**WHY IS THE CATEGORY OF "PLURALISM" INSUFFICIENT TO DESCRIBE THE MEDIA SPHERE?**

Dimitris Trimithiotis

Docteur en Sociologie, AMU CNRS LAMES

**Résumé**

En considérant les média comme des constructions sociales, cet article cherche à déconstruire le constat quantitatif du pluralisme médiatique. En se basant à la fois sur des éléments théoriques et sur une enquête empirique portant sur une station radiophonique, l'article propose d'introduire dans le champ de la recherche l'enjeu de l'accessibilité d'opinions et d'idées dans l'espace médiatique.

**Mots-clés**

Pluralisme, sphère médiatique, processus de production, discours médiatique, clôtures sociales

**Abstract**

By considering media discourse as a social construction, this article aims to deconstruct the quantitative evidence of media pluralism. Based on theoretical accounts as well as on an empirical study of a radio station, the paper suggests that what should be examined is the modalities of the accessibility of ideas and opinions in media discourse and thus in the public sphere.

**Keywords**

Pluralism, media sphere, process of production, media discourse, social frames

# Introduction

"Pluralism" of the media seems to be an incontestable phenomenon in modern societies. The number of newspapers, TV and radio stations and web pages is constantly increasing. However, is the quantitative observation of the expansion of the media also equivalent to a qualitative pluralism in the media sphere? Does the large number of media outlets existing in a given society constitute a sign of a pluralism of opinions?

Based on a qualitative approach, this article aims to deconstruct the quantitative observation of the constant increase in the number of mass media outlets. The objective is to understand whether this multiplication and variety in the mass media can be considered not just as a matter of numbers, and  be interpreted as a sign of free expression. Is it possible for all social groups to transmit their opinions through the media?

The first section of the article is focused on a theoretical discussion. The main argument is that the category of "pluralism" is not sufficient as a criterion for the appreciation of the

democratisation of the media sphere. The second section explores the relevance of this argument through a specific case study of the Cypriot radio station "Astra". Astra was founded in the 1990s by a local political party, AKEL. This particularity of a specific radio station enables us to observe the process of *formation* and *trans-formation* in the media discourse broadcast by the station in relation to the political intentions of its founder.

# Pluralism *versus* Accessibility

In contemporary societies, "diversity" and "plurality" of the media are considered as institutionalised principles, or at least this is the claim of important institutional bodies. For example, Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, on freedom of expression and information, lays down an obligation on States to guarantee the pluralism of opinion and the cultural diversity of the media in support of democracy, as well as the freedom of all citizens to be informed and to hold opinions.[1] Thus, the rule on "pluralism" appears as a founding principle of European media policy in the process of European integration and organisation.

In *Democracy in America* (2000 [1840]), Alexis de Tocqueville argues that plurality of the media is evidence of a democratic society in progress. The media allow the realisation of the right of citizens to express themselves, to judge and to hold opinions. According to the author, newspapers (being the only mass media of his time) have three main functions: they guarantee freedom by exposing the "secret" elements of politics; they create and maintain the community by providing a common reference for citizens; and finally, they enable the realisation of rapid and concerted action. At the same time, Tocqueville recognises that newspapers can also become a form of tyranny by imposing on citizens a specific worldview, a specific vision of social reality. The author argues that the only way to neutralise the effects of the media is to increase their number, in order to attain a plurality of worldviews.

A similar vision of the media sphere can be found in research affiliated to the Frankfurt School. These studies argue that the social ties within a community are tending to become progressively weaker in modern societies. In this sense, the media are seen as a possible means of bringing people together and increasing the social cohesion of the community. The development of the mass media (that is, the newspapers) in aristocratic societies can be considered as an important first step towards the creation of a democratic society. These early newspapers, led by the bourgeoisie, enabled criticism of the monarchy. More recently, Habermas (1991) showed that a public sphere in which people were assumed to have political intentions had emerged in England at the turn of the 17th century. Social forces that wanted to acquire the capacity to influence the decisions of the monarchy tried to find a way to legitimise their own requirements. This process of legitimisation was realised through the transmission of information to the general public and the constitution of public opinion. The bourgeoisie intended to inform the public about the monarch's policies in order to incite citizens to react against these political projects. The media are presented here as a simple means of communication between rational individuals who are in the same situation and can achieve their objectives through access to information.

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1 Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Behind Habermas' analysis lies an informal bias: understanding the relationship between the media and opinion involves examining the relationship between the *message* (what is transmitted) and the *reception* (of the message). It means examining the way in which media messages are received as well as the impact they can have on the construction of citizens' opinions. Consequently, questioning the media from this perspective, that is the perspective of the relationship between message and reception, could possibly lead to a confirmation of the idea that pluralism exists in the sphere of the media. However, what about discourses and opinions that have not been broadcast? Indeed, this type of approach often seems to ignore the fact that, before being received and having any effect on individuals' opinions, the media discourse goes through a process of production which involves a certain selection and framing of potential content.

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1993) invented the concept of the *agenda* to identify and compare the opinions which are broadcast by the media and the opinions of citizens. An agenda is a hierarchy of priorities and issues for consideration. The two researchers analyse the priorities of the media using the indicator of the quantity of airtime or the number of lines that the topics occupy in the media sphere. They analyse citizens' priorities using opinion polls and interviews. The authors claim that there is a gap between the categories of priorities. The media make a selection of issues and subjects to be published and, thus, leave others unrevealed. The authors point out that the effects of the media operate at the societal level and, in the long term, not through instilling opinions but through neutralising the selectivity process and focusing on limited issues. In this sense, the process of the selection of information produces a false representation of the society.

In a complementary perspective, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann argues that the media get involved in the social space by suppressing the diversity of opinions. She argues that there is a gap between individuals' opinions and their public discourse. She attempts to explain this phenomenon by referring to a form of *conformism* and a sort of *band-wagon* (Noelle-Neumann, 1991). Weaknesses in social relations lead individuals to ignore the existence of a variety of opinions. As a result, public opinion strongly depends on what is perceived as dominant by the media. For this author, individuals evaluate the dominant opinions so as to adopt positions that do not leave the individuals isolated.

If the media can be considered as active constructors of society, they are also constructed in relation to their social context: the media are social constructions. It is precisely this complex process which this paper attempts to take into consideration. I argue that there is a need for a shift in focus: instead of focusing on the dimension of reception and analysing the effects of media messages on citizens' views and opinions, this paper analyses the process of the production of media discourse, the actors who are involved and the interactions between the actors themselves and between the actors and the social context.

## The case study

This proposition rests upon the results of a case study on a Cypriot radio station, Astra. This case study allows us to highlight the relationship between this medium and its founder: the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL). It enables us to take into consideration the logic behind the creation of Astra, the worldview it represents, and the socio-political structures that characterise the Cypriot media sphere. What is the logic in the foundation of

Astra, and to what extent can this radio station disseminate a specific discourse? What is the influence of the socio-economic and cultural context on the discourse of Astra?

The relationship between the medium and its founder can be observed through a material base of data. The political party's (AKEL) official texts allow the observation of its political values and their relationship with Astra's media discourse. I have also conducted a series of eighteen interviews with members of the Board of Directors of the station, the director and ex-director, journalists, music producers and members of the logistics department.

The media discourse is considered here as the material trace (Molino, 1986) of the process of its production. It is a material object, in its oral or written form, and provides a possible starting point for this research. Through the materiality of the media discourse it becomes possible to analyse the elements of its configuration, the organisation of these elements and the different procedures related to its production (Ramognino, 1988). In other words, the media discourse is placed at the centre of the analysis not in order to examine its effects on the public, but to capture the social actors, the possibilities and the constraints within its formation. The comparative perspective between the discourse of the radio station and the discourse of the party also allows us to go beyond the existing discourse in order to discuss some elements in terms of their "absence" and then to analyse the reasons for this absence.


# The purpose of the creation of Astra

The empirical investigation shows that the Astra station is managed by AKEL, a party that was established in 1941 and is (officially) the successor to the Cypriot Communist Party. The Astra station was originally owned by a private company. It began to broadcast in 1993, but went bankrupt a year later and then stayed inactive for a year. In 1995, a company called Radiostage was founded by AKEL and was (informally) used to buy the logo, the broadcasting licence and the technical equipment of Astra. Communication between AKEL and Astra takes place through the Board of Directors of the station: this consists of seven members, all of them active members of AKEL.

The interview survey with the founders of the station brings to light the political intentions behind the creation of Astra, the reasons that led AKEL to run a radio station and the objectives that AKEL has given Astra. Indeed, after the passing of the "Broadcasting without Borders" Act, which led to the emergence of three TV channels and a large number of private radio stations in the country, the leadership of the AKEL political party recognised the need for the party to launch its own radio station. The media companies (television and radio stations) that made up the Cypriot media sphere at that time were considered by the leaders of AKEL to be discriminatory in their political discourse.

> We were attacked by the media. Progressive ideas were actually attacked. Thus the left resisted or better tried to resist by creating its own station. Astra has been created to fill an empty space. There was no media with a progressive identity. [Ex-Director of Astra]

According to an AKEL member who is a former CEO of Astra, it was not only that other media were not giving enough airtime to AKEL politicians, but also that these media showed a hostile attitude towards the political views defended by the party. In this sense the creation

of Astra was intended to fill up an empty space in the Cypriot media sphere. Astra is considered by its leaders as a distinctive station: "the only station that could provide progressive and left-wing vision of reality". Beyond the discourse of the actors in the station, the purpose of the creation of Astra also appears in its broadcasting content. Continuity between AKEL and Astra can be observed through the way in which Astra selects topics and then treats these topics.

# Discursive continuities

A comparison between the political principles of AKEL, as they appear in the Act of Foundation of the party, and the media discourse of Astra enables us to identify several elements that show continuity between the two structures, AKEL and Astra. I will briefly develop two examples of this continuity: (a) the political positions concerning the problem of the division of Cyprus and the relationship between the Greek Cypriot community and the Turkish Cypriot community; and (b) the positions on the issue of immigrants.

## *The Cyprus problem*

The "Cyprus problem" refers to the division of the island: the southern part of the island is inhabited by Greek-speaking Cypriots, and the northern part – occupied by Turkish Army – is inhabited by Turkish-speaking Cypriots. These two parts have defined themselves as independent republics. However, only the "Republic of Cyprus" – the Greek-speaking part – is recognised by the international community. The "Turkish Republic of North Cyprus" – the Turkish-speaking part – is considered to be a territory of the Republic of Cyprus occupied by the Turkish army. Several attempts by the United Nations to reunify the island have not succeeded in improving the situation. The persistence of the Cyprus problem plays heavily on the discourse of the political parties in the country. Each party proposes its own vision and its own treatment of the problem. These political positions occupy a very important place in the local political arena. Indeed, for some political parties, the Cyprus problem is their only raison d'être (Mavratsas, 2003).

AKEL is a political party of the Greek-speaking side and is openly positioning for reunification. In the Act of Foundation of the party, it states:

> AKEL fights for an independent Cyprus, sovereign, federal and demilitarised [...] in which all its inhabitants, Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Maronites, Armenians and Latins live in peace [...].[2]

Moreover, the party's activities reflect this guiding principle, and include the organisation of demonstrations, meetings and concerts encouraging the participation of members of the two communities.

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2 Act of Foundation of AKEL (Katastatiko AKEL) Article 1, Paragraph 9(a). Our translation.

This anticipation and political will in favour of the reunification of the island and the rapprochement between the two major communities in Cyprus is also present in the discourse of the Astra station. The station broadcasts such programmes as "Ιστορικές Διαδρομές" (Roads of History) and "Πατριδογνωσία" (Knowledge of the Homeland) which are focused on the history, culture, tradition and customs of the island. The aim is to bring the Greek-speaking and Turkish-speaking communities closer. The intention is to make the public aware of elements of the daily life of each community, focusing especially on the common culture of the two communities. I illustrate here an excerpt from an interview I conducted with the director of the station concerning these programmes.

> We are trying to bring Cypriots closer, all Cypriots. Because we live separately and because of the lack of communication between the members of the two communities, we have fabricated a terrifying and grotesque image of each other! [General Director of Astra]

During this broadcast, guests from the two communities argue on topics proposed by the programme, in order to make the links between the characteristics of the two populations explicit. The programmes' topics include food, music, literature and the daily life of the two communities. Finally, it should be emphasised that these programmes are sometimes broadcast in both languages, Greek and Turkish. The programme presenter translates the speech of the Greek-speaking guests into Turkish and vice versa.

## The issue of immigration

We can also see the continuity between the AKEL political party and the discourse of the Astra radio station by referring to the issue of immigrants in Cyprus. In the early 1990s, Cyprus became a refuge for thousands of immigrants. As Trimikliniotis and Demetriou have shown, a xenophobic discourse started to emerge into the country almost as soon as immigration into Cyprus begun. Furthermore, the authors argue that the election of a left-wing government in 2008 meant a change in the official discourse but at the same time an intensification of negative depictions of migrants from opposition politicians and opposition media, seeking to undermine the new government's immigration policy (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou, 2012).

One of the common points between AKEL and Astra is that they both intend to fight explicitly against this xenophobic discourse. Indeed, one can read in the Act of Foundation of AKEL:

> [...] AKEL educates its members in an international vision, to fight against all forms of political oppression, social and ethnic, against imperialism, neo-colonialism and racism.[3]

Thus, the Astra station became the "spokesperson" for this political aim of AKEL.
We also have a special sensitivity for nationalist and racist issues. We fight against xenophobia. At this time, the prevailing view is that everything is the fault of immigrants. If for example there is a murder today and the suspect's name is Giorgos Andreou (Greek name)

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3 Act of Foundation of AKEL (Katastatiko AKEL) Article 1, Paragraph 8. Our translation.

the case is not going to cause a media scandal. But if the suspect is called Ahmed or Hassan, the case will make big noise. [Astra journalist]

It should be noted that in most of the interviews the journalists referred to the problem themselves. They describe this phenomenon as "the rise of racism", and they argue about the necessity of an opposing discourse in the Cypriot media sphere. For them, this kind of discourse does not exist except on Astra.

> For the same topic, other media will focus on different aspects of the subject ... for example, some stations, that I will not name, they will focus on the fact that the delinquent is a foreigner. In contrast, we are going to present the fact with objective data: the location of the event, the time, who attacked whom, and then we will try to analyse the reasons that prompted this immigrant to attack his employer for example. [Astra journalist]

The media discourse against racism and the overcoming of divisions between indigenous and non-indigenous people is a part of the "identity" of the station. This is reflected in the content of the programmes, and especially in the way in which the station presents topics of current interest. Furthermore, the Astra journalism team maintains a close relationship with a Cypriot organisation defending the rights of immigrants. As a result, Astra gives voice to activists from the association who are trying to explain to citizens why the issue of immigrants has to be thought about in a different way.

These examples bring out the main type of discourse of the Astra station, and attest to the links between this media discourse and the discourse of the founding political party, AKEL. This continuity between the two discourses is complemented by the political affiliation of the journalists. The Astra station staff appear to be a united community of members who share common values and goals and above all the same discourse. The relationship between the discourse of AKEL and that of Astra is also preserved by the presence of Astra's Board of Directors which has an important role in deciding on the radio station programmes.

# The Board of Directors as an intermediate body

There is a Board of Directors that runs the Astra radio station. The Board consists of seven members: the President, the Vice-President, the Chief Economic Advisor and four ordinary members. The role of the Board is to organise and manage the station. The seven members have meetings to assess the station's programmes and its general functions.

> We do a kind of evaluation of the programmes. Sometimes if something doesn't work or does not meet our goals we can propose changes. [Member of the Board of Astra]

The Board of Directors lies at the intersection between the AKEL political party and the Astra radio station, as a sort of intermediate body. It has informal responsibility for the contact between AKEL and Astra. The Act of Foundation of AKEL emphasises that every party member has a dual obligation to disseminate the principles and values of the party and to strengthen the party's influence and prestige. As we have pointed out, the board members

of Astra are also employees/members of AKEL. In this sense they are committed to defending and spreading the political values of AKEL through the positions they occupy on the Board of Directors of Astra. In other words, they have a responsibility to ensure that there is consistency between the political principles of AKEL and the media discourse that is broadcast by the Astra station.

# Discursive discontinuities

Discursive proximity between the broadcast content of Astra and the official texts of AKEL appears to be a logical result, especially if we take into account the purpose of the establishment of the station, the political affiliation of the station's staff and the role of the Board of Directors of the station. On the contrary, there seems to be a paradox in the existence of a discontinuity between the two discourses, the media discourse and the party's discourse. Observations reveal a gap between the goals that the party has for the Astra station and the media discourse of Astra. In other words, there seems to be a distinction between what is *prescribed* and the *real* discourse (Forquin, 1992) of the station.

These discontinuities are organised around a principle: the *audience*. We do not consider the audience as an explanatory factor, but as a *non-human actor* (Latour, 1987) that enables an understanding of the relationships established between the media discourse and the cognitive standards of the social sphere. The audience reveals the way in which the prescribed discourse of Astra is transformed in relation to the social context. This principle of the audience includes two types of issues: (a) financial and (b) electoral.

## *Audience: a financial stake*

The existence and sustainability of mass media are directly related to the capacity of these media to hold and renew a certain economic capital. They operate like any other financial companies (Badillo and Bourgeois, 2004). The Astra station is in fact a *non-profit making* station, but, despite this, Astra is obliged to enter into the market game in order to ensure its functionality.

Astra started its broadcasts with capital provided primarily and informally by AKEL. However, AKEL was not able to finance the station on a long-term basis. Thus, the radio station needed to find new funding sources. To acquire economic independence and ensure its continued existence, the Board of the station opted to broadcast advertisements. In fact, advertising constitutes the main source of funding for the Astra station.

Astra's financial dependence on advertising has affected the production of its discourse at several levels. The consequences may take the form of *absences* or *discontinuities* when looking at the discourse compared to the political profile of the station. We can illustrate this through the example of an event that took place in Cyprus in February 2008 when twenty people were dismissed from a national supermarket chain. Several events took place: some of them were organised by the Workers' Union PEO, which is directly linked to the AKEL political party. It should also be noted that AKEL is actually a labour party. Article 1.2 of the Act of Foundation states that:

> AKEL is the highest form of organisation of the working people, founded by the voluntary union of workers, peasants, artisans, scientists and intellectuals and serving workers to claim and protect their rights.[4]

However, the Astra station spent only a few seconds of its airtime on the dismissal case, in the brief newscasts that are broadcast every hour. The information was not a priority and has not featured prominently in the programmes broadcast by Astra. In the morning news programme, where this case was also mentioned, there was a single telephone interview with the CEO of the supermarket chain, in which he presented the reasons that led the company to dismiss the workers.

Financial dependence involves establishing relationships between a station and its advertisers/companies. In other words, advertisers somehow play the role of financial sponsors of the station. Astra is constrained to avoid any serious argument with them, in order to maintain its "partners" and protect its financial resources. A focus on the example of the dismissals by the supermarket chain makes it possible to understand this phenomenon. The supermarket company is one of Astra's most important advertising customers. Therefore, it is one of the main financial resources for Astra. As a result, dependence on the company led Astra to differentiate its discourse concerning the matter of the dismissals from the discourse of AKEL.

This dependence on advertising customers not only leads to the absence or the moderation of a specific political discourse, but also leads to the introduction of new content in the Astra programmes. The station gains financial resources through the advertising space it offers. This means that the station has to be attractive to its potential customers. However, this also entails an adaptation to the requirements of its potential customers, and involves an implicit process of transformation of Astra's media discourse. In order to attract customers, the station – as an advertising space – needs to justify a large and varied audience.

> We broadcast some programs that are "light" compared to others. Not because we want to, but because we too need to play the advertisement game. For example, if there is a brand of mobile phones that we want to advertise, we will not say, "you know, it's not worth it, because teenagers do not listen to Astra". Instead, we must say that there are programmes that are mainly followed by young people and it is during these programmes that we will broadcast these advertisements. [Director of Astra]

There are some programmes broadcast by Astra that do not fit the profile of the station, such as radio shows combining commercial music and news about celebrities' life-styles. However, their presence in Astra's broadcasting schedule is justified by the fact that this type of broadcast helps to increase the audience of the station and attracts a specific audience, teenagers, who are a target audience for some of Astra's "customers". For the director of Astra, these programmes do not reflect the "identity" of Astra, and neither do they correspond to the goal of AKEL to enable its members to be released from the dependencies of the market. But their introduction into Astra's schedule is determined by economic constraints that affect the functioning of the radio station.

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4 Act of Foundation of AKEL (Katastatiko AKEL) Article 1, Paragraph 2. Our translation.

The shift observed in the media discourse of Astra can be explained by the constraints of the economic environment of the Cypriot media space. I argue that there is an interconnection between the media sphere and the economic sphere that leads to the emergence of certain "rules" in the functioning of the media. Some messages and some discourses can be broadcast (or not), despite the intentions of the owners and the administrators of a media outlet.

## *The audience and the stake of face-work*

The non-human actor of the audience acts not only as a financial factor in the process of the production of media discourse but also as an electoral one. The Astra station as a mass media outlet is obliged to address its broadcasts to a much wider public than the group of members and supporters of the AKEL party. This has an important influence on the process of production of the media discourse.

In order to understand this correlation, I give an example of one of the current issues of interest. This is a Church of Cyprus project to build private schools that would be managed by the Church. This is a topic that did not feature much in the Astra broadcasts. The only broadcast where the topic was discussed was the morning news programme. During the programme there was only one guest: the spokesperson of the Cypriot Church. He was asked to explain and clarify the Church's project concerning the foundation of schools. In other words, there was a lack of confrontation between different opinions and therefore a lack of a position criticising the Church of Cyprus project. Astra's treatment of the subject can be described as paradoxical if one takes into account the Marxist-Leninist values of the founder party. The Act of Foundation of AKEL states that the party "advocates a secular republic consisting of rational citizens who are liberated from all kinds of religious constraints".

The explanation for this paradox lies in the consideration of the character and the place of AKEL on the Cypriot political scene. AKEL is among the two major political forces in Cyprus. In elections it usually obtains more than 30% of the votes. Despite the fact that the political values of AKEL are based on a communist ideology, the party refuses to carry the label of "radical left-wing party". It preserves the image and the status of a "moderate party", and this allows it to participate in government through coalitions with parties of the centre left wing and even with conservatives of the centre right wing. Maintaining the status of a "moderate party" involves also taking "care" in its public discourse. In this sense, the lack of criticism of the Church of Cyprus project to build and run schools can be understood in terms of *presentation of self* (Goffman, 1959). It can be seen as a social performance that aims to present and maintain a certain desired impression of the party for others. It is a way to protect the image and the status of AKEL. The party's "real" position with regard to the Church and to religion in general is largely a minority view in the Cypriot political space.

The religious aspect is strongly present in the history of Cyprus. The Christian religion spread early in the island, around the year 40 AD. Since that time, it has been carefully preserved. The first president of the Republic of Cyprus, after the independence of Cyprus in 1960, was the Archbishop of the Church of Cyprus. He was elected with a majority of nearly 90% of the votes, and remained in power for almost fourteen years. This contributed to the strengthening of the links between the sphere of politics and the Church of Cyprus. The religious character of the island was also encouraged by its contemporary history that has set Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities against each other. Both communities are

attached to different religions; this opposition has pushed both communities to strengthen their religious sentiments, which is seen as a way of protecting their identities (Hadjidemetriou, 2002).

Currently, the vast majority of Greek Cypriots proclaim themselves to be believers. Values and rituals of the Orthodox religion are part of the Cypriot culture: Greek Cypriots respect all religious events of everyday life, including baptisms, weddings in church, religious name days etc. We also note that, in general, the rate of participation in the Archbishopric elections is roughly equal to that in the presidential elections. This allows the Church to justify its participation in state affairs and more generally in all areas of public life.

The Astra station is supposed to ensure media coverage of the political discourse of AKEL. However, the station is not just a tool that enables communication with party members. Indeed, as a mass media company, Astra's programmes are addressed to a wide audience who do not necessarily share all the political values of AKEL. In other words, the media discourse of Astra seeks to maintain Astra's credibility and communications with a wider public than party members and supporters. In this sense, a critical discourse against the projects of the Church could disrupt these links. The fact that this critical discourse is absent from Astra shows a discontinuous discourse relationship between Astra and AKEL. If the intentionality of the administrators in the process of the production of media discourse is a fact, the "filtering" of this initial intention by the norms of the social context is another.

# Conclusion: the sphere of the public

This is not a deterministic approach where the media discourse is completely enclosed within the constraints of its social context. I have argued that several discursive elements and activities show the continuity between Astra and AKEL: the treatment of the political problem of Cyprus and the relationship between the Greek Cypriot community and the Turkish Cypriot community, or the treatment of the issue of immigrants. In this sense, the discourse of the Astra station brings new cognitive elements into the media sphere of Cyprus and in a way fills this "blank", which is the main reason for Astra's creation.

However, this case study also showed that the discursive content of Astra broadcasting is related to the principles and values of the local social context. These principles and values, playing through the non-human actor of the audience, frame the process of the production of Astra's media discourse. The result of this framing is the creation of discontinuities between the political principles of AKEL and the discourse of Astra. The economic characteristics of the Cypriot social context impose on Astra the practice of advertising as the primary resource for its funding. This phenomenon leads to the presence of broadcasts that are contradictory in their content to the station's political profile. Advertising is more than a technique for the seduction of consumers and marketing. Advertising affects models and standards. It creates, through its ubiquity, a language and a universally shared imagination. If the obvious function of advertising is economic, its latent function is cultural (Rieffel, 2005). Additionally, the dependence of the Astra station on advertising activity increases the difficulty of developing a critical discourse towards its advertisers. Similarly, the lack of a critical discourse towards the Church is related to the characteristics of the socio-cultural context of Cyprus and the role that the Church occupies in this context and consequently within dominant Cypriot mentality.

Taking into account the audience and the "common sense" financial and electoral requirements means taking into consideration the normative structures of the social sphere on which individuals base their preconceptions. The media is not an exterior structure of society. It is a social construction built according to the standards that characterise its societal context. Elements of this context are introduced into the media sphere and have an impact on the process of the production of media discourses. Consequently, media discourses cannot be understood only by reference to the logic of their creation. They are also partly explained by the characteristics of the society into which they emerge (Eliasoph, 2003).

From this perspective, one can argue that the media discourse of Astra contributes to the (re)production and (re)legitimisation of the dominant norms and values of the societal context of its production. Indeed, if on the one hand the media discourse is produced in relation to the audience, on the other hand individuals build their opinion by relying on available arguments which circulate in the public sphere (Boullier, 2004). Certainly, this hypothesis implies a return to the question of the construction of public opinion and of the effects that media discourses can have on their receptors. This question remains to be developed. What this paper has shown is that the media discourse puts on stage issues and themes that promote the construction of certain visions of reality, while avoiding other possibilities and ways of thinking.

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