

# COMMUNITY MEDIA REVIEW

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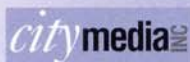
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## UPFRONT • PAGES 3-8

Bunnie Riedel, Brian Wilson, Board of Directors

## WIRED WORLD: THE GLOBAL VILLAGE • PAGES 9-36

*Introduction*, Jeff Hansell, 9 / *Afghanistan*

*Revisited*, Mary Lou Bigelow, 11 / *Pre and Post  
Revolution Evolution of Broadcast Television in*

*Poland*, Erik Möllberg, 15 / *Channel 22 and*

*Me*, Eli Kao, 17 / *Asian Spectrum: A Bridge  
Between Cultures*, Melody Tsang, 18 / *HFM*

*Interactive: Community Learning in the UK Via Radio and  
the Internet*, David Wortley, 19 / *AMARC8 Meets in*

*Kathmandu, Nepal*, Jim Ellinger, 20 / *New Initiatives in*



*Australia*, 21 / *Community Media in Brazil:*

*The Good News Is on the Web*, Julio Wainer, 22 /

*The Open Channels' Website: The Global Village*  
*CAT*, Christer Hederström, 23 / *The Dictator's*

*Worst Nightmare: The Internet*, Thomas A. Dine, 24 /  
*Search for Common Ground: Countering the CNN Effect*,  
Jeff Hansell, 26 / *Produce Locally, Distribute Globally*,

Mike Eisenmenger, 28 / *Bucking the Trends: Fostering Local  
Television in the Age of Globalization*, Robert Huesca, 29 /

*Our Media, Not Theirs! Loud and Clear  
from Barranquilla, Columbia*,

Clemencia Rodriguez, 31 / *Summit to  
Address Global Information Society*, 35



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As the journal of the Alliance for Community Media, COMMUNITY MEDIA REVIEW shall support the Alliance mission by providing: a comprehensive overview of past, present and future issues critical to the Alliance and its membership; vigorous and thoughtful debate on those issues; and a venue for members and like-minded groups to present issues critical to the Alliance.



# Search for Common Ground: 'Countering the CNN Effect'

BY JEFF HANSELL

Since 1982, Search for Common Ground has been working in the area of international conflict-resolution on the principle of transforming the way the world deals with conflict, by "understanding the differences and acting on the commonalities."

Recently John Marks, the founder of SFCG writing in the introduction to *The Power of the Media*, a handbook for Peacebuilders said, "Wherever and whenever violent conflict looms, television, radio, newspapers and websites have a crucial role to play. They can inflame the situation; or they can use their considerable power to defuse tension. In other words, they can be part of the problem; or they can be part of the solution..."

In part, because of the so-called 'CNN effect' of war images on television audiences around the world, SFCG argues for a more ethical use of the media in order to counterbalance the negative effects and reverse the damage that has already been done.

Today, Search for Common Ground can be said to be utilizing community media as a tool for social transformation within outcomes-based projects in a number of countries around the world. One such television project is in Macedonia.

*Nashe Maalo* ("Our Neighborhood") is the first children's television program made to promote intercultural understanding, to encourage conflict prevention in a multicultural society, and to impart specific conflict-resolution skills that children can use in their everyday lives. This unique series, co-produced by Common Ground Productions (CGP) and Search for Common Ground in Macedonia (SCGM), presents a timely opportunity to influence an entire generation of children in Macedonia in the direction of mutual tolerance and



*The fact that ethnic Albanian, Macedonian, Roma, and Turkish youth showed more positive perceptions of each other after viewing only eight episodes underscores the value of the series and the need for sustaining the broadcast of the program.*

respect.

Executive producer Eran Fraenkel feels that with *Nashe Maalo*, he is actually teaching both adults and children how to use the media in their own country as

a tool for social transformation.

"However, we felt that television programs

by themselves were too passive and not enough to make a sustainable change" Fraenkel said. *Nashe Maalo* uses lots of interactivity (similar to methods employed in *Sesame Street*) to get the children involved and invested in the program. Fraenkel also does school and community outreach, to more directly involve all segments of the population.

## **The Show—*Nashe Maalo***

The show stars Karmen, an animated building with a voice, whose mission is to harbor peace within her dilapidated walls. She has been trying to talk to the grown-ups for years, but they have never listened. In their children, though, she sees a great capacity for learning, understanding, generosity, and kindness.

Karmen selects eight children from Macedonian, Roma, Turkish, and Albanian backgrounds, and creates an opportunity for them to meet. The children become friends and together discover the secrets of the building. By leading them on journeys through magical doorways, she provides them with the

opportunity to see and learn about the world from each other's perspectives. Through this, the kids develop a deeper sense of mutual understanding and respect for one another.

A trademark of Common Ground Productions, one that separates it from other production organizations, but makes it similar to community media, is to work with local professionals who represent the ethnic groups for whom the production is intended and to rely on a minimal expatriate presence on site. The *Nashe Maalo* Production Team consists of approximately 100 professionals and support staff who come from the country's Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Roma communities. The child actors that star in the series are likewise from these four groups. The resident producer is the only expatriate directly involved at the production site in Skopje, while CGP and SCGM provide on-going executive and technical guidance.

## **Local Employment**

One of the underlying tensions in Macedonia is the weak economy and resulting lack of economic opportunities. Meanwhile, the making of *Nashe Maalo* provided jobs for over 100 local professionals and support staff and a steady flow of business for local vendors supplying materials, equipment and rental space for the production.

## **Capacity Building**

*Nashe Maalo* offers ongoing training





opportunities for the Nashe Maalo Production Team. CGP continues to build the capacity of the team by providing overall executive guidance that includes rigorous reviewing of scripts and productions. A highly skilled resident producer is also on hand to provide guidance at the set and in post-production. One of the primary means of building capacity is to have the local professionals take on primary responsibility for the writing and production of *Nashe Maalo*, along with the day-to-day management of operations: timelines, budgets, accounts, equipment, sets, etc. The Nashe Maalo Production Team is, in essence, learning the details of producing a professional television series from start to completion.

The production team is also receiving training from Common Ground Productions and Sesame Workshop in skills they can continue to use after the series is completed. For example, the editing unit, which was created during the course of production, is likely to continue after the series' completion as a viable self-sustaining operation.

So has *Nashe Maalo* worked? According to Fraenkel, "It has been wildly successful beyond all our initial expectations." According to research and surveys, more than 75 percent of Macedonian children across all ethnic groups watch and participate in the series. In addition, more than 50 percent of parents also watch the show with their children.

*Nashe Maalo* was found to have a very positive impact on children's views of themselves and others. When asked to describe members of the Albanian, Macedonian, Roma, and Turkish ethnic groups before viewing, many children demonstrated negative, stereotyped perceptions. After viewing, many children provided more positive descriptions when presented with images of people from other ethnic groups or their own.

Macedonian children showed the greatest positive changes in perceptions of other ethnic groups. This evolution of attitudes among the dominant ethnic group is one of the most powerful findings of our research. Furthermore, Albanian children showed the greatest positive changes in perceptions of their own ethnic group.

The fact that ethnic Albanian, Macedonian, Roma, and Turkish youth showed more positive perceptions of each other after viewing only eight episodes underscores the value of the series and the need for sustaining the broadcast of the program. If there is hope for building mutual respect and understanding among different groups of people living in Macedonia, it lies with the country's young citizens. Efforts such as *Nashe Maalo* are a positive step toward a better, more peaceful future.

*Jeff Hansell is the guest editor for this issue of the CMR. He is chair of the Northeast Region of the Alliance for Community Media and executive director of Malden Access TV north of Boston. Email [jeff@matv.org](mailto:jeff@matv.org)*

*—This report was compiled and assembled from interviews with Eran Fraenkel and Susan Koscis, and from major parts of the SFCG website (<http://www.sfcg.org>) and other publications.*

*Eran Fraenkel is the Director of Southeast Europe Programs for the European Centre for Common Ground, Brussels.*

*"It has been wildly successful beyond all our initial expectations."*

*— Eran Fraenkel*



## CALL FOR ENTRIES

The 2003 Common Ground Student Short Film Competition is now open to entries through the end of July. This annual student film competition is open to all film students in the U.S. and abroad. The films that are selected will be included in the Common Ground Film Festival in Washington, DC, and in the traveling Common Ground University Film Series.

### Criteria for Selection:

The films selected to be screened at the Common Ground Film Festival in Washington in fall 2003 will:

- ▲ Be balanced in their portrayal of all sides of the conflict or issue;
- ▲ Communicate shared human experiences and qualities;
- ▲ Avoid stereotyping by focusing on individuals rather than representatives of a group;
- ▲ Promote understanding of the issues and of the people involved;
- ▲ Provide audiences with a broader context of the issues;
- ▲ Be relevant to the important issues that people, communities, and countries face today.

*Film submission deadline: July 31, 2003*

For more information go to: <http://www.sfcg.org> or contact Susan Koscis, vice president of Arts and Culture, at 202.265.4300 or [skoscis@sfcg.org](mailto:skoscis@sfcg.org)