Exploring Remoteness & Social Capital through Community Media in Kyrgyzstan

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Approach

- An exploratory ethnographic study mapping the communicative ecology of remoteness through community radio & its role in community building in Kyrgyzstan

- A communicative ecology approach that places community radios within the wider media ecology of their communities

- In-depth interviews with community media association (2); community radio managers (3); and community volunteers (12)

Some Key concepts

- Community media
- Communicative ecology layers
- Communication action framework
- Communication infrastructure
- Storytelling network
- Communicative rhizomes
- Catalyst for change

Some guiding thoughts on remoteness:

What makes a place remote?
Is remoteness a factor of geography and topography,
is it a construct of connectivity, or is it an outcome
of politics and history?
... remote denotes multiple aspects:
lack of material infrastructure and transport,
improper communication & geographical isolation.

The question of remoteness is eminently political, weighed against the notion of proximity & the localization & exercise of political power. The reduction of remoteness to a question of distance & proximity brings with it the sphere of normative judgements regarding belonging & non-belonging, so that the proximity of the centre also becomes a point of desire, while the periphery is to be eschewed.
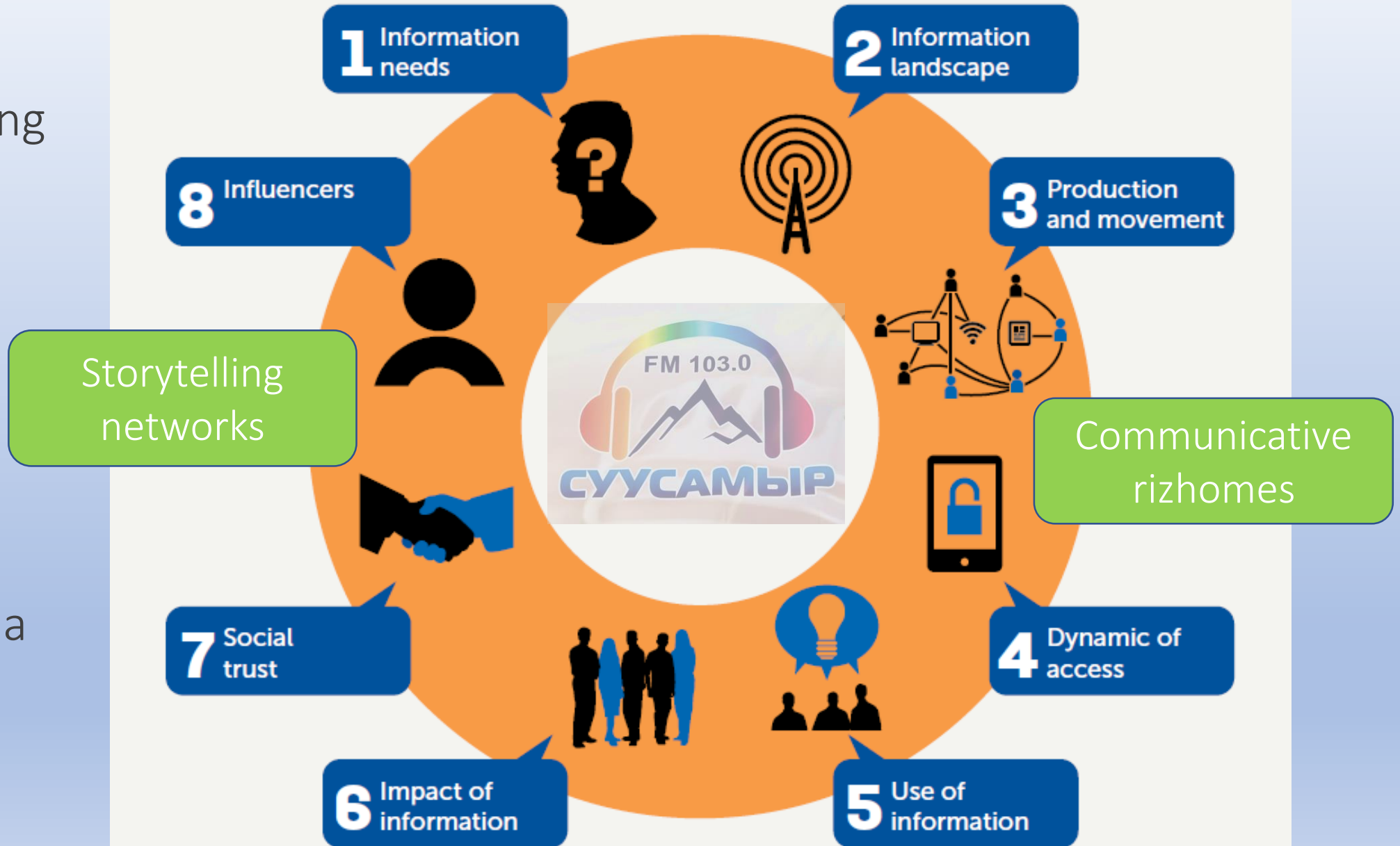
(Botha, nd)

If one begins with the premise that places have always been hierarchically inter connected instead of naturally disconnected then cultural & social change becomes not a matter of cultural contact & articulation but one of rethinking difference through connection.

(Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 35)

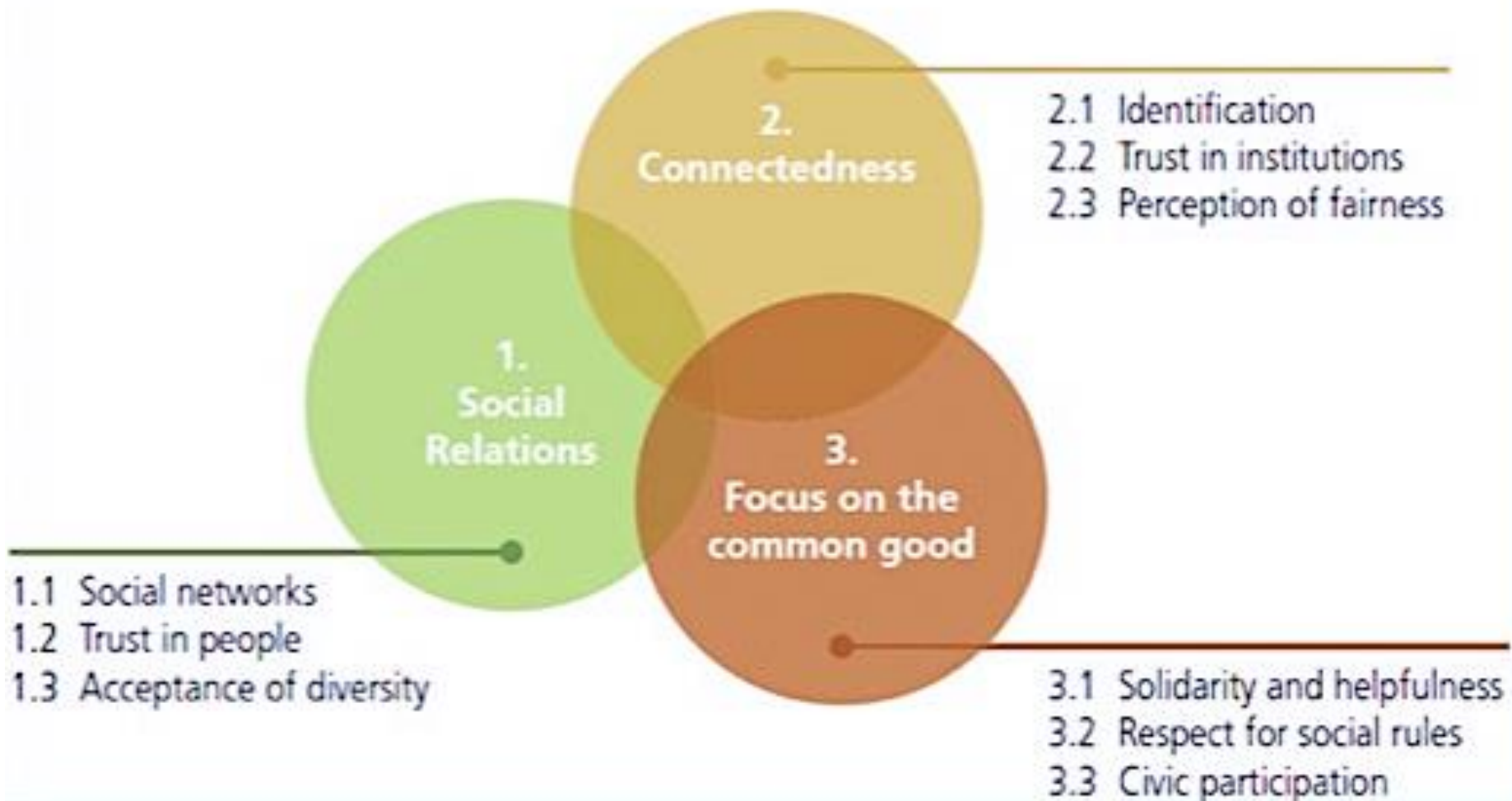# Information ecosystems, remoteness & social capital/cohesion some models

Contextualizing the Information Ecosystems Internews model to the mountainous remote communities of Central Asia

THE EIGHT CRITICAL DIMENSIONS OF INFORMATION ECOSYSTEMS

1 Information needs
2 Information landscape
3 Production and movement
4 Dynamic of access
5 Use of information
6 Impact of information
7 Social trust
8 Influencers

Storytelling networks

Communicative rizhomes

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СУУСАМЫР

Social cohesion

Characteristic of a collective
Multidimensional
Measured at the micro, meso and macro levels

1. Social Relations

2. Connectedness

3. Focus on the common good

1.1 Social networks
1.2 Trust in people
1.3 Acceptance of diversity

2.1 Identification
2.2 Trust in institutions
2.3 Perception of fairness

3.1 Solidarity and helpfulness
3.2 Respect for social rules
3.3 Civic participation

Source: Dragolov et al. 2006

Social Cohesion

Only one third have local community development committees

Community development committee / Which organizations/groups exist in this community					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	33	28.2	100.0	100.0
Missing	System	84	71.8		
Total		117	100.0		

Majority have a designated place where the meetings take place to discuss local issues

Is there a designated place where the meetings take place to discuss local issue					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	81	69.2	69.2	69.2
	no	36	30.8	30.8	100.0
	Total	117	100.0	100.0	

At meetings of local community members almost half of the decisions are made mostly through voting by community members and about quarter of decisions are made by community leaders such as *aksakals* and other community members accept it

how is decision normally made at this kind of meetings?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	voting by all community members	47	40.2	46.5	46.5
	community leaders, eg. aksakals make a decision, and other community members accept it	23	19.7	22.8	69.3
	decision is made by local administration	21	17.9	20.8	90.1
	other	6	5.1	5.9	96.0
	99	4	3.4	4.0	100.0
	Total	101	86.3	100.0	
Missing	System	16	13.7		
Total		117	100.0		

Kinship & tribal relations as community cohesion

- Tribes pose a central role in social, economic, and political life in Central Asia (Collins (2003).

- A clan is an informal social institution in which actual or notional kinship based on blood or marriage forms the central bond among members (Collins, 2003).

- 'Clans are identity networks consisting of an extensive web of horizontal and vertical kin-based relations. If clans can be seen as 'horizontal' by virtue of their capacity to bind members through relations of mutual trust, they can also be seen as 'vertical' by dint of their tendency to include both elite and non-elite members from different levels of society and the state.' (Collins, 2003)

Tribes and Tribalism

Tribalism adapted itself to the new socio-political conditions. …the present economic crisis of the transitional period, constant decrease in the living standards of people and struggle for survival resulted in the unity of people in accordance with blood ties.

Privatization of state property led to the emergence of clans that could compete for property ownership.

As a final reason, independence paved the way for tribalism to operate openly and influence state building.

As an additional aspect, the political leadership has also interested in tribalism because it can be an instrument of controlling political elite and also it is a fact that present political leadership stays in power mostly by means of tribalism (Besikci, 2006)

Social cohesion

The Esenaliev et al research (2018) found that while community driven development projects in Kyrgyzstan had positive impact in a number of areas including unity & cooperation, it also showed little impact on deep-trenched perceptions, attitudes & trust for closely related social groups & local institutions.

*(Social Cohesion through Community-based Development in Kyrgyzstan by Damir Esenaliev, Aida Bolotbekova, Gulzhan Asylbek kyzy, Kanat Tilekeyev, Anastasia Aladysheva, Roman Mogilevskii, Tilman Brück UCA **WORKING PAPER #46, 2018**)*

Community driven development & community radio

- Community radio: a significant contributor to community driven development (CDD).

- The CDD intervention rationale: the process of implementation of a programme induces community members to work together. In this process, they gain more understanding about other social groups & local leadership. By working together towards a common goal, community members become more cooperative and gain trust.

- Higher level of female participants consistent with other community driven projects – and our research with community radio volunteers

Evidence from our research…

…demonstrates that community radio can be a valuable a tool in community driven development (CDD) that can help reduce the gap between community & local authorities & instigate higher levels of accountability.   …but high levels of social trust are important. Community radio is more successful in communities with high social cohesion (Sussamyr and Talas) and agents of change that are insiders to the community.

Batken Community Radio did not work well and it stopped broadcasting after one year because the founder and manager was from Talas and not local from Batken.

Aijamal launched "Bakai-Ata" community radio in Talas, but she is from Talas city center and local people in Bakai-Ata do not know her and she is struggling to find support and volunteers from Bakai-Ata now.

Background context

Ассоциация Общинных СМИ

Community Multimedia Media Centres &
Community Radios in Kyrgyzstan: setting a trend in Central Asia since 2000s

Enabling conditions: greater media freedom in Kyrgyzstan in comparison to other Central Asia countries
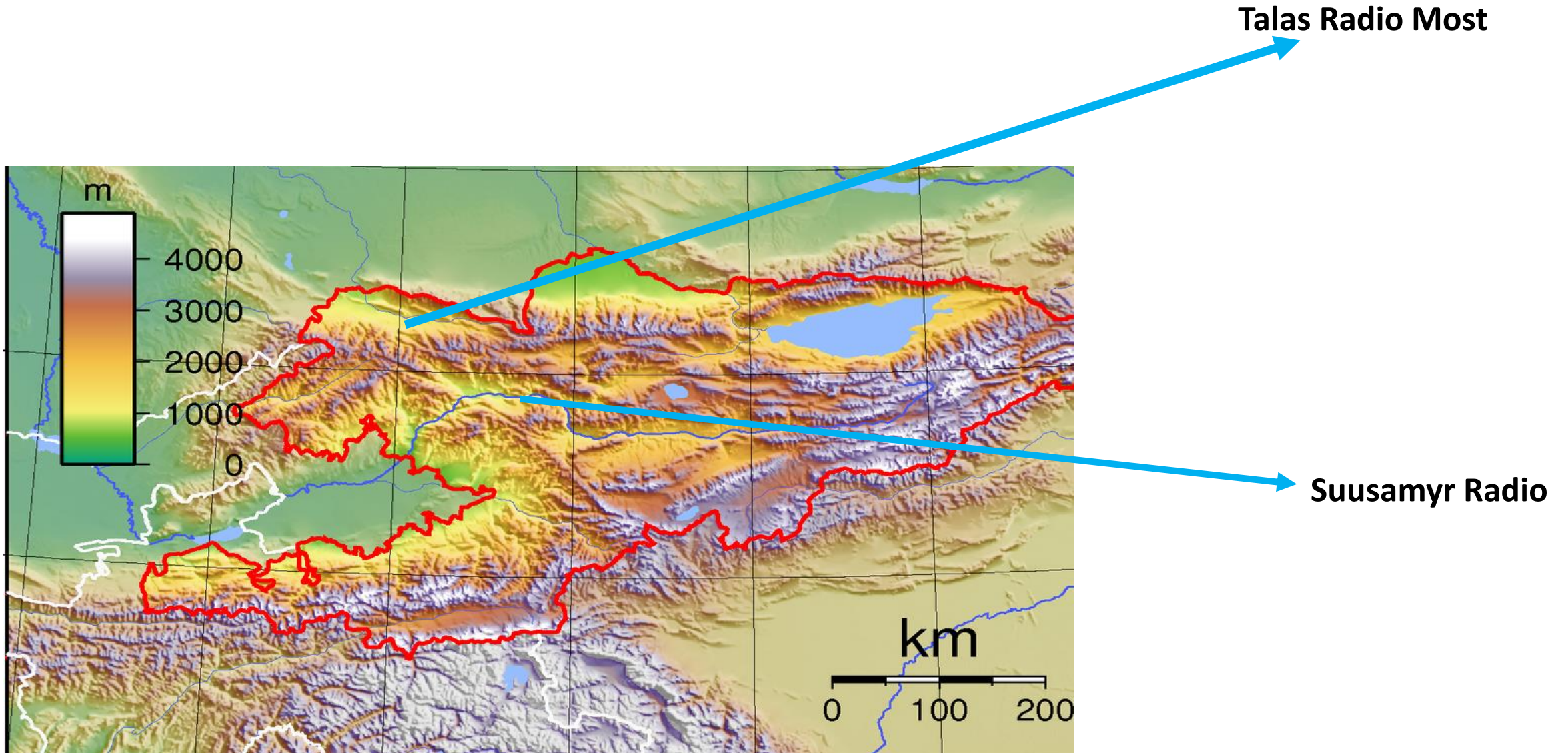
Two Case Studies: Suusamyr Radio & Radiomost

Rural remote community radio


Central Asia's first **semi-urban** remote community radio

Mapping the communicative ecology of *remoteness*

Talas Radio Most

Suusamyr Radio

Radio Suusamyr: the high school volunteers that run a radio from school

Perceptions of remoteness

"we are not isolated, we are in contact with the world and the world is in contact with us through our community radio and the Internet".
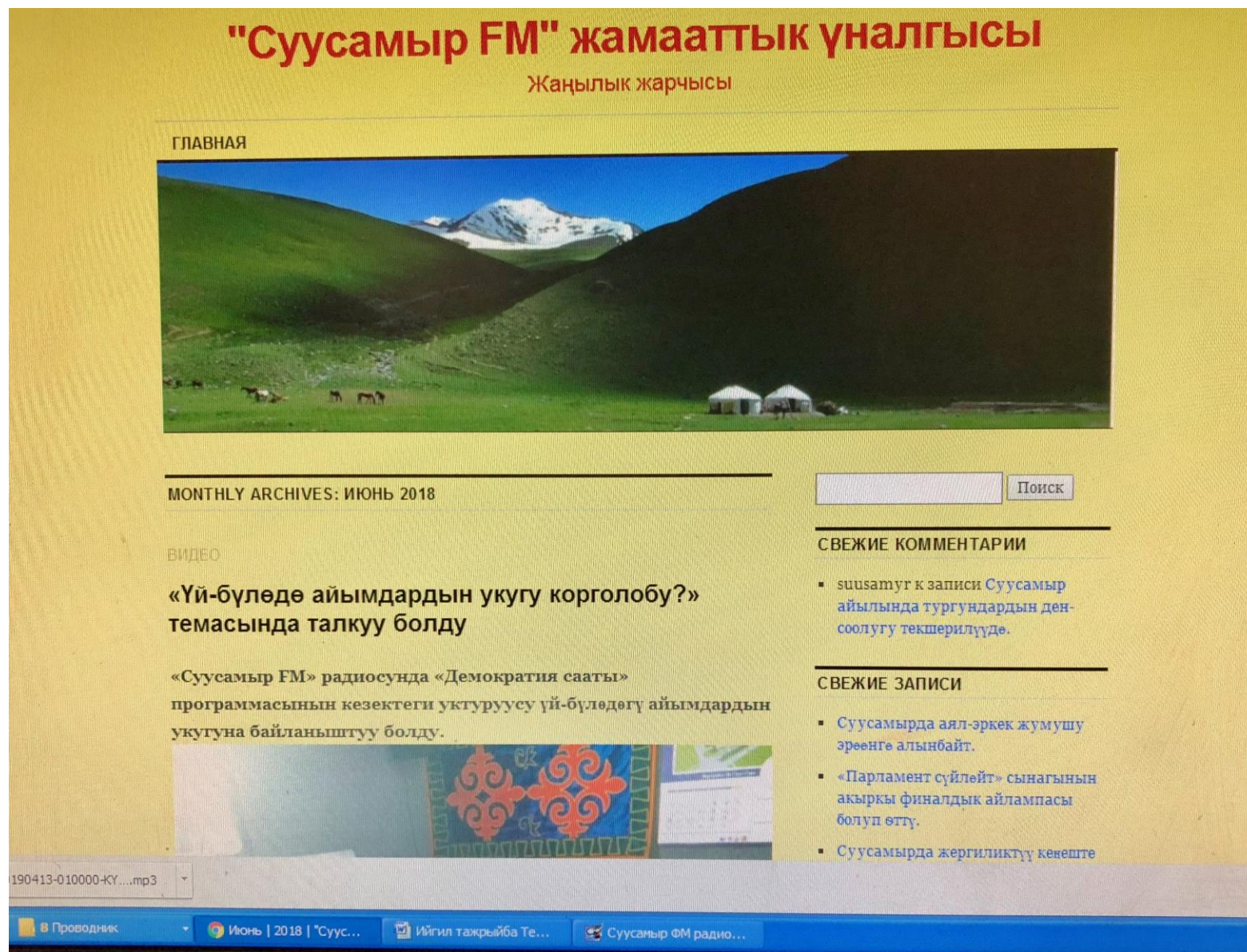
Communicative rhizomas

cohabitation of time *on air* & space (*off air*) enables the creation of civic education practices that connect the inhabitants of remote communities with the centre & helps strengthen civic mindness and participation.

"What if" program: 'on' and 'off air' school competition that leads to visit to Parliament

Radiomost *"people's reporters model"*
local networks of storytellers

Community radio:
integral part of remote mountainous communities' storytelling network

…created through a storytelling process in which inhabitants of remote mountainous communities, community organizations & local community media work with each other to construct a vision & a reality for their remote communities as places where they belong & in which they engage shared concerns (adapted from Kim, Jung, Ball-Rokeach, 2006)

Communicative ecology layers

Social

- Community media tap into existing social networks in a way that allows a symbiosis (school, village reporters etc.)

Discursive

- Diverse & representative, participatory/democratic & community based (dialect, music, religion, health, gender diverse, cross-generational, etc.)

Technological

- UNESCO and other agencies: central in providing technological support that sustains the new community media (external catalyst for change)
  - Voice of village mobile app: "twitting on lost horses"

The catalysts for change:
insiders with commitment to their communities

Conclusions: impact

- Reversing flows of information
- Building on existing social capital
- Strengthening social cohesion
- Contributing to community development
  - Community authorities accountability
- Reducing feeling of remoteness by focusing on community change

Plus

- Behaviour change: confidence, communication skills
- Media literacy
- Digital technology literacy
- Career choices
- Cross-generational
  - "but they teach us how to use internet"

Чон рахмат – Thank you!