

7-2000

Media, democracy and development: Learning from East Timor

J. Cokely

Queensland University of Technology

A. H. da Costa

Queensland University of Technology

J. Lonsdale

Queensland University of Technology

A. Romano

Queensland University of Technology

C. Spurgeon

Queensland University of Technology

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/apme>

Recommended Citation

Cokely, J.; da Costa, A. H.; Lonsdale, J.; Romano, A.; Spurgeon, C.; and Tickle, S., Media, democracy and development: Learning from East Timor, *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 9, 2000, 27-42.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss9/3>

Media, democracy and development: Learning from East Timor

Authors

J. Cokely, A. H. da Costa, J. Lonsdale, A. Romano, C. Spurgeon, and S. Tickle

Media, Democracy And Development: Learning From East Timor

How might media function as the infrastructure of democracy and nation building when the basic requirements for life have been devastated by civil war? Students in the School of Media Journalism at the Queensland University of Technology recently confronted this question when they participated in a Project that used the Internet to support the development of an independent press in East Timor. This paper describes the East Timor Press Project (<http://www.easttimorpress.qut.edu.au>) and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the Project and reviews the benefits of the Project to the students, site users and East Timorese society. It concludes with observations about how the Project contributes to the effort to develop physical and democratic structures in East Timor, as well as the limitations of the Project.

*John Cokley, Aderito Hugo da Costa, Jamie Lonsdale,
Angela Romano, Christina Spurgeon & Sharon Tickle*

East Timor Press Web Project, Queensland University of Technology

In October 1999 central Dili was at ground zero. Most buildings had been destroyed and life for the majority of the newly independent East Timorese people was a daily struggle. Reliable local news was urgently needed to stem the rumour mill and disseminate vital information to an anxious citizenry, but the capacity to do that had been systematically destroyed. Shibutani's classic study of the sociology of rumour demonstrates how rumour flourishes when formal channels of news fail. Shibutani (1966: 31) finds that especially after crises, people sometimes "become so desperate for such information that they get careless about its source". When institutional channels of news are cut, rumour becomes "the collective transaction through which they try to fill in this [information] gap" (ibid. 1966: 62). Speaking a month after

©AsiaPacific
MediaEducator
Issue No.9
July-December 2000

the referendum in which the East Timorese voted for independent sovereignty, Timorese journalist Virigilio Da Silva described the need for a strong mass media as urgent. "There is a news vacuum here and rumours thrive because there are no newspapers. Gossip through the grapevine can be damaging to nation-building" (Inbaraj 1999).

This paper reports on a unique teaching and community capacity-building project, which is a goodwill collaboration between an Australian university, an Australian commercial news organisation and the newly formed press in East Timor. This paper describes the background to the East Timor Press Project and how it evolved over the last six months of 2000. It reports the achievements of the students, contributes to the on-going discussion about the role of news media (particularly computer-mediated media) in Asian and Western nations, and evaluates the Project as a pedagogical model for understanding the connections and tensions between media, democracy, and economic development.

East Timor Press

Indonesia withdrew from East Timor after the August 30, 1999 referendum that determined that East Timor would become an independent nation. Before the Indonesians pulled out, the pro-integration militia, with the support of the Indonesian military, engaged in a series of attacks on the new nation's infrastructure. An estimated 70 per cent of the country's physical infrastructure was destroyed. With respect to communications, all telephone links, including the mobile network, were cut and radio relay stations were damaged beyond repair. The militia also torched the offices of the main daily newspaper, *Suara Timor Timur* (*Voice of East Timor*), leaving empty smoking ruins. They furthermore completely destroyed all newspaper stocks (Inbaraj 1999). *Suara Timor Timur* was a small private newspaper run by a pro-Indonesia businessman, but its journalists had reported objectively throughout the growing crisis, prompting pro-autonomy East Timorese to accuse staff of "antagonistic" reporting. Journalists were threatened and the editor-in-chief, Aderito Hugo da Costa, was forced to flee the country in fear of his life.

East Timorese editors and journalists gathered at the Hotel Turismo in December 1999 to craft a draft "Declaration of Five Principles" for the newly formed *Timor Lorosae* (*East Timor*) *Journalists' Association*. The main thrust of these principles is to uphold an independent press and freedom of information, while at the same time promoting national unity, reconciliation and nation-building. Nobel Laureate and then Vice-President of the National Council for Timorese Resistance (CNRT) Jose Ramos

Horta, who has responsibility for media policy, stated that East Timor's newspapers would not face any special regulation: "My philosophy when it comes to the media is to let a thousand newspapers and radio stations blossom" (Dodd 2000: 6). Indeed, the East Timor Press Project is just one of a number of media reconstruction and development initiatives presently underway. (For other efforts, see Sharpe 2000.)

Twelve East Timorese journalists and editors from the newly newspaper *The Timor Post* newspaper, most of whom had worked at *Suara Timor Timur*, and from the *Lalenok* and *Talitakum* news magazines, attended a post-conflict journalism training program in Brisbane, Australia, in February 2000. The training had been organised and funded jointly by the Centre for International Journalism (CIJ) at the University of Queensland and the Reuters Foundation. CIJ Director John Wallace said he became aware the journalists had no equipment to return to and approached Australian news media organisations. Bob Howarth, Editorial Technology Manager for Queensland Newspapers, part of the stable of Murdoch news interests in Australia, rose to the challenge immediately, tapping industry connections to source computers, cameras, software, printing equipment and even two cars to send to Dili for *The Timor Post*.

Within weeks of the journalists' return, *The Timor Post* published its first edition. Using printing equipment that had just arrived from Australia, journalists worked 28 hours straight to produce the first edition of *The Timor Post* in the indigenous language, *Tetum*. Copies were printed on a hotel photocopier. The issue coincided with the day that Indonesian President Abdurrachmin Wahid visited East Timor.

In the early months of 2000, lack of equipment and the shortage of newsprint meant that the only newspapers that were "printed" were not newspapers in the normal sense, but were more newsletters that had been photocopied onto A4 printing paper. The information and opinion pieces in these publications were often written by unpaid activists rather than trained media practitioners. Even basic journalistic resources such as notebooks, film and computers were in scarce supply. The print runs of several hundred copies were distributed in their entirety, with no formal collections being made of many of the earlier papers by the news organisations themselves. With the gradual rebuilding of East Timor's infrastructure, some of these limitations are being slowly overcome.

The Timor Post has subsequently built up to a staff of 30 journalists and office workers and publishes up to 2000 copies five days a week using a printing press managed by a print cooperative. It is the only newspaper to publish in four languages,

Tetum, Bahasa Indonesia, Portuguese and English. The Talitakum and Lalenok magazines are also publishing weekly with smaller circulations.

In its present state, print-media production has been sporadic and little emphasis has been placed on record keeping. A similar situation has been evident for decades in neighbouring Indonesia, where a government struggling to prioritise development of the economy and physical infrastructure has been preoccupied with tasks other than record-keeping and developing the administrative support and personnel required for storing and disseminating information (Romano 2000: 55-56; Romano 1996: 52).

While the press in East Timor is rebuilding steadily, the rest of the world has been unable to access local news stories. The next step was an online presence for the Dili-based publications. Howarth approached the School of Media and Journalism at the Queensland University of Technology -- which has produced an online student newspaper for three years -- in June 2000 with a proposal to collaborate on a build-operate-transfer web project. John Cokley was contracted to design and conduct a supervised student project, which would operate under the advice of a cross-disciplinary committee of academic and IT staff, along with Howarth who was liaising with *The Timor Post* journalists and travelling to East Timor regularly. Cokley is a journalist with 20 years newsgathering and production experience, a part-time member of the QUT journalism staff since 1990, an experienced web publisher and one of a small team of online news editors at Queensland Newspapers.

The telecommunications infrastructure in East Timor at that time was at least a year away from supporting a commercial online news service. Mobile phone networks still provide the only public telecommunications apart from one Telstra Internet cafe, which charges US\$9 an hour (two days salary for an East Timorese journalist). QUT's brief, therefore, was to build and maintain the site until the infrastructure in Dili became available. The initial proposal called for the Project to run over at least two teaching semesters, July-November 2000 and February-June 2001, followed by the technology transfer in Dili in July 2001.

The School of Media and Journalism committed itself to supporting the Project as both a community service and as an opportunity for students to engage in a real-world online publication where there was an identifiable need for such a service. The Project also strengthened an existing effort to internationalise the contents of QUT's journalism program, with particular emphasis on increasing the students' understanding of the cultural and media environments in the Asia Pacific region. *The East Timor*

Project website was also a major initiative in storing early records of East Timor's fledgling print media and has become the most comprehensive and internationally accessible access point for copies of its print publications.

Underpinning the *East Timor Press Project* are various assumptions about the relationship of media to economic, national and political development. As a teaching and learning exercise, the Project is implicitly concerned with the roles of media technologies and institutions in questions of economic reconstruction and nation building. Narratives about the democratising influence of media in the modern era are shared across the academic fields of media, communication and cultural studies (eg Crowley et al 1995; Hartley 1996), as well as in the professional communication discipline of journalism. In these Western traditions the media, including new media, are understood as tools of democracy (Friedland 1996), as well as social practices in which imagined communities of interest, such as nations, are formed, extended and reconfigured (Anderson 1983; Calabrese 1999; Poster 1997).

The concept that media and communications could be engines of economic development has evolved over almost a century. The correlation between the density of media and communications infrastructure and economic wealth, and the competitive national advantage accruing to early adopters of new communications systems, has been noted at least since the early days of the telephone (eg, see Perry 1977). The concept that modern mass communications could be particularly useful in developing countries was popularised by modernisation theorists after World War II. Pye (1963), Lerner (1958) and others suggest that mass media can help build national cohesion and impart the modern values that they believe are necessary to kick start industrialisation and physical and economic development. Such theories have come under heavy attack since the late 1960s, when structural theorists claimed that Western political, economic and cultural dominance were exacerbating the problems of developing countries. Such theorists blamed Western media supremacy for perpetuating East-West and North-South inequalities, because of the imposition of inappropriate Western cultural values and technologies (eg Mattelart 1979; Schiller 1969).

Critiques of Western-style communication accompanied the call for a New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO), with the aim of increasing the flow of communications from and within developing countries in order to balance the pre-eminence of Western communication flows. A third wave of

Media, Development & Democracy

theorists has attempted to overturn the premises of both the modernisation and structural constructs, instead drawing from liberation philosophies that promoted concepts such as dignity, quality of life, political empowerment and equity within countries as well as between countries (eg Hedebro 1992).

Participants in the East Timor Press website project have not consciously selected one form of communications-for-development theory over another. It would not be appropriate to do so, given that all of East Timor's newly independent news media are welcome to participate in the Project, and there are marked differences in the political philosophies both between and within the country's existing news-media publications. The political perspectives of East Timor's journalists and editors ranges from conservative to left-wing. Prior to the 1999 referendum, some supported independence from Indonesia, while others were in favour of continued integration.

Even though members of the website project team have not intentionally favoured any development paradigm, it is clear that regardless of which theory one supports, the poor state of communications infrastructure and the more widespread devastation of East Timorese society means that the impact of the Project as a wealth-generation strategy and as an exercise in democratic nation-building will initially be extremely limited. So too are the risks of cultural and economic dependence associated with communications-driven development strategies. Put another way, the principal short-term beneficiaries of the Project were the students involved and people outside East Timor seeking news of East Timor generated by the East Timorese themselves. The hope for the Project is that further benefits, for example an archival record of the early period of independence, will be realised by the East Timorese people and society in time.

The role of the Murdoch family's News Limited press holdings needs to be scrutinised also. The efforts of Howarth and his News Ltd colleagues are clearly motivated by the desire to see the East Timorese empowered to report their own news. However News Ltd has also benefited from Howarth's close association with *The Timor Post* staff through reporting trips and regular intelligence reports. Howarth has managed at least one scoop and many articles through this association. *The Timor Post* appears to function as a de facto news bureau for News Ltd.

The first six months of the Project involved QUT's School of Media and Journalism students designing and constructing a website under Cokley's tuition and supervision. Although most of the participating students were Australian, the Project has also

Project Strengths & Weaknesses

involved QUT journalism students from China, New Caledonia, Norway and Taiwan. The students who have helped to establish the *East Timor Press* website have done so by enrolling in a subject called “Supervised Project”-- an elective subject, in which students can undertake practical or theoretical work of their own choice under the one-to-one or small-group supervision of the subject’s coordinator. Thirty-one students enrolled in the “Supervised Project” in the second teaching semester of 2000. Eighteen were involved with the *East Timor Press Project*, while the remainder opted to engage in other, unrelated activities.

By the end of the first semester, the contents of the *East Timor Press* website included postings of 17 issues of *Lalenok* and *The Timor Post*, a transcript of the *Timor Lorosae Journalists’ Association’s* “Declaration of Five Principles”, interviews and background articles by the Brisbane-based students about events/ issues in East Timor and about the site itself, and useful HTML links. It is hoped that a third East Timorese publication, *Talitakum*, will go online soon and that others will also follow.

The Project as it was envisaged had both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths have been that the Project has provided:

- The opportunity to allow an East Timorese journalists access to the largely Western-dominated Internet and World Wide Web;
- The means for QUT’s Media and Journalism students to (a) learn about the socio-political situation in East Timor and (b) learn from the colleagues in Dili how journalism is practiced in a radically different cultural and physical environment; and
- A vehicle for instructing Media and Journalism students in Australia about the emerging theory of writing and publishing news for an online audience.

The weaknesses, acknowledged implicitly by all the editorial advisory committee, the News Ltd staff and the course designer, have included:

- The language barrier between the English speakers in Brisbane and Tetum, Bahasa Indonesia and Portugese speakers in Dili;
- Lack of theorisation about what forms of development are appropriate for East Timor, what forms and styles of communication would best support such development, and the appropriate degree of “control” over the Project to be exercised by the East Timorese journalists versus that by the Brisbane-based students;
- The uncertain communications link between Dili and Brisbane (almost nil online); and

- The acknowledged experimental nature of the “Supervised Project” subject, which would inevitably test Internet novices against software they had never encountered and a news-writing system with which they were unfamiliar.

In practice, Weaknesses 1 and 4 were overcome. Weakness 3 remains a large obstacle to progress in the first and second “strengths” listed above. The third hoped-for strength, and an aim of the course from the beginning -- that is, instruction in the emerging theory of writing and publishing news for an online audience -- has carried on at a pace which the students themselves have evaluated as useful and rewarding (according to unpublished QUT-sponsored evaluative procedures conducted three times during the first six-month period of the unit).

The non-existent Internet link between journalists at *The Timor Post* meant that for the most part news from Dili could be uploaded to the newly created *East Timor Press* website (www.easttimorpress.qut.edu.au) by only two methods. The first has been physical transfer of printed versions of *The Timor Post* to Brisbane by personal courier (Howarth) or mail. These are uploaded to the site as scanned Portable Document Files (PDFs) using a flatbed A4-sized scanner at QUT and Adobe Acrobat software on the QUT server. The second has been telephone interviews by participating students, who called Hugo Da Costa and asked him about news events in Dili and articles in *The Timor Post*. These interviews were written into news articles and features and uploaded to the website. Once during the semester, Howarth was able to deliver to QUT a series of PDFs saved on 1.44MB disk in Dili, and these were immediately uploaded to the website.

At the end of 2000, the website did not offer a site-search facility. Full-text searches were only possible on each page or PDF file using standard, basic Microsoft Windows facilities such as CTRL-F.

With regard to Weakness 2, there was no real consideration of the theories and principles of development communications at the initial Project planning phases and such concerns have never formed part of the formal Project brief. Discussions have never been held on whether the World Wide Web was an appropriate means of propagating *The Timor Post* and other Timorese publications. However, in the early discussions between participants, there was a clear understanding reached about the degree of control that the Brisbane-based members would have over the Project and over the conceptualisation of the form and structure of the website.

The East Timorese participants in turn would dictate the contents of the actual online newspapers as their articles were to be reproduced virtually verbatim, except for minor subediting.

At the time of the early discussions, Project participants were very much occupied with finding funding and other resources, recruiting the appropriate expertise, collecting and compiling copies of East Timorese news publications. They also had to consider the practical and theoretical issues of the problem-based, “learning-through-doing” approach that would be adopted in the Brisbane classes. Classes for the Project’s first semester ended in November and will resume in February, the end of the summer break, thus allowing time for critical reflection on these issues.

It is unlikely the *East Timor Press* website is being used by East Timorese in their home country due to the almost universal lack of electricity and computer infrastructure in the troubled region. There is a substantial international audience for the site, and further analysis is required of the server traffic data (presented below in brief) before it is possible to determine whether East Timorese expatriates are visiting and using the website. Anecdotal comments to Project members and students have indicated a low but persistent level of interest within Australian East Timorese communities in material posted to the site. As the site grows in size and depth of content, the editorial team envisages it as a developing archive of East Timorese news and cultural events, which could become the subject of further research and study.

The criteria by which the Project may be judged include that :

- East Timorese journalists eventually take control of day-to-day management of the Project,
- the Project is sustainable for East Timorese journalists once they take full control of the project,
- until this time, the Project website reflect East Timorese aspirations and concerns, and
- the Project succeeds as an effective teaching and learning exercise.

The first three criteria are considered in this section. The final point is discussed in the next section.

Although it was initially planned that day-to-day control and management of the site would be handed over to East Timorese journalists by mid-2001, it subsequently became apparent that this would not be achievable due to the slow pace of rebuilding the country’s telecommunications. At the end of 2000, participants believed it would be 12 months before East Timor’s telecommunications technology would be sufficiently reliable to allow the transfer of site management. Although it is not clear whether 12 months is sufficient time, Project participants have

Criteria For Success & Failure

commenced discussions to ensure that the appropriate physical, financial and human resources are available in East Timor for the end of 2001 in the event that communications infrastructure is sufficiently developed.

The minimum required would be a late-model IBM-compatible computer with a fast enough processor, such as a Pentium II, to handle browsing, FTP and email software all at once. Also needed would be a modem able to handle the communications system at a sufficient rate to transfer documents up to 1MB at a time: a 56K modem would suffice. Cabling, reliable power and operator training would also be essential. Ongoing maintenance issues would be similar to those already faced by computer users at *The Timor Post*. Additionally, although Howarth has identified several East Timorese journalists who are developing their Internet skills, an Australian member of the Project will need to spend several days of training in situ to ensure that those who take over the management of the site have the requisite technical skills for such work.

An application for funding for the technology transfer will be submitted under the QUT Community Service Grant Scheme in 2001. If successful, the Grant will support the transfer of operations to Dili in 2001.

The Project partners have also been working towards financial viability in both the long and short term. The Project has been viable in its early stages because of two elements. These are: (i) the decision to operate the Project as part of the School of Media and Journalism program's "Supervised Project" subject for which participating students would receive marks and credit towards their degree, and (ii) the degree of voluntary contribution of time and resources by participants. Once a minimum of 12 students enrol in the "Supervised Project" with the aim of participating in the *East Timor Press Project*, then it becomes feasible for the university to pay the wages of a tutor/supervisor dedicated solely to the website Project.

As was mentioned above, 18 students enrolled in the East Timor website activities in the first semester of the Project's operation. If enrolments in the Project stay above 12 for the next two semesters, then it will be possible to continue operating on the same basis in 2001. Website establishment and operational costs have also been kept to a minimum by establishing the site with QUT internal facilities and voluntary labour of the Media and Journalism staff involved in authoring this article.

Project partners are also investigating means by which the Project can become a commercially sustainable news site in the longer term. This goal is, in large measure, fuelled by a desire for

the website to be economically self-financing by the time East Timorese journalists take full control of the Project. For example, it is hoped that sources of funds to cover the communications costs of maintaining the website will be tapped by this time. The most common e-commerce model for a news site relies on advertising and sponsorship. Project partners are engaging in some early efforts to identify sources of advertising and sponsorship income for the site. QUT is supporting this development. Pro-Vice Chancellor Information and Academic Services Tom Cochrane has authorised a departure from QUT web publishing guidelines, in order to facilitate experimentation with commercialisation of the site.

Advertisers and sponsors will only support sites that have a proven level of site traffic. To that end an understanding of the site's audience over time must be gained. Observations of visitor frequency, origin, usage and site interaction needed to be collected and analysed. This was achieved in phase one with automated recording of connections into the by the web server, and the analysis of those connections in the form of detailed reporting of the data using the software package *WebTrends Log Analyser 6.0*. The data collected were: the amount of time a visitor has spent within particular sections of the site, how these visitors have been referred to this website (whether they guessed the right address or which search site actually directed them), the geographical location they came from, the most popular time of day to access the site, the most popular day of the week, the number of visitors who return to the site, the page that most visitors exit from, and the number of unique visitors to the site.

Evaluation of the data enables some critical site management decisions to be made regarding the design, content and marketing of the site in the next phase. For instance, a trend suggests that the site is most popular on a Tuesday morning between 9am and 10am. This information can be used to ensure the site is updated on Mondays before the peak period occurs. It is also important to understand the limitations of this type of reporting. Accurate numbers of unique visitors are hard to gather, as they require the use of cookies.

A cookie is a text element transferred to a user's machine by software resident on a website, allowing the transfer or harvesting of information back to the website including unique information about the user. Simply tallying the number of unique Internet addresses recorded will be inaccurate due to the existence of Internet firewalls. A rough idea of the site's popularity is the number of hits on the home page.

The site achieved over 1000 hits on its home page during October. Geographically the site's visitors have mainly come from

Australia and the United States, with a particularly large cohort of US visitors from the state of Virginia. As the reporting and analysis mechanisms become more fine-tuned, the information gained will inform the marketing strategy for the site.

Finally, the Project participants have aimed to establish a site that represents the voices of the Timorese, rather than the voices of their Brisbane-based and predominantly Western partners. Golding has identified three factors that have led to the westernisation of Third-World journalism, and the tenets could be used to discuss the collaboration between the Timorese journalists, QUT academics/students and Queensland Newspapers. Golding says firstly that developing countries are often westernised, because “media institutions have grown as extensions and imitations of those in industrialised societies” (Golding 1977: 294). Secondly, journalistic training programs in developing countries are often conducted for many decades after independence by Westerners or Eastern Europeans, who inculcate Western or Soviet-style syllabi (Golding 1977: 295-298). Thirdly, journalists are influenced by technologically sophisticated Western media technologies and texts, especially when those journalists use foreign texts as models of general professionalism because of the higher production standards associated with the foreign media products (Golding 1977: 298-301).

In the case of the East Timorese media, many external influences are strong. Certainly Golding’s point about the East Timorese media institutions growing from the models set in Western societies is valid. Regarding the second point, many journalists of *The Timor Post* were trained under the Indonesian system. Since independence was attained, Western organisations, such as the CII, mentioned above, Internews and others have been conducting training for East Timorese journalists. Once the technology is sufficiently developed in East Timor to allow a transfer of the East Timor Press website to the East Timorese themselves, the Australian partners will conduct initial training in how to use the equipment. In relation to Golding’s third point, limited computing and IT skills among East Timorese journalists has meant that the QUT staff and students will have an influence in terms of establishing a model of professionalism for the online media product.

It is beyond the scope or aims of the partners in the *East Timor Press Project* to address the issues relating to the training of East Timorese journalists in the skills of journalism by Indonesian or Western practitioners and academics. With regards to the style and contents of the Project website itself, there has been no instruction so far from Dili through Howarth about web design or any input from the East Timor staff about how the project should

develop. The site itself was constructed by a student cohort that was predominantly Western, although there were some international students representing Asia-Pacific nations. These students studied how websites communicate to their “readers” and were required to read several papers dealing with web-page design from a Southeast Asian point of view (eg Massey 2000).

On the one hand, it could be argued that because the Internet is a developing medium itself and because the site had to be kept simple so that it was quick and easy to download, students have only added the most basic of additional information and design features, thus limiting the degree of possible external cultural interference.

On the other hand, it is immediately obvious on entering the site that although the “reader” can download newspapers stories that may be written in any one of four languages, the HTML links and site information are only currently in English. This invites a certain type of audience and style of reading. The English-language dominance of the site matches with the United Nation Development Program’s findings that English prevails in almost 80 per cent of the world’s websites, even though less than 10 per cent of people worldwide speaks the language. The UNDP argues that this is one of a variety of factors that creates “severe problems of access and exclusion” on the Internet, “cutting off” many people’s “voices and concerns from the global conversation” (UNDP 1999: 246).

In relation to the text on the site, the staff and students in Australia have sometimes altered the East Timorese articles to conform to standard English expression. The students have attempted to ensure that the posted copy is tampered with as little as possible, so that there is no outside distortion on the local angles, issues and analyses presented in the East Timorese journalists’ stories. This was a key element of the students’ brief, which stated that: “the site is to be client-focused to clearly and faithfully represent the material published in those participating media”. As was mentioned above, students also contributed articles themselves. They were instructed to “take an information role, not an advocacy role, regarding [coverage of] events and policies in the East Timor region”. Thus, although the students cultural background may well have influenced the angles and news values involved in constructing such stories, students were made aware of the need to think through the issues of how to avoid “slanting” stories to suit their own personal or political perspectives.

From the students’ perspective in Brisbane, the ability to use the East Timor situation as an instructional forum and test bed for online news writing and production was invaluable and successful. By the end of the semester, all students in the 18-strong

ETP As A Pedagogy Of Empowerment

class has reached a level of competence on Internet browsing, email and web-site development software which would have enabled them to start work in a professional online news organisation. Assignments submitted by the students indicated they had mastered several key aspects of online news presentation, namely the length of articles required for online news sites, the importance of timely and current content, and the necessity for user interactivity on a website.

The design and progress of the unit were evaluated from the students' perspective during the first six months of the Project. One evaluation involved asking students to comment on the lecturer's ability to transfer that content and conduct those exercises, and the results are not reported here. In two further evaluations, the course content and practical exercises were assessed through:

- An online survey of content and presentation, and
- A taped focus group moderated by QUT instructional designer Alison Green.

Both of Green's evaluations raised issues of course expectations and operational limitations. She states that: "students generally appreciated the aim of the course and the ideas behind it. Several talked about how they had learned new skills. Their comments showed that they were aware that a large responsibility for their learning was their own."

The students generally felt that the emphasis of the course changed from practical to theoretical once the problems with receiving content for the site arose. One student was expecting "a lot of practical, hands-on experience on designing the web site and putting content on it", but felt that this expectation was not met to the extent that he had hoped.

Much of the unit's course material was presented to students online, on what is known as the OLT (OnLine Teaching) site. This is a basic, Cold-Fusion generated instructional site normally used by lecturers to enhance flexible delivery of course material and to communicate off campus with students between lecture and tutorial sessions. Comments collected by Green reflected some design limitations within the OLT, especially a feature which makes text appear wider than the available screen area, forcing students to use the Windows scroll-bars to read all the text.

Students discussed the OLT web site in terms of reading on-screen, scrolling to the right, recognising new or changed content, and regularity with which they were expected to check the site.

Green submitted a short list of recommendations to the *East*

Timor Press advisory committee regarding the second semester of operations of the unit.

As an instrument of development and democratisation, the role of the *East Timor Press Project* website will obviously be limited for many years. Access to the site within East Timor itself will be minimal until there is greater infrastructural development. There has also been only rudimentary theorisation of what kind of development and democratisation the site should promote, partly because, as was discussed above, there is such marked variation of political orientation within the local journalistic cadre itself. Although the design of the website has largely been driven by outside forces, the Project itself was initiated at the request of the East Timorese and the contents of the publications that have been uploaded onto the site are themselves largely unaltered from the hard-copy print versions that are circulated in East Timor. This can be considered a positive contribution, because much of the information flowing from East Timor comes from external observers, such as the United Nations, foreign journalists, international aid organisations, visiting diplomats and scholars, and so on. Although the site is edited and formatted by non-East Timorese, the site still helps to redress the East-West, North-South information imbalance by providing a Timorese information service with a distinctively local perspective.

Conclusion

REFERENCES

- Anderson**, Benedict (1983), *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London.
- Calabrese**, Andrew (1999), "Communication and the End of Sovereignty?", *The Journal of Policy, Regulation and Strategy for Telecommunications Information and the Media*, vol. 1, no. 4, August, pp. 313-326.
- Crowley**, David and **Paul Heyer** (eds) (1995), *Communication in History: Technology, Culture and Society*, Longman Publishers USA, White Plains, NY.
- Dodd**, Andrew 2000, "Voices of Freedom", *The Australian*, April 6: 6-7.
- Friedland**, L., (1996) "Electronic Democracy and the new citizenship", *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 18: 185-212.
- Hartley**, John (1996), *Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity and Popular Culture*, Arnold, New York.
- Hedebro**, G., 1982, *Communication and Social Change in Developing Nations: A Critical View*, Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa.
- Inbaraj**, Sonny (1999), "*East Timor: Journalists Rebuild Media as Well*", Inter Press Service wire report, 22 November.
- Lerner**, Daniel (1958), *The Passing of Traditional Society*, Free Press, New York.

- Massey**, Brian L. (2000), "Market-based Predictors of Interactivity at Southeast Asian Online Newspapers", *Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy*, Vol 10, no. 3. Available at: HYPERLINK "http://www.emerald-library.com/brev/17210cd1.htm" "http://www.emerald-library.com/brev/17210cd1.htm" (accessed 10 December 2000).
- Mattelart**, A. (1979), *Multinational Corporations and the Control of Culture*, Harvester Press, Brighton.
- Perry**, C., (1977) "The British Experience", in I. De Sola Pool (Ed), *The Social Impact of the Telephone*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Poster**, M., (1997) "Cyberdemocracy, Internet and the Publish Sphere", D. Porter (ed.), *Internet Culture*, Routledge, New York.
- Pye**, Lucian W. (ed.) (1963), *Communications and Political Development*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Romano**, Angela (2000), "Foreign correspondents and knowledge broking in Indonesia", *Foreign Devils and Other Journalists*, D. Kingsbury, E. Loo & P. Payne (eds), Monash Asia Unit, Clayton, Australia: 51-76.
- Romano**, Angela (1996), "Piecing Together the Jigsaw: The Professional Culture of Foreign Correspondents in Indonesia", *Media International Australia*, no. 79, February: 49-56.
- Schiller**, Herbert (1969), *Mass Communication and the American Empire*, A.M. Kelly, New York.
- Sharpe**, Patricia (2000), "Personal Impressions: broadcasting in East Timor - News Update", ABA Update, no. 93, November: 9-10.
- Shibutani**, Tamostu (1966), *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor*, The Bobbs-Merrill Co, Indianapolis.
- United Nations** Development Program (1999), "Globalization with a Human Face: UNDP Report 1999", in *Global Transformations Reader*, D. Held & A. McGrew (eds), Polity Press, Cambridge.

JOHN COKLEY, ANGELA ROMANO, CHRISTINA SPURGEON, JAMIE LONSDALE and SHARON TICKLE are members of the advisory committee for the East Timor Press Web Project and are employed in the School of Media and Journalism at Queensland University of Technology. John Cokley also works for Queensland Newspapers Pty Ltd. Hugo da Costa is the Editor-in-Chief of The Timor Post. Email: a.romano@qut.edu.au

Others who have offered unpaid assistance or support include Howarth, QUT School of Media & Journalism Technical Services manager Dave Harvey, Head of Journalism Lee Duffield, journalism lecturer Roger Patching and Head of the School of Media and Journalism Stuart Cunningham.