

Community Television in the mist of Digitalization in Thailand: Policy and Community's Practice

Phattar Burarak

University of Phayao, Thailand

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Abstract

The media reforms especially broadcasting media are clearly seen in the year of 1997 that the ownerships of frequencies were divided in to 3 sectors; business, public, and community sector. Their rights are legitimate as stated in Thai Constitution and related laws respectively.

16 years pass, Community sector, a new player, seemed awakening and continued movements toward this change whereas the previous players, public and business sectors, were not active in pushing this forward. They only tried to maintain their ownership or existing benefits as much as they could.

At present (2013), it is the year of change and movement in frequency allocation and granting broadcasting and telecommunications licensing in Thailand operated by the Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC). The regulations stated that the issuance of three kinds of licenses should be completed, however, that operation has led to conflict of ideas towards policy and method of frequency distribution for national public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting.

It is criticized that the decision of the NBTC has no intention of reforming media. In addition, the issuance of broadcasting community service has never discussed or considered as the important agenda from the NBTC and other social sectors. This led to unclear and confused operation for practitioners on community service broadcasting.

Although the policy has not been clear, the civic sector in many areas of Thailand shows readiness and starts of pilot implementation within their capacity. Therefore, this study to reveal the current situation of broadcasting community service in views of policy and struggle for naming of the meaning of community's television and giving a concrete practice of community's television in Phayao Province, located in the north of Thailand by presenting in the areas of management, building community's participation, applying technology and innovation, and skills building for locals.

Introduction

Television technology was introduced to Thai people 60 years ago which operated and own by the state. The TV program was regulated from the central government where the capital city located and broadcast to the remote areas with reason of building modernization and patriotism (Phattar Burarak, 2008). Due to this structure, it has caused the monopoly in broadcasting by the state. Later people's struggle for media reform by proposing new broadcast ownership to all sectors was successful to distribute the solely ownership to business and community sectors as enshrined in the Thai Constitution of 1997. However, the Thai media reform has not been much successful because there were numerous debates and negotiations from benefit group which took 7 years delayed the establishment of the Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), a single converged regulator for telecoms and broadcasting sectors for the nation.

After the establishment of NBTC, the broadcast master plan and licensing and assignment of frequencies plan were formulated in 2012. The mission focuses on the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting by divided into three types; public group, business group and community services (at present September 2013). There are conflicts and struggles for the use of frequency between people and former frequency users.

This study is to focus on community services sector which shows less progress in operation and is regulated to grant license after other types of operator. At present, NBTC cannot regulate the guideline and direction in support the management and provision a clear broadcasting area and also regulation on issuance of license so that people will see the overall picture. Although there is unclear policy from regulator, the civic sector and community draw much interest and really want to participate in broadcasting operation. However, it has begun trial broadcasting of community for self-preparing within their own capacity.

Therefore, the objectives are to study the meaning of community TV service by analyzing a provision of regulations issued by regulator and also to understand meaning, format, and idea of community toward community TV service in the aspect of similarity and difference between community and regulator. The research is also to study the experiment community group based on their potential and understanding on process and operation of community TV by using a qualitative approach and participation action research and collecting data through published document analysis, interview and participation observation.

Related Conceptual Theory

Concept of Local/Community Television

Definition of Local or Community Television

By taking consideration of the meaning of local or community television from the field operation in many areas and categories, there is a difference. For example, it is an area-oriented TV system for responding and a provision of specific area in general area in nationwide, has specific target for management and operation distinct from the commercial television, and emphasizes on responding to release the minority group, depressed people, or inequality (USAID, :7-9). Also, the television that acts as local

TV station but presents internationally content and provides area for communication on every day's life issues or social events that are presented about the stories of locals or unknown group on the TV screen by working together and responding of locals or community (Fuller,2007, David,2005). In Thai concept, the local or community TV is regarded as the mass media that broadcasts with the purposes of informing, entertaining by responding to the needs of local people, and also allowing people to be involved in many levels, such as a viewer or a producer in production team, a leader, a planner, a policy maker on program production for TV station and those programs must aim to local development (Haruethai Khadnak, 2004).

Important Common Characteristics of Local or Community Television

The study from many countries revealed that the following issues are important; (Phattar Burarak, 2012 p.244-255)

1. TV station(s) located in the local area will be able to respond and provide service for locals. Nowadays, although the broadcasting technology can transmit to everywhere in the same time, location of local or community TV station is still important because it enhances the physical and spiritual closeness to the people be tied up and build sense of belonging.
2. Process and Operation which is based on getting people involved no matter what class they represent; locals, professionals. Even though the local or community TV status and ownership are different, the principal ideas is to provide people opportunity to participate in the process of TV station that will be used in TV operation, for example the National Broadcasting Services of Thailand (NBT), Channel 11,Chiang Mai. The station is owned and operated by the State that the main purpose of operation is to voice the government, but some parts of TV production are open for the locals to work together.
3. Goal(s) for operation which aims to work for the locals. The concept of local or community TV is derived to respond the expectations and needs of people who want to have media that create public consciousness and local development. The goal for operation is for the locals that helps to develop local ability in reflecting more local or community TV's characteristics than commercial TV operation such as TV content program and presentation also management that local people can participate in at all levels.

Community Television: Community Participation

Communication Participation Concept

It is an attempt to explain the power of receiver in the communication process. Its role is not only seen as an active audience, but also an active sender who make clear picture of struggling for the rights in communication accessibility and community participation.

Although the idea of community participation in communication process has been widely accepted that it can lead to local development based on the power of community, there are many limitations for adopting the idea in practice. Some group in some countries, in particular, in the dictatorial regime, they strongly deny the idea of participatory theory (White, 1994:20). In addition, there are important conditions that restrict people to access to communication; the geographical difficulty by means of isolated or remote area, economical condition that not allow them to own the media, and cultural condition which means capital, skill and capacity in communication's awareness, literacy or ability to handle with communication equipment and technology for media production (Kanjana Kaewthep, 2003:117-120).

6 Levels of Citizen Participation in communication (Kanjana Kaewthep2005:58-64)

1. Active audience and provide feedback.
2. Participate in programs.
3. Program productions involvement; before and after productions.
4. Cooperative programs as resource, program director/producer.
5. Partnerships in programs in organizing activities that stimulate other people know and understand the role of community TV.
6. Participate in management

Methodology

A qualitative approach and participation action are used in this research in order to build understanding and new body of knowledge about the operational process of Phayao Community TV. There are several methods used such as participation observation with core team during 5 mouths (June-October 2013), 7 group interviews, vox-pop interview with 50 community people, open ended questionnaires, and document analysis, for instances minute of meeting, Video recording, audio tape recording to collect all data and the triangulation method is used to verify the correctness of data. The researcher have been continued participating in all activities, assisted in collecting data, presented and reviewed data to the group, corrected and added useful data from time to time.

Results

Community Television in Regulator and Community's eye

There are a few direct messages talking about community TV in laws, regulations, and announcements. If there is, it is only a short message can be found. There is unclear procedure and some rules have not been regulated, for example, how the Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission or NBTC will support financial fund, how to regulate the pricing of usage of network services, regulations on qualified license, guideline to support the community that is ready to be granted license and plan to support community service.

Meaning

It is a television program that has restricted broadcasting service within the coverage area owned by the locals with no profit-seeking and commercial advertising. Not less than 70 percent of the local programs will present news and useful information that meet the needs of people in community and 50 percent produced by the locals.

Community TV Principle

To empower the strength of community by getting people involved with the purpose of no profit seeking and commercial ads aimed to respond and access to people at all level.

Role

Media is in charge of local development, information and education to locals according to their contexts.

Participation

There are 4 types of participation as follows;

1. Ownership.
2. Management.
3. Program production.
4. Other forms of participation such Audience Council, TV Watchdog Group, Community Service Group, TV station Public Relation.

Community TV in the community's eye

Data collection was done by conducting 50 open-ended questionnaires to participants who live in the area of study, doing vox-pops (50 people), participating observation the work of Phayao Community TV and Forum, group discussion, and informal interview. Summaries can be presented as follows;

Meaning

It is a medium for community development that presents their stories to both inside and outside community. They are independent from politicians and officials, open

platform to get people involved equally and are not a tool for politics or any interest group. Program content reflects the diversity's needs for all groups.

Principle

The television for community development and a tool for communicating and presenting stories in community in various aspects among locals and outsider community that reach for all groups.

Role

It is to raise public awareness, inform, educate and guide youth and people in community into the good direction by presenting content with the purpose of community development and reflecting problems, weaknesses, strengths to solve problems and find solutions together.

Participation

There are variety and diversity of participation that depend upon the community's contexts in the area; from owner to become an active audience. (More details appeared in the next topic)

Comparison has been made between the views of community and policy from the above 4 meaning, it found that there are similarities in particular, a medium for community development. But there is slight different feature that.-

Community sees that independent media and free from the influenced or interest group are important for community TV. The principle of community shows no difference in policy, but do not mention about media that requires people participation and indicate that community TV uses 2 levels of communication; intra community communication and inter community communication. Duty and Function of community TV in the view of community is not only for providing information, but also for training people and strengthening community for change. Lastly, the level of participation of community is in accordance with own capacity, but the policy just sets in general framework.

This can conclude that although community TV or community service TV is a new issue and regulator shows less interest in it, there are some meanings in the sense that people in community have more knowledge and deep understanding the philosophy of community TV and are able to work further.

Process of Community TV in Practice

The research focuses on the Phayao Community TV, Phayao Province, it is the one of provinces in the upper north of Thailand. This community is regarded as an active and motivated. There are 4 features will be discussed; 1) Beginning and Network Building, 2) Building participation, 3) Fund and Program, 4) Technology and Innovation at local level.

1. Beginning and Network Building

1.1 **Beginning.** The Phayao Community TV started from the core group who has experience in media and has worked for the community together with the local academia. The group at the beginning was small scale working on name of the 'Phayao forum institute' (phayao people's wisdom). The key leaders has worked and initiated various activities to move community forward on the public interest issues. The tool used is 'Open space for public communication' to make people familiar with TV process work and network.

1.2 **Phayao Community TV Network Building**

1.2.1 Type of network. From the study, it can be divided into 2 types; Inside network and Outside network and each type supports each other in different aspects as follows;

1.2.1.1 Inside network. There are 3 groups involved as follows;

1.2.1.1.1 Educational institutes. School of Management and information sciences, University of Phayao facilitates them in studio recording and TV program produced by students during the trial operation.

1.2.1.1.2 Groups in community. They are co-worker and co-produce by providing information and setting location while shooting including meals and accommodation for the producer team.

1.2.1.1.3 Media group/Local media. Their role is to broadcast live program or event in the form of cable TV and community radio.

1.2.1.2 Outsider network. There are 4 groups working with the Phayao Community TV as follows;

1.2.1.2.1 Media at national level. The Citizen Media Network Department under the Thai Public Broadcasting Service has its role in educating and training and also organizing community forum on the issues related to community.

1.2.1.2.2 Office of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission or NBTC is to educate and provide policy and related regulations including organizing seminar about the community TV.

1.2.1.2.3 Funder. The Friedrich Neumann Foundation supports the people participatory process by organizing community forum.

1.2.1.2.4 Outsider Community TV network group who has active worked at their own areas, for example, the Baan Nok TV group and the Lanna Channel Community in sharing ideas and driving the policy forward and also co-working for live show program.

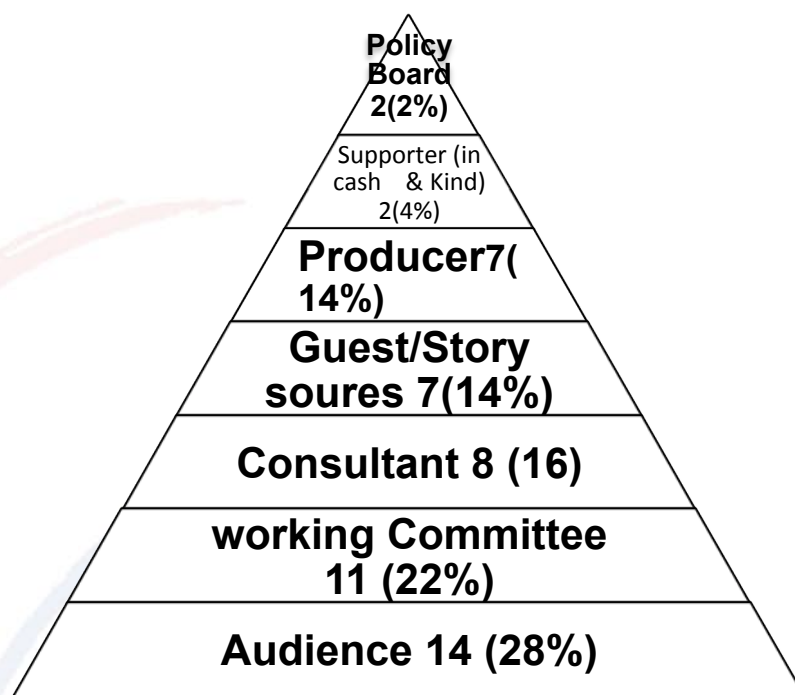
1.2.2 Tools for network Linkage

- 1.2.2.1 **Horizontal communication.** To expand ideas, the core group will start dialogue, explain, and guideline about how community TV works to other groups; leader, network group, public and civic sectors.
- 1.2.2.2 **Public community communication sphere.** Agenda is set up and open spaces for people have a chance to face to face communication, discuss, and find solutions. This will raise the community TV as a community agenda.
- 1.2.2.3 **Community TV program.** It is just a trial program to show the people how to produce via local media channel such as local cable TV, online TV (www.phayaoforum.com, youtube.com/phayao community TV), Facebook page (phayao community TV) and link interesting issue broadcasting at the national media by joining hands with public media network and national television broadcast. By doing this, people in community will see their own stories and acknowledge the results of working on the Phayao community TV.
- 1.2.2.4 **Activities** that link to community's culture. Program TV will link and connect to everyday life of people and activities organized by the network group to make people familiar community TV and encourage people from both inside and outside working together.

2. Types of Participation in Community TV

2.1 Type and level of participation. From the observation of many community forums held from August to September 2013 and the open-end questionnaire analysis, it reveals that.

2.1.1 There are 6 types of participation and it is shown in a hierarchy structure vary by frequency of expressions. The top of pyramid represents low level of participation which can interpret that the participation requires much contribution e.g. time and effort into the process whereas participation as an audience shows the most frequent as shown in the below table.



N= 50

Picture 1 shows types and level of community participation in Phayao Community TV

3.Community TV program and Fund

3.1 TV Program operations

3.1.1 Co-produce with network group presenting via local cable TV and online TV as experimentation for testing its capacity and understanding community by working with educational institutes and local agencies for 3 months.

3.1.2 60 minutes broadcast via community media, on-air a day per week at 9.30 AM. every Thursday and re-run 3 times per week on local cable TV.

3.1.3 Design simple and reachable TV program by using community dialect language of potential network group for pilot operation. The programs presented in north dialect. There are 4 program formats as follows.

3.1.3.1 News. 15 minutes length produced by new media communication department University of Phayao.

3.1.3.2 Talk Show. 30 minutes length by the Phayao forum Institute together with new media communication Department University of Phayao as facilitator (Studio & Equipment).

3.1.3.3 Variety 'Keaw Da Pa Aiew' (Take you around Phayao by Keaw and Da). 10 minutes length by the Phayao forum Institute and university students from new media communication Department University of Phayao as producer.

3.1.3.4 Vox-pop content about community. 5 minutes length by getting other agencies involved in expressing and sharing ideas via community TV.

3.1.4 Organization and program management has not been established because the working group mainly is member from core team and network group who has function on program production. A Coordinator is appointed for program and broadcasting management who will work closely with other network groups including time management for broadcasting. It can say that the organizational structure is flexible.

3.2 Community TV Funding can be described in 4 phases as.

3.2.1 Searching for social fund. Before trial broadcast core team member will not get paid and salary, they do with their heart and have goal to work together, expand and build network both inside and outside for social cultivation.

3.2.2 Searching for financial fund. After ideas expanded to the networks for a while, core team member proposed the project of community TV experiment program to get funding from other agencies.

3.2.3 Transforming social fund to be financed. Since the Phayao Community TV has been acknowledged and receives positive feedback from people in community, the project then is funded for doing research and implementing project from outside agencies.

3.2.4 Enhancing inside community fund for sustainable operation the network and core team group realize the importance of inside fund which is from the community to look for the sustainable operation. Therefore, the core team plans to raise fund from the community in various activities. However, this plan has not been done seriously. From observation and analysis people's reactions, it found the possibility to receive financial support from the community, although it might not a main support during these days. This can understand that to donate to the TV operation has not been occurred in Thailand before.

4. Technology and Innovation at community level

4.1 Tool for network connectivity innovation

4.1.1 Identify the meaning of 'Phayao Community TV' by connecting it to annual community ceremony or ritual to give new meaning of community TV as Merit or goodness that people should take care and support.

4.2 Production and broadcast innovation

4.2.1 Internet is used to be a tool for building and connecting network group from both inside and outside community. It is to inform people to know more about 'Phayao Community TV' and to reach and respond people in community.

4.2.2 Social network. Apart from a weekly broadcast, it is a channel to publicize program and communicate to audience about program, content and process of work of Phayao Community TV.

4.2.3 Local Cable TV and YouTube Channels. Showtime is on local cable TV every Thursday at 09.30 hrs. and uploaded in YouTube.

4.3 Fund raising innovation

The ideas that introduce partnership of the community and accept donation as mentioned earlier is seen as an innovation in searching income for the community, if this is implemented.

Conclusion and Discussion

Relationship between Community TV and Network

The formation of community starts from small group and gradually expands ideas and activities to people by searching for network from both inside and outside community to empower the community TV and expanding scale of work and audience. The inside networks is a role to 'Push' community TV within the community whereas the outside network helps to 'Pull' it be stronger. In particular, the first phase of operation that includes social and financial fund. So, the relationship between network and community TV development presented as figure 2.

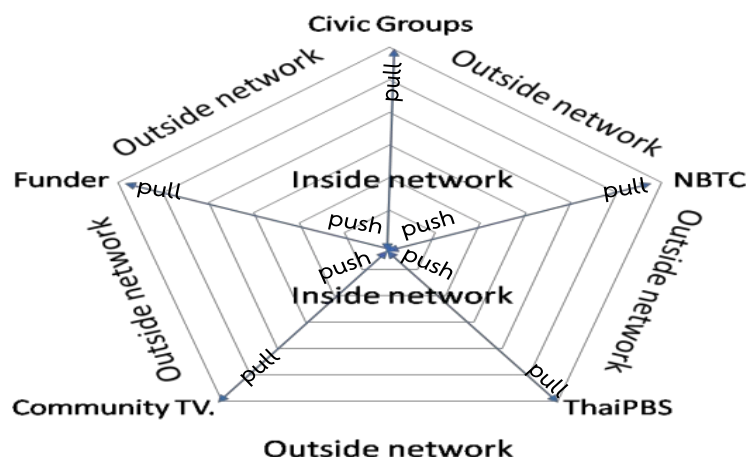


Figure 2 Push & Pull Network's Relationship Model

The key of occurrence and existence of community TV is human resource and participation of network both inside and outside community in accurate time and

place and duty. When the network is built and worked together, there should have mechanism to get them connected and remain it. This is a challenge for community in community TV management in long-term.

Funding and Community TV

The research found that there are 2 types of funds; Social fund and financial fund. At the beginning of community TV process, social fund is more important than finance. But after working for a while when it is time for public presentation, especially, more TV program produced, financial support is needed to facilitate in working. This period of time, financial grant from outside network is essential because inside network is not ready to be self-financed. But the role of social fund still remains. After stepping to the phase of existence of community TV, social and financial funds should be in balance by mean of more self-financing from inside community.

Timing of using funds should begin from building social capital and transforming it to financial capital that both can work together and searching for stab ability from inside community. By doing this, it can guarantee sustainable participation and ownership that lead to self-sustained community TV in the future.

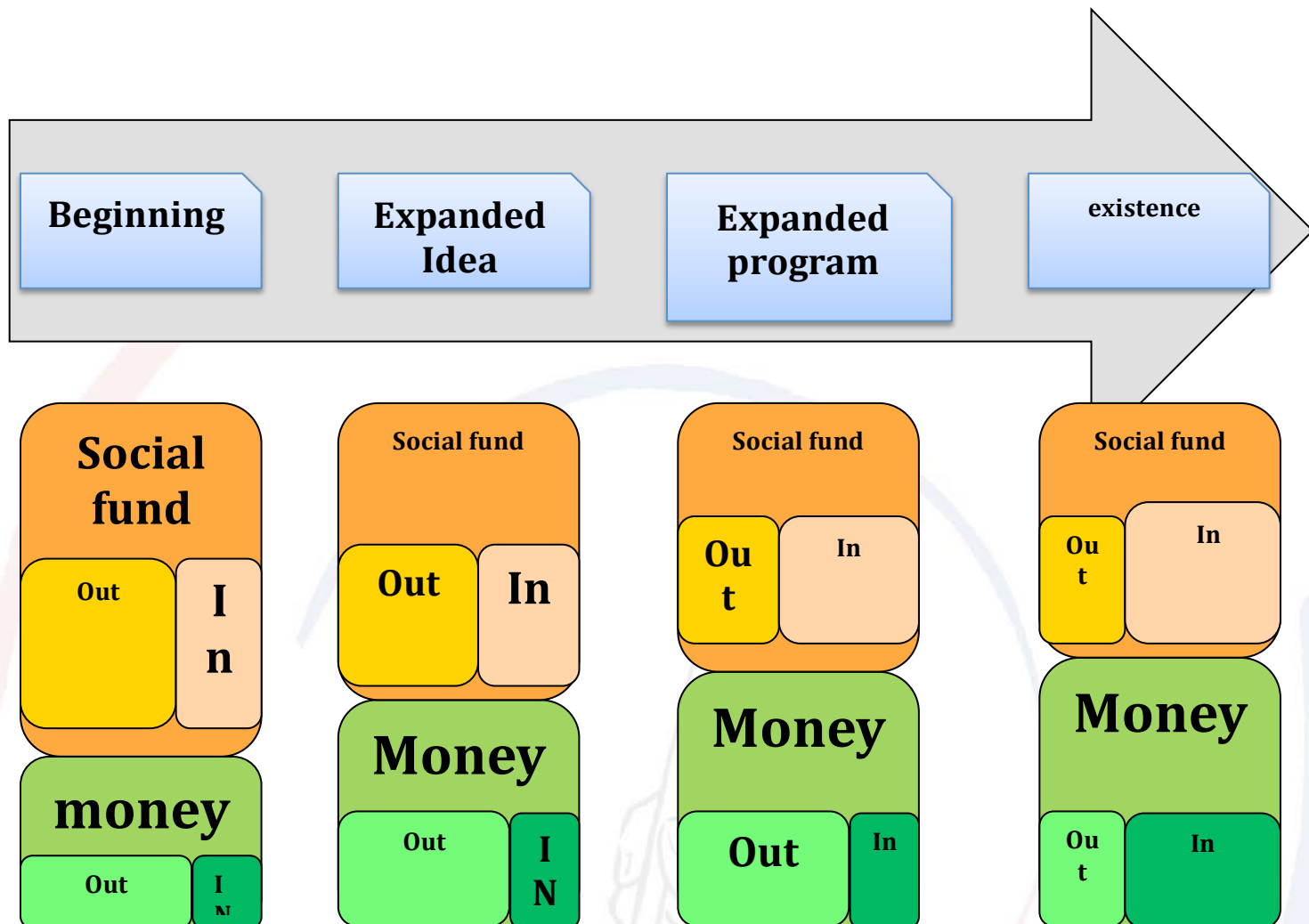


Figure 3 Timing and proportion's funds in Community process

From the study, it can be said that community may or may not require legal endorsement or policy from solely regulator. Due to the case of Phayao Community TV, it can operate on own, but is not endorsed and support from the policy maker in providing guideline, regulations and support the existence of community TV. The development and growth of community TV according to clear principle will help to limit the length of experiment. Without clear cut of policy, the media reform and interest of transformation from an analog terrestrial TV to a digital terrestrial TV that aim to public accessibility, right for communication and frequency ownership by people will unable to meet the goal.

Suggestions

The study could suggestion to both regulator and Community TV operator can be drawn are;

Suggestions to Regulator;

1. The regulator should formulate clear plan and regulation related to community TV with sufficient content that be able to implement and be prepared the readiness of community together with training and skill development for people. These will make people better understanding and doing on own with support from the related agency.

2. A rule selection framework for issuing license in the area of community service should consider the different capacity of each community because community TV's goal is to develop community. Its form of operation should be in accordance with each community's context rather than the entire country.

Suggestions to operator;

1. It is suggested that there should have core team as a facilitator who is knowledgeable, skill, motivated, and social capital to move the operation of community TV forward.

2. Network building with educational institute and communication arts student can help community TV program production faster and later they will be a core team producer for community TV. However, they need framework of co-working with core team and other related networks so that they would have guideline that related to the philosophy of community TV operation.

3. The operation of community TV should be based on inside and outside networks to expand ideas during the period of experiment until it can exit. The networks should be open for inclusive work or forum to exchange views experiences to highlight the value of community TV and is reliable medium in the eye of locals and society.

4. Building networks with public participation should be diversified so that they can support strengths and weaknesses of each other in working and increase the capacity of community rather than emphasize only on the networks themselves.

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