is more of a citizen journalist or even a professional online journalist than a blogger:

"I'm a freelance writer and aspiring political scientist. I blog personal essays at The World is Round, my personal blog; photographs at my Flickr photostream; commentary on African politics at Africabeat; and world news for About.com."

From a topic flow point of view, this means that the blogger is already "regional" rather than local. A post by Brea, dated Sunday, February 11, 2007, and titled "Guinea-Conakry: The End of a Dictatorship?" includes her own summary of recent events in Conakry, where a series of strikes threatened to bring down the government of Lansana Conte, followed by a roundup of blogs from across Francophone Africa commenting on that situation. The blog quotes are both in French and in English. This article is interesting because it pulled a rich comment thread, seven comments, in both French and English, many from other countries in the region, but some from the United States, including a request from a freelance reporter from Chicago looking for a labor leader to interview. This speaks to the "two-wayness" of Global Voices's information flow.

Coverage of the Global Blogosphere

One of the site's claims is that they do a thorough search of each region's blogosphere. Regional editors look at thousands of blogs weekly to cull their material. The following cross-correlation of Global Voices coverage with another known blog authority aims to validate this claim. The source is the annual weblog awards, The Bloggies (http://2006.bloggies.com/), which are awarded based on votes from other bloggers, and hence are a self-defined "best of the blogosphere" for the year. Global Voices' claim is to offer "the most interesting voices" from the blogosphere. The following are the results for the top three winners for 2006:z

1) "Iraq the Model" by "Mohammed" (an Iraqi living in Baghdad), offering "New points of view about the future of Iraq" won the weblog of the year third prize award in 2006 for the category "African and Middle Eastern blogs" This category is matching an area where Global Voices would be most likely to be relevant. "Iraq the Model" was quoted 10 times in Global Voices archives.
2) The second prize went to "Treppenwitz" by David Bogner (an American/Israeli settler living in the West Bank), which also won the Israeli-Jewish blogger of the year bronze medal in 2004. Global Voices has three listings for "Treppenwitz" in the archives.
3) The first prize winner was "Rantings of a Sandmonkey," from Cairo, Egypt, self-billed as "an extremely cynical, snarky, pro-US, secular, libertarian, disgruntled sandmonkey." He gets

three listings in the Global Voices archives.

This cross-referencing exercise suggests that Global Voices editors are surveying blogs that the award voters feel are significant. It should be noted that Global Voices doesn't pick up all bloggers. Many bloggers blog on topics that are not particularly significant to Global Voices. For example, the third place winner "Iraq the Model" blog gets more mentions because he blogs more about topics of relevance on their Web site [See Appendix I].

Competing with Other Blog Aggregators
Another way to judge Global Voices is to look at who else is doing what they are doing. A number of keyword searches show that most other aggregators of global blogs in their topic areas are smaller and more specialized. A typical example is the World Bank, with a couple of sites for development bloggers. There are also specialized sites for disaster relief bloggers in South Asia, for example, but no sites designed for nonspecialists. Other sites that offer information on similar topics, such as OneWorld.net, or OpenDemocracy.net, have a journalistic, rather than citizen media, production model.

Measuring Impact by the Numbers
There are several areas in which the impact of Global Voices can be quantified.

Reaching a Global Elite
The profile of the typical Global Voices blogger can be extrapolated from a September 2006 Global Voices internal survey of 231 respondents. It is difficult to know the statistical significance, but the responses are indicative and paint a picture of a highly educated elite working in the media or involved with education. In terms of nationality, 32.9 percent of the respondents are from the United States, 7.8 percent from India, 5.2 percent from the United Kingdom, 4.3 percent from Canada, and 3.9 percent from China.

The survey also asks for country of current residence. For India the figure is 6 percent; for the UK, 6.5 percent; and for China, 4.3 percent. These figures would indicate that Global Voices bloggers often work or reside in countries other than those of their birth. The ratio of male to female bloggers is 2:1. Almost all of the respondents were over 19, with the media group being 25–35 years old. Slightly over half of the respondents (122) list English as their first language, followed by 14 for Spanish, 13 for Mandarin, 7 for Arabic, and 5 for Bangla.

The majority of those responding to the survey were journalists (35, or 15.4 percent), working in education (31, or 13.7 percent) or students (30, or 13.2 percent). Others were either "self-employed," "technology worker," or "NGO" in that order. Most have a college education, either a master's or a PhD (97, or 42.2 percent), a BA (82, or 35.7 percent) or at least some college (38, or 16.5 percent).

Most respondents also have high-speed Internet connections available at home and first found Global Voices via another blog. A third had been following Global Voices for more than a year, and a third check in with Global Voices several times a week, typically via direct access, with about a quarter using RSS feeds. Sixty percent of respondents said they were interested in a particular country or region. Ten percent were only interested in their home area, and 28 percent were interested in a global picture. Sixty percent of the respondents said they hadn't posted on Global Voices. In other words, these are readers, or audience for the site, more than content producers, who represented 40 percent. These readers see Global Voices as a "source of information" more than a "source of opinion" and think of it as "somewhat reliable." (49 percent) vs. "very reliable" (38 percent). Of the respondents, 72 percent are bloggers themselves, most of whom link to Global Voices.

Reaching Media and Journalists
One of Global Voices' key goals is to give journalists a broader view of developing countries. While only 24 respondents in the survey were journalists, 19 of them (90.5 percent) said they had gotten a story idea from the Global Voices site, 10 (47.6 percent) had quoted from a Global Voices post in a story, and nine had interviewed a Global Voices blogger. This would seem to support the notion that Global Voices does serve as an effective conduit of information to journalists.

Comparison with Other Online Projects
Via Technorati ranking: The Technorati Web site (www.technorati.com) offers several metrics for gauging the significance of a Web site in the blogosphere. The main two are Authority and Rank. Authority refers to how many other blogs link to the site in question over the previous six months.

Rank refers to sites with the most links, and hence, more authority—it is calculated based on how far a site is from the top of the list.

Global Voices' Technorati ranking as of early February of 2007 was 259, going up to 246 in May with an Authority of 2,927. According to Zuckerman, by September, the site's rank was much higher, routinely in the 110–120 range. He noted that if the figure included all of their individual foreign language blogs, as well as their advocacy blog, the site would be in the top 100.

Groups which would be comparable to Global Voices include IndyMedia.org, with a February authority rating of 8,921 and a rank of 24, or Worldchanging.com, which has an authority of 2,843 and a rank of 263. Opendemocracy.net, the online global magazine, had an Authority of 1,659, giving it a rank of 820.These comparisons suggest that Global Voices can be seen as an important presence in the blogosphere, comparable with other sites that do not have a significant offline presence in the print or electronic media.

Via Blogpulse: Another measuring tool is blogpulse.com, the Nielsen rating of the blogosphere. In an article written shortly after the launch of Global Voices, Zuckerman noted the rapid rise to popularity of Global Voices and pointed out that this was with bloggers across the political spectrum As of May 2007, Blogpulse shows that globalvoicesonline.org was mentioned in between .001 and .005 of all global blog traffic with 1,695 bloggers linking to Global Voices [See Appendix II].

Via Alexa.com: Alexa measures the popularity of sites worldwide. As of mid-September, the Global Voices site was ranked 44,420, higher than comparable sites like OneWorld.net and Opendemocracy.net.

Via Global Voices Web Statistics:
In an effort to maintain transparency, Global Voices posts its own server statistics online and updates them regularly. The usage figures as of early February 2007 indicate a growth from March 2006, when Global Voices averaged a half million visits per month, to January 2007, when the visits had doubled to over a million. If an average viewer visited the site ten times a month, this would still indicate some tens of thousands of Global Voices viewers

Geographically:
In terms of global coverage the Global Voices "country cloud" lists 208 separate "countries." As a comparison, the United Nations in 2006 listed 192 member states. The main reason for the difference is that Global Voices lists political units such as dependencies or territories as "countries." Hence, the U.S. Virgin Islands is listed separately from the United States, as is Puerto Rico. Wallis and Futuna, a French protectorate in Micronesia with a population of 16,000, is the smallest and least posted from, with one post, while China tops the list, with 1,325 posts (as of January, 2007), followed by India (846) and Russia (753). Countries with over 400 posts include: Armenia, Bangladesh, China, India, Iran, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Trinidad, and Tobago. The number of posts in each case is the cumulative figure since bloggers in each country joined the Global Voices network, a figure that can date back as far as November 2004. Zuckerman notes that a few good contributors can pump up the statistics for a particular country.

Conclusions
Global Voices represents an innovative and experimental form of public media: The site is

driven by linked missions—to expand the online conversation about international issues and to provide an outlet for bloggers from countries where free speech is under threat. As such, it is pitched to engage multiple and overlapping publics: U.S. reporters and news consumers, global bloggers, and regional audiences, among others. Its success in reaching each of these audiences can be measured through a variety of distinct metrics, most notably moving readers to write about the site's content in other venues, and to comment upon it both within and outside of the site.

Although things change quickly in the virtual universe of the Internet, Global Voices seems to be a viable and growing enterprise: In terms of its size, while it is difficult to compare with other citizen media sites, it seems to be one of the larger in the blogosphere that has a social purpose. It is notable that the site depends on underwriting from both foundation and commercial sources rather than advertising or monetization of its content.

Global Voices is engaging an influential and unprecedented transnational public*:* The conversation, while in many ways representing the concerns of a kind of global elite, is reflective of an elite of socially concerned individuals with a shared belief in the value of a kind of speech that is both free and thoughtful. At a time when the global news is often dominated by the politics of terror and the gloomy intractability of issues around the environment and development, Global Voices offers a valuable home for shared discussion and understanding. Its growing connection to a global human rights movement also suggests that it is part of something significant—and also suggests a discourse model which can be used to rethink political possibilities.

Global Voices has a dual mission as a news provider and as a global community: While currently, Global Voices retains vibrancy in both areas, it is conceivable that the pull of "newsworthiness" concretized in the Reuters relationship may at some point start to conflict with the kind of personal contextualized "citizen media" quality of Global Voices blog posts, moving the site more in the direction of a "citizen journalism" approach.

APPENDIX:

I.   Global Voices Topic Cloud (May, 2007)

1ˢᵗ Tier (over 4,000 posts)
Politics

2ⁿᵈ Tier (over 3,000 posts)
Governance

3ʳᵈ Tier – (over 1,500 posts)
Arts and Culture
Freedom of Speech
History
Human Rights
International Relations
Law
Media
Protest
War and Conflict

4ᵗʰ Tier (over 500 posts)
Business
Cyberactivism
Development
Economics
Education
Elections
Ethnicity
Gender
Humor
Ideas
Internet and Telecoms
Law
Protest
Religion
Travel

5ᵗʰ Tier (over 200 posts)
Children
Diaspora
Disaster
Energy
Entertainment
Environment
Film
Food
Health

Humanitarianism
LGBT
Labor
Literature
Music
Photography
Racism
Sport
Technology

6th Tier (under 200 posts)
Agriculture
Finance
Indigenous
Industry
Language
Refugees
Relief and Rescue
Science
Software and Tools

IV: **Blogpulse graph for Globalvoicesonline.org for May 2007.**