

MEDIA RELATIONS IN THE THIRD SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS OF ESTONIA

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by  
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## Declaration

I hereby solemnly declare that I have written this thesis by myself and without support from any other person or source, that I have used only the materials and sources indicated in the footnotes and in the bibliography, that I have actually used all materials listed therein, that I have cited all sources from which I have drawn intellectual input in any form whatsoever, and placed in “quotation marks” all words, phrases or passages taken from such sources verbatim which are not in common use and that neither I myself nor any other person has submitted this paper in the present or a similar version to any other institution for a degree or for publication.

Tallinn, May 19, 2008

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Iris Meigas

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## **Introduction**

The current research paper takes a critical but constructive look at the practices related to media relations activities in Estonian third sector organizations. The research expands on the topic from the perspective of the organization.

Mass media is a means of communication to interact with the publics with whom an organization wants to exchange messages. According to Grunig et al. (2002) communication is vital because it enhances the organization's behavioral relationships with key publics. Media relations are the most visible part of public relations (PR). Majority of PR related activities, such as research, evaluation, analysis, and planning are performed within the organization and remain largely invisible to the public eye. Effective media relations presuppose a strategic planning of organizational communication processes. Consistent and well-planned communication activities assure long-term co-operation relationships with media as well as help build and maintain a positive reputation. Good relations with media are more likely to result in objective media coverage reflecting organizational messages, which in turn, influence public opinion.

A viable civil society consists of three pillars figuratively speaking. Business or private sector makes up the first pillar; the public sector consists of government institutions, and the third sector is formed of non-profit organizations. The three spheres function most effectively when they are all well developed and interdependent. The non-profit sector consists of organizations that are established based on the public interest principle: something done in the public interest that seeks to maximize the general welfare of the members of the society. Public interest refers to amenities that are not utilized for private consumption and are available to all such as nature, security, and culture (Lagerspetz 2006). As Estonia is going through a transition from a closed totalitarian system into an open democratic society, the third sector is gaining an increasingly important position in the society. Estonian non-profit organizations operate as service providers, advocacy groups, grant makers, societies, think tanks, institutes, clubs, networks and umbrella organizations ("Civil society").

Definite indicators of a strong civil society are the level of independence that media has from political pressure, the plurality of opinions and the voices of various social groups in media (Kivirähk et al. 2006). In a democratic society, it is in the capacity of media to assure a platform for a balanced and diverse dialogue between the public and various interest groups as well as between the public, private and the third sector. Although, rated third on the Worldwide Press Freedom Index in 2007 ("Reporters sans frontieres") Estonian media has still a long way to develop into a reliable source of information for its own citizens. Journalism is one of the most distrusted institutions in Estonia, ranking second between parties (1<sup>st</sup>) and the Parliament (3<sup>rd</sup>),

according to a survey conducted in October 2005 (Kivirähk et al. 2006). The same survey indicated that non-profit organizations ranked on the fourth place due to lack of trust into the institution. It is in the capacity of NPOs to build the trust through consistent, open and honest communication.

According to a research conducted by sociologists from the Tallinn University in 2005, non-profit organizations place the significance of their relationship with media on the third place right after local governments (1<sup>st</sup>) and schools (2<sup>nd</sup>) (“The Institutionalization...”). The membership survey of the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) conducted in 2006 identified that the most important area of training that the members see a need for is image formation, public and media relations (Kübar 2006). Internal communication and member involvement came a close second in the same survey together with asset development, financing principles and possibilities. This indicates that the non-profit sector in Estonia has realized the value of a positive organizational image and professionally managed communication activities.

The goal of this research paper is to investigate whether the third sector organizations, also referred to as non-profit organizations or NPOs throughout this paper, in Estonia recognize the need for interactive relations with media. In the current paper the term non-profit organization (NPO) denotes both non-profit associations and foundations. Throughout this paper, the term ‘media’ denotes the institution of mass media, whereas ‘the media’ in plural indicates the media organizations.

The current research paper consists of five parts. The first part will explore the theoretical background associated with the research topic. The second part will take a look at the past and present development of the third sector in Estonia. The third part of the paper describes the research objectives, presents the research questions and methodology used in the current paper. In the empirical findings chapter the results of the survey among Estonian NPOs will be presented and analyzed; direct quotes from respondents are cited in italics enclosed in quotation marks. In the fifth part the research results will be discussed and interpreted. Also, possible topics for further investigation will be elaborated.

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Kaja Tampere and all survey respondents. Thank you to my partner Olav for his support, patience and faith in me, my mother-in-law Heldi for her devotion and good advice, my sister Sandra for technical help, my parents for support, and my daughter Kaia Helena for understanding.

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” - Margaret Mead*

## **1. Theoretical research**

The theory chapter of the current research paper will take a closer look at the two counterparts involved in media relations: mass media as a social institution and the model organization that interacts with the media by transmitting messages. The author will explore the primary concepts that deal with the mass media institution, and describe its functions and effects. Thereafter, the author will focus on the strategic planning of organizational communication processes, specifically media relations activities, in a model organization.

### **1.1 Mass media as means of communication**

In the present research paper the term ‘media’ is short for ‘mass media’ and describes the means of communication, or technologies, that operate on a large scale, reaching and involving virtually everyone in a society to a greater or lesser degree (McQuail 2000). McQuail describes media as a ‘social institution’ within the society, with its own rules and practices. Media has an interdependent relationship with the society that shapes, defines and sets limitations to media. In turn, media reflects and shapes the social reality, and defines the norms, values and standards for the society, thus, influencing the public opinion.

Media has great influence on shaping the public opinion. Essentially, public opinion is a construction of opinions and attitudes towards a socially relevant topic or situation, which are shared and expressed by a large part of the population. Therefore, public opinion that is reflected and magnified in media has a great impact on all spheres of the society. According to McQuail (2000) mass media is the most easily accessible source for individuals to evaluate and form their opinions. Individual opinions that do not coincide with the dominating opinions in media tend to be kept silent in fear of falling into isolation or reshaped to fit the public opinion.

#### ***1.1.1 Mass media function and effects***

The term ‘agenda-setting’ has become increasingly popular when characterizing the contemporary media. As per the agenda-setting approach media influences the topics that the audience thinks about, but not the direction of the public opinion itself (McQuail 2000). Van Dijk (qtd. in Coulthard & Caldas-Coulthard 1996) states that the power of media is symbolic and persuasive having the potential to control the media consumer’s minds but not their actions. Media agenda originates from public opinion as well as proposals of political, social and business elites, thus, news selection subordinates to pressures from various sources (McQuail 2000). Agenda-setting is related to the framing concept, which characterizes the effects of media (*Ibid.*). The media sets a frame to the context in which a news item is presented and as such influences

the audience's interpretation of the information, and subsequent attitudes as well as behavior towards the issue.

The agenda-setting approach is further explained with the 'gatekeeper' concept. Media filters the information and determines what becomes the news and what is left out. Once on the media agenda and allowed to enter 'the gates of media' it then defines, explores and attempts to find solutions to socially significant problems. Various interest groups such as the government, political parties and business interest groups, to a certain extent need to along with the agenda set by the media and transmit as many of their messages as they are able to 'push through' the media channels (McQuail 2000). Thus, access to media is paramount and may lead to the 'cultivation of news' for the sake of getting media coverage.

In mass media theory one of the functions of media is the 'construction of reality' in the society. In other words, the way the society perceives the topics covered in media is largely prescribed and determined by the media channels that the members of the society consume. "The media represent the major means by which individuals, groups and classes construct an understanding of the lives, meanings, practices and values of other individuals, groups and classes, thus acquiring a picture of how 'social reality' hangs together. Reality is not in any sense 'given', it is constructed; media texts do not reflect reality, they are a construction of reality" (Underwood 2003). Hall (1982) adds the element of ideology to the 'construction of reality' approach and describes the relationship between the dominant ideology and social reality: "social reality, as constructed for us by the media [...] results [...] from the power relationships within our society and serves to maintain them" (qtd. in Underwood 2003). Media is both a 'watchdog' and an agenda-setter. Thus, media works to maintain as well as challenge the existing status quo.

### *1.1.2 Access to media*

The level of access to media varies greatly from one organization to another. Media organizations and professionals are constantly bombarded by information from various external sources. The media present information selectively. The selection criteria depend on the type, intent and reach of the information as well as the target audience. From the perspective of media there are several determinants to evaluate the newsworthiness of the information received. Although the 'gatekeeping' function or selection and editorial processing of news can be considered subjective and specific to each particular media channel, it does for the most part follow a certain criteria. During the editorial process the value of the news is being estimated. The primary news values in Western media are: relevance, closeness, short time scale, personification, negativity, drama and action, significance, clarity, eliteness (McQuail 2000). News that rate highly in the aforementioned values are expected to generate high audience interest.

Van Dijk sees media as a ‘valued social resource’ and thus “controlling the means of mass communication is one of the crucial conditions of social power in contemporary information societies” (qtd. in Coulthard & Caldas-Coulthard 1996). In simple terms the level of access to media is proportional to the extent of power an individual, group or institution has within the society as public discourse has an affect on the minds of most people. As per McQuail’s (2000) definition of ideology the mass media does not typically intentionally reinforce the ruling ideology, but does usually propagate values and norms that are characteristic to that ideology. The theory of mass communication supports the idea that media has a tendency “to serve the interests of those who already have [...] political and economic power in the society” (*Ibid.*). Media does not, nevertheless, work as a ‘one-way feeding tube’ of information from the political and economic elite to the public. The media first and foremost consider the demands of its audiences (*Ibid.*).

The diversity of topics covered and sources used is an indicator of a balanced and functional media, which mediates the arguments and opinions of different societal interest groups. Bringing various topics into the media agenda serves to focus the public awareness. Although liberal, the Estonian media has been criticized by Lauristin for being too party and government centered (qtd. in Pilvre 2006). The voices of various societal interest groups such as non-profit organizations are not audible. Vihalemm and Lauristin (2002) further add that Estonian media is currently attempting to redefine its public role in a market driven society. There are significant points about the development of Estonian media since the republic regained its independence in 1991. The media system has undergone diversification and fragmentation as multiple new print and broadcast media channels have come to the market. Though, this process is slowing down in pace compared to the situation some five years ago. As a result of diversification and the increased cost of media consumption also the audiences have become increasingly distinct and segmented. This has resulted in media losing its former culturally and socially unifying role. Commercialization of Estonian media has resulted in the growing entertainment orientation in media use. Also, the usage of new media technology continues to be on the rise.

## **1.2 Organizational communication**

The following part of the theoretical research chapter will focus on the model organization that interacts with media.

Mass media communicates messages from and to the members of the public thus mediating a dialogue between individuals, organizations and institutions. McQuail (2000) describes communication as an interactive process that is also a social relationship. Communication process is characterized by Lasswell (1948) as “who says what in which channel to whom with what effect” (Biagi 1992). Communication is a cyclical process that takes place within a context

between individuals, organizations or institutions. Proceeding from Lasswell's statement, a communication model includes five components in the process: the sender who initiates the process and encodes a message; the message that can be written, verbal, non-verbal, or electronic; the receiver who decodes the message; the medium, through which the message is transmitted; and the impact that provides feedback and confirms to the sender that the receiver's understanding of the message was intended by the sender.

In the context of the present research paper organizational communication activities, including relations with media, can be more precisely classified as public relations (PR). Long and Hazelton's define PR as "a communication function of management through which organizations adapt to, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organizational goals" (qtd. in Wilcox et al 1997). Cutlip et al. (1994) as well as Grunig and Hunt (1984) both emphasize the management function of PR. Like traditional communication models, the public relations process also has a cyclical nature. It starts with research and analysis of the situation, continues with policy and action plan formation which is then implemented. At the end feedback is collected and the whole process evaluated based on which adjustments in the strategy or tactics are made. The process then starts anew with research and analysis to evaluate the situation. Martson's RACE model depicts the PR process with four elements: research, action or planning, communication or implementation, and evaluation (Wilcox et al 1997).

As mentioned in the definition of PR above, organizational communication processes must emanate from organizational goals. PR activities use communication to help achieve larger organizational goals (Grunig et al. 2002). For effective communication activities organizational goals must be clearly defined. In a two-way communication cycle the feedback from organizational environment, or more simply said dialogue with stakeholders will, in turn, influence future adjustments in organizational objectives.

### ***1.2.1 Organizational communication from the perspective of stakeholder approach***

The essence of the environment determines the communication methods and tactics to be used by the organization in its interaction with stakeholders: individuals that have an interest in the organization. For an organization to function effectively and successfully in its environment, it is important to determine its stakeholders. "Stakeholders are "those groups or individuals with whom the organization interacts or has interdependencies" and "any individual or group who affect or is affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices or goals of the organization" (Conner qtd. in Gibson 245). Therefore, stakeholders have a direct influence on the direction that the organization aims for. Grunig et al. (2002) refer to stakeholders as key publics and distinguish six major groups: employees, investors or shareholders, the media, customers, government

institutions, members of associations, and the community in which the organization operates. Media is loosely defined as a key public because journalists act as representatives of other publics (*Ibid.*).

The stakeholder approach emphasizes the need for a strategic stakeholder management. Stakeholder systems and communication strategies are created by the organization. The systems have a dynamic nature: the existing stakeholder groups and communication strategies need to be adjusted as the organization goes through various life cycles or as the organizational environment changes (Tampere 2003). Acknowledging the interdependence between the organization and its environment is vital (Grunig et al. 2002). At times of organizational or environmental change the organization needs to adjust its stakeholder systems and policies in order to persist. A practical tool for profiling is stakeholder mapping, which helps to identify and assess the people, organizations and institutions that can be affected by organizational activities or can influence the organization. Literature lists various methods of stakeholder mapping proceeding from different characteristics such as the level of interest, power, and influence of the stakeholder group.

### ***1.2.2 Media relations***

Organizational relations with media are paramount for a variety of reasons. Through media the organization spreads its messages. For the organization it is the most effective channel of communication in terms of audience reach. The media are also considered independent sources of information and are, thus, perceived as more credible than the direct sources (Caywood 1997).

The goal of media relations is to balance organizational goals with public opinion. From the perspective of an organization, relations with the public are vital for its longevity as they function in the same environment and are interdependent of each other. Press coverage influences public perception and behavior with regard to the organization. As per Caywood (1997) approach to media relations can be proactive, reactive, or interactive. Reactive media relations respond to media inquiries. Proactive media relations promote and publicize the organization. Interactive media relations take a step even further to develop relations with the press. Positive and consistent relations with the media are more likely to result in media interest and objective coverage than non-existent or reactive media relations. Interactive media relations presuppose knowledge of the principles of the media industry on the part of the public relations professional.

Knowing thoroughly the message one intends to deliver is the start of proactive communication. The format of messages delivered to the public via media can roughly be divided into two types: paid media coverage and free media coverage. Paid media coverage is marketing communication, advertising, and promotional coverage sponsored by the organization. Free or non-paid media coverage is any kind of media exposure that the organization is not paying for, such as published

news, press releases, and broadcasted events. An essential difference between the two types of publicity is the level of control the organization has over the message that is being delivered (Pinzon 2002). In case of advertising the level of control is high; however, the (cost) effectiveness of such message communication format can be rather low. Whereas, with non-paid media coverage the level of control the organization has over the message is low because the media channel will decide the context, time, and format of message delivery. Essentially, public relations are non-persuasive and concerned with building relationships with stakeholders and generating goodwill for the company; whereas, marketing is persuasive and deals with customers and selling products and services (*Ibid.*). Ideally, the two activities must support each other.

In working with the mass media the push-and-pull strategy can be applied, which is more commonly known in marketing and advertising. The organization ‘pushes’ the products or services it provides, and the target stakeholder ‘pulls’ the services or products for consumption. A similar analogy can be applied to communication management practices. A representative of the organization co-operates with the media ‘pushing’ or proactively offering information. On the other hand, once a relationship has been established, the media start to ‘pull’ or request for information from the organization to mediate to the public. The balance between the usage of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ or proactive and reactive strategies varies largely on the scale and focus of the organization. The organization must at all times consider the balance between the supply and demand of information as well as the timeliness of information delivery.

### ***1.2.3 Strategic planning of organizational communication***

Organizational messages that are communicated to stakeholders are formed through an on-going strategic planning process. A strategy defines the course of action to reach organizational objectives. Tactics describe the specific activities applied to achieve the strategy (Alas 1997). Strategic planning proceeds from organizational mission that describes the purpose of the existence of the organization. Ideally, it is a short and memorable statement, and takes into account all stakeholder groups. In principle, the mission is a static definition of the organization. The mission can be altered when organizational environment changes dramatically.

Strategic planning starts with situation or problem analysis and research. Research provides a solid platform for understanding the organizational environment and characteristics of each stakeholder group such as media consumption habits, lifestyles, behavior and attitudes towards the organization and its field of activity. Upon research strategic goals and objectives will be constructed. Goals and objectives must be specific and measurable (Alas 1997). A versatile organizational strategy includes a communication plan that sets goals for internal and external communication. The strategic planning cycle ends with a thorough evaluation process and starts anew with research.

A simplified list of activities in organizational strategic planning process:

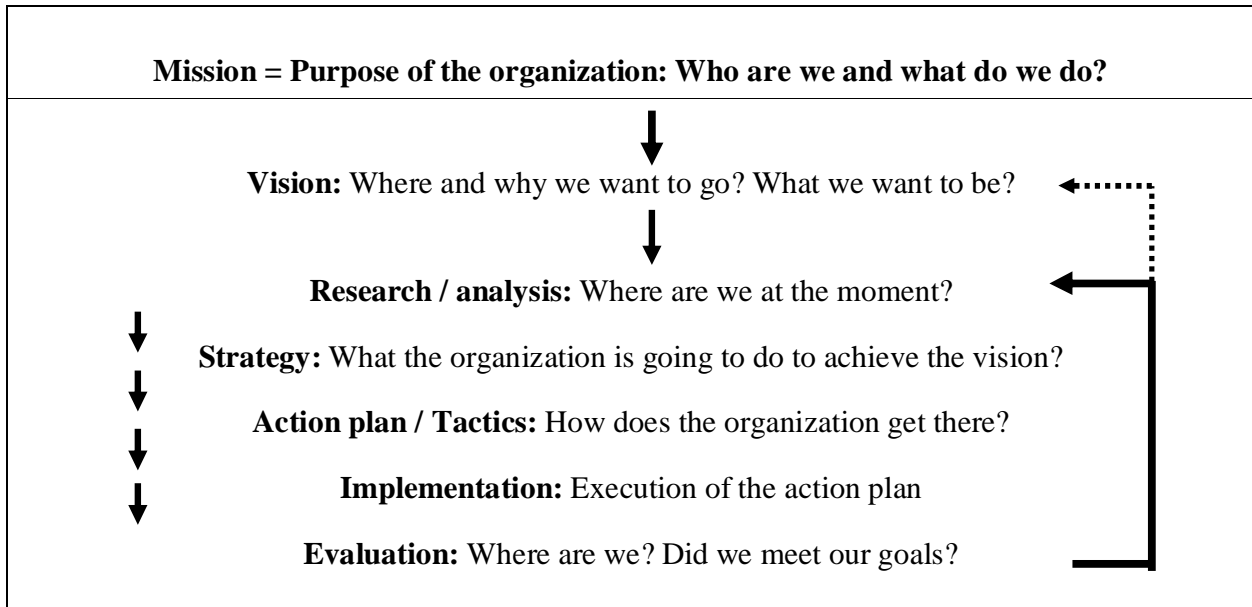


Figure 1. Strategic planning process.  
Adapted from: Alas (1997) and Siil

Strategy implementation includes goal-setting through which performance is evaluated (Miller 1999). Goals must be realistic and specific enough in order to be measurable. Upon goal setting one will proceed to action, and organizational behavior results. Ultimately, the results are measured against set goals. Feedback is provided for the setting of new goals or adjusting of existing objectives.

#### 1.2.4 Communication strategy and messages

Many academics and theorists emphasize that organizational public relations including relations with the media should be a part of the larger business strategy. The employee responsible for communication activities must participate in the strategic planning stage in order to provide valuable research based information from and about the environment of the organization.

A well-planned and documented communication strategy lists organizational objectives and the tactics that are used to achieve the goals. It includes a map of stakeholder groups that can possibly be influenced by and interested in the activities of the organization. The strategy also lists the spokespeople who will have the right to interact with media in matters that concern the organization. More specifically, it prescribes the content, format, channel, audience, and expected

results of communication activities (Suhtekorralduse käsiraamat). Upon implementation of a specific communication activity the results are reviewed and evaluated against the set objectives by acquiring and evaluating feedback via various sources from the targeted stakeholder groups (e.g. market research polls, surveys, questionnaires, customer satisfaction interviews, etc.).

A viable communication process has a cyclical nature. Grunig et al. (2002) describe a two-way symmetrical communication model as the most ideal form of communication with the public. The goal of two-way symmetrical communication is mutual understanding between the organization and its stakeholders. It attempts to balance the interest of the organization and its publics. Feedback from the public is sought in order to analyze the results of communication. Research is conducted in order to evaluate not just attitudes but the level of understanding of organizational messages (Wilcox et al. 1997). Grunig (2001) emphasizes that the symmetrical communication model is more beneficial for the organization in the long-term because by giving up some of what they want the organization gains more in return (qtd. in Roper 2005).

Thus, effective organizational communication is not a mere transmission of messages but an exchange of information, ideas, and experiences. A similar principle is also explained in the systems approach: an open system, whether it be a society or an organization, is viable because information flow is two-directional; the system interacts with the environment (Alas 1997). An open system is dynamic as it adjusts to the changes in its environment and stakeholders systems (Tampere 2003). In contrast, a closed system is characterized by one-directional flow of communication; the system is static and the result is entropy (Miller 1999).

As organizations communicate with the public and other stakeholders they send out messages. A message that is visible, audible and cognizable must be unambiguous and relevant to the targeted receiver. Thus, messages must be created keeping in mind the target audience. The organization has to 'speak the language of the stakeholder group' for effective communication to occur. The message must be tailored for each audience group who are affected by organizational decisions and behavior. This means that the same message is presented in different format, paraphrasing, simplifying or adding details. It is vital that communication professionals are a part of the strategic message design process in the organization and not acting as mere technical clerks (Grunig et al. 2002). The communication professional's task is to mediate messages between the public and the organization. Research and evaluation process help determine and ensure that organizational messages were accurately received by the target publics (*Ibid.*).

### ***1.2.5 Communication tactics and methods***

There are a number of tools and techniques the organization can apply to communicate its messages. The means vary depending on the intention and content of the message as well as the

specific target stakeholder group. Transmission of messages takes place mostly via media. There are spoken, written, and visual tactics. Within the organization the messages are dispersed by interpersonal communication. Communication with the public takes place via media through which organizational messages are mediated. In order to select the most appropriate tactic, the organization must know the format that each medium prefers (Claywood 1997).

Written tactics and tools of communication with the public are: press releases, newsletters, annual reports, booklets, brochures, and other publications. The media channels for written tools are print media and the Internet. Spoken tactics include: interpersonal conversations, speech, news or press conference, press parties and tours, interviews, meetings, word-of-mouth. Visual and audiovisual tactics are: news releases on TV, radio, and the Internet, photography, slide shows, corporate design, outdoor displays. (Wilcox et al. 1997) The media channels for spoken tactics are radio, TV and the Internet. The latter is an interactive two-way channel making it possible to acquire instant feedback and speeding up the communication process.

## **2. The third sector in Estonia**

The third sector, also referred to as the voluntary or independent sector of the society, consists of non-profit or non-governmental organizations (NPO, NGO). The first and second sectors of the society are respectively business and government sectors. The term 'independent sector' indicates the sector's independence from the institutional legal and commerce restrictions, which constrain other sectors (Lesly 1998). The term 'civil society' (also referred to as 'civic society') denotes a social sphere where individuals, organizations and institutions co-operate to promote their interests and values (Lagerspetz 2006). The non-profit sector is an important part of the civil society. The direct result of the activities of NPOs is the improved wellbeing of the members or clients and the ultimate result is public benefit. Somewhat newer concepts in the context of the third sector are 'social economy' and 'social enterprises', which point to the organizations' social goals. A social enterprise would, for instance, provide employment opportunities to formerly incarcerated individuals.

Being classified as a post-communist country, Estonia is a representative of a transition society undergoing a change from totalitarianism to democracy and learning to communicate according to democratic principles. Estonian society has, since regaining independence in 1991, fast adapted democratic principles and gradually abandoned communist ones. Market economy instead of planned economy has been applied. The society cannot be defined as a closed system anymore, but is also not a fully open system yet. The newly emerged democratic ideology brought along the emergence of a civil society and civil initiative where NPOs through a dialogue and cooperation with the public and private sectors build social capital. Social capital denotes the norms and networks that strengthen the people's capacity to cooperate for the purpose of common goals and general wellbeing of the society (Putnam qtd. in "Sotsiaalne kapital..." 2006).

According to the Central Commercial Register there are two legal forms of non-profit organizations in Estonia: non-profit association and foundation. As of March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008, there are 25,862 non-profit associations and 775 foundations registered in Estonia (Äriregister). Four to five percent of the labor force in Estonia or 28,000 people are occupied in the third sector (Lagerspetz 2006 and "Civil society"). According to the Center of Policy Studies Praxis, in 2007 the non-profit organizations contributed 0.8% of GDP or 1.7 billion kroons (Ender 2008). Thus, statistically the role of NGOs is seemingly insignificant in the Estonian economy. However, Ender notes that majority of activities and social benefits that are generated in the third sector organizations do not reflect in their financial statements. In 2006, an estimated 1.9 million hours of volunteer work were accounted for in non-profit organizations. The hours translate into approximately 200 million kroons and increase the sector's contribution into the GDP to 1%. Other contributions into the Estonian society that cannot be directly measured include: the

employment possibilities provided and the reduced need for social support, increased consumption and tax accrual. (*Ibid.*)

There are various types of non-profit organizations depending on their field and nature of activities. In the present research paper the term non-profit organization (NPO) denotes both non-profit associations and foundations. The Estonian central registry for non-profit organizations and foundations specifies 12 types of organizations: ordinary association, trade union, artistic association, apartment association, housing association, building association, church, abbey, congregation, the association of congregations, party, association of local governments, commercial co-operative with the members' personal liability, additional liability commercial co-operative, land improvement association, limited liability commercial co-operative.

More than half of the NPOs in Estonia are apartment, gardening and garage associations (Lagerspetz 2006). Of the remaining 11,000 organizations about 1,200 are actual public benefit organizations (“Civil society”). For the purposes of current research only the following organization types are included in the sample: ordinary association, trade union, artistic association, foundation.

For recourses the third sector relies on the two other sectors and individuals. Financial recourses are used to accomplish organizational goals and may not be used to earn a financial profit to owners and organizational members. Traditional NPOs depend heavily on funding and donations, whereas organizations classified as social enterprises earn most of their income from their operational activities. In Estonia an NPO may receive its income from a variety of sources: membership dues, direct support from the state or local government, project grants financed by local and international foundations, sale of products and services, and donations from private persons and other organizations. Indirect sources of income are tax allowances, in-kind contributions as well as time and effort contributed by volunteers (“About civil society...”). Project-based funding has become increasingly popular as the Structural Funds of the European Union have opened up to Estonian organizations.

The state has conduced to the development of NPOs by granting subsidies and imposing tax incentives for funding. There is a list of non-profit associations and foundations approved by the government, which benefit from income tax incentives. This means that private individuals get a refund on the income tax from the donations and gifts. As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 the list contained 1,655 organizations (“Tulumaksusoodustusega...”). In order to be included into the list an organization must meet the following requirements: the association operates in the public interest; it is a charitable organization offering goods or services primarily free of charge to a target group, or makes support payments to the persons belonging in the target group; and the organization does not distribute its assets, income or other benefits to its founders, members,

members of the management or controlling body or persons who have made a donation (“Income Tax Act”). According to law religious associations are automatically included into the tax incentives list.

## **2.1 Media relations in third sector organizations**

The organizational objectives of a third sector organization differ from traditional goals of business corporations to earn a profit to shareholders. Nevertheless, the communication strategies and methods are similar in each type of organization. The significance of media relations in a third sector organization depends on its size and nature of the field of activity. If the organization relies heavily on donations and membership fees or other funds as financial resource, then influencing the public opinion is important.

According to Caywood (1997) media representatives and public relations practitioners are increasingly becoming aware of their interdependence on each other. There is a mutual need, as journalists depend on PR professionals for information and organizations rely on media to mediate their messages. In media relations the organization must ‘package’ its information in a format that is acceptable and usable for the media. Media is looking for an angle that is relevant and interesting to the public. Ultimately, the information must be something the target audience wants and needs, something that motivates them into action or provokes a change in perception (*Ibid.*).

According to Claywood (1997) for a non-profit organization there are typically two major audience categories: (1) those targeted for fund-raising purposes, such as foundations, government agencies, and corporate and individual sponsors; and (2) those who are the objects of the organization primary activities such as service receivers, local and state politicians, and the general public. An average non-profit organization allocates minimal funds to public relations related activities and often there is no single person whose task is to interact with the media. There are two reasons: lack of resources and also lack of managerial awareness of the importance of professional communication (Lesly 1998).

In Estonia media has become increasingly interested in the activities of the third sector. According to the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO), in 2004 mass media was named as the second co-operation partner among non-profit associations (after local governments), and 5<sup>th</sup> partner among foundations (“The Institutionalization...”). According to Rammo (2005) stories published and broadcasted on NPOs are mostly focused on events or feature individuals. There is a lack of deeper understanding and analysis of the civil society concept. A major reason for this shortcoming is the lack of skill and practice within NPOs to produce and package information so that it is attractive for media. Currently there is very little

professional and strategic image building in NPOs. Nevertheless, the public image of third sector organizations is positive. This is indicated by the constantly growing number of volunteers, numerous successful charity projects, and the increasing awareness of the corporate social responsibility concept. (*Ibid.*)

## **2.2 Previous research into media relations and the third sector in Estonia**

A number of research papers have been written on the topics of media relations and various communication aspects of the Estonian third sector. However, none of the earlier works specifically concentrated on media relations in the third sector organizations.

In 2003 Peterson and Kaljund (qtd. in Rikmann 2007) researched the stereotypes about NPOs and civil initiative among media representatives. The research revealed five primary stereotypes about people related to NPOs: without any career and money-making prospects or ‘losers’; individualists who perform the job for their personal pleasure; ineffective and incapable in their field; have a marginal influence and are insignificant in the context of the society; and incompetent and unprofessional in media relations. As a result of those stereotypes a vicious circle has developed: media representatives have a negative image of NPOs in their mind, which reflects in their relationship with representatives of NPOs. As a result NPO representatives behave as the ‘underdog’, lack faith in their efforts and thus, the stereotype is regenerated. This greatly hinders the NPOs’ possibilities to transmit their messages via media. According to the authors there is a great task to be achieved by Estonian NPOs and political journalism: to build awareness of the civil society and civil initiative.

A research into the public relations practices of Estonian third sector organizations was conducted by Kristina Kurm as part of her bachelor thesis at Tartu University in 2005. Kurm concludes in her study that most Estonian third sector organizations do perform some PR functions, which lack, however, strategic planning and are not consistent. In majority of cases the PR related responsibilities are performed by the manager of the organization. The third sector organizations see a need for an increased importance of the PR role, which is often lacking due to personnel, skill, time and financial shortages. The means of communication used for interaction with the public and stakeholders vary: some organizations prefer direct phone and e-mail correspondence, others rely more on press releases and home page. Also, event organization and meetings with representatives of stakeholders were mentioned.

An in-depth study of communication practices of Estonian third sector organizations was conducted by Telvi Tonsiver as part of her bachelor thesis at Tartu University in 2007. Research concentrated on organizations which primary focus of activity was to improve the welfare of children. Research results concluded that in small organizations it is more likely that a single

person handles all media communication tasks. In medium and big sized organizations the tasks were more often disbursed depending on the occasion. Less than a third of respondents sent out regular press releases or published opinion articles. Also, a small number of organizations had a direct contact with a media representative (e.g. in a local newspaper). The lack of skills to 'promote' themselves appears to be the biggest obstacle in getting the message to the public. At the same time, the organizations recognize the need to be visible in media and talk about their activities.

A number of research studies have been conducted on the relationship between media and public relations practitioners in Estonia. Research generally demonstrates the perceived oppositional nature of the two professions, especially in times of crises (Laasme 2005). Though, PR professionals are more likely to see journalists as their co-operation partners. Journalists tend not to fully understand the function of a PR specialist as a communicator and information mediator, whereas, PR professionals disapprove of the journalists' superficiality and disregard for the consequences of publishing a story that 'sells well'. There is a lack of understanding of each other's roles on both sides; there is distrust, skepticism, and prejudices that somewhat hinder their co-operation. (*Ibid.*)

### **3. Research questions and methodology**

#### **3.1 Research objectives**

The goal of this research paper is to observe the media relations practices in the third sector organizations of Estonia. This research is motivated by the growing significance of the third sector organizations as Estonia is transforming into a mature civil society. In addition, several surveys, referred to in the Introduction of the current paper, have demonstrated that NPOs increasingly recognize the need for relations with media.

#### **3.2 Research questions**

The following four research questions are presented:

1. Do Estonian NPOs see a need for media relations?
2. What practices do NPOs use in media relations?
3. What experiences have NPOs had in their interactions with the media?
4. What conclusions have NPOs made from their experiences?

#### **3.3 Data collection and analysis**

In order to answer the research questions presented above a survey was conducted among Estonian NPOs, which are actual public benefit organization. The research instrument used in the current research paper is a questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared by the author upon research into theory on media relations and background information on the situation and characteristics of the third sector in Estonia.

The questionnaire is semi-structured consisting of 21 questions. (See: Appendix 1) There are four open-ended questions, twelve multiple choice questions, and five factual questions about the organization. Thirteen questions were presented to directly research the media relations practices of each organization. The remaining eight questions were presented to gather additional background information about the organization and its environment. Organizations that replied to not having any interactions with media did not have to answer specific questions on the media relations activities.

The questionnaire was distributed by e-mail in April 2008 in Estonian and translated into English for the purposes of presenting the current thesis. The questionnaire was initially tested on five NPOs in order to determine the accuracy of multiple choice categories and relevance of questions

to their organizational activities. No changes in the questionnaire were made. The results of the survey will be displayed in statistical charts in the empirical findings part and interpreted in the discussion and conclusion part of the research paper. All inferences, extrapolations and conclusions based on research results about the third sector organizations of Estonia are applicable to the approximately 1,200 organizations that are actual public benefit organizations as per NENO (as opposed to all the 26,000 NPOs currently registered in Estonia).

### *3.3.1 Survey sample*

Contact information for NPOs, that eventually formed the survey sample, was pulled from two sources: members of the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) and organizations registered among the non-profit associations and foundations approved by the government, which benefit from income tax incentives (ITI). This particular sample was selected because these organizations are expected to have a reasonable interest in the public opinion and various communication activities as they depend heavily on funding from outside sources.

NENO is a non-profit association that unites public benefit nonprofit organizations in Estonia. Their member count as of March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 was 94. The questionnaire was sent out to 89 member organizations. Prior approval was acquired from NENO over the phone to send the questionnaire to their members. One organization on the list was in the process of being liquidated. In case of four organizations no contact was able to be established. Either the e-mail address was not provided and the phone was not answered or the e-mail sent out gave an erroneous response and no alternative contact information could be found.

Upon first mailing to members of the NENO sample 25 answered questionnaires were returned. Thereafter, a reminder phone call was made to the remaining members. As a result, three more questionnaires were answered over the phone and thirteen questionnaires returned upon a reminder. Upon numerous attempts no contact was possible to establish with twelve organizations possibly because there are no full time employees in the organization, there is no permanent office or the contact information was outdated. In total 41 members of the 94 NENO members returned the survey. One questionnaire did not qualify for analysis due to contradictory and incomplete answers. Response rate of the NENO sample was 46%.

In an effort to conduce to the emergence of viable third sector the state has imposed income tax incentives for a number of approved NPOs. There are currently 1,655 organizations registered in the income tax incentives (ITI) list. The author requested the contact information of organizations, including e-mail, phone and address, from the Center of Registers and Information Systems (CRIS). Less than a third of the organizations (31%) in the ITI list had an e-mail. In

addition, the contact information for many organizations was outdated as it had only been inserted into the RIK database once when the organization was first registered and never updated.

Using a systematic sampling technique every second organization with an e-mail address on the ITI list was selected and included in the sample. Prior to sampling the organizations were listed according to their location as opposed to alphabetically. Such order of organizations assured a proportional coverage of all regions of Estonia in the sample. Nineteen (19) of the sample organizations that were members of NENO were also listed in the ITI list. The overlapping organizations were excluded from the ITI sample. Questionnaires were sent out to a total of 241 organizations. The mailing returned 34 reports of erroneous e-mail accounts. However, due to the outdated and poor quality of data received from CRIS it was impossible for the author to determine the exact number of questionnaires that actually reached the intended recipient. A total of 36 questionnaires were returned by the organizations in the ITI sample yielding a response rate of approximately 17%. Three questionnaires did not qualify for analysis due to contradictory and incomplete answers.

Neither reminder phone calls nor a second mailing was conducted with the ITI sample due to research time limitations. Thus, the response rate for the ITI list is significantly lower. The author considers the total of 77 returned responses for the two mailings a sufficient and representative sample of Estonian third sector organizations that generate actual public benefit. The respondent organizations are active in a variety of different fields and have varying numbers of employees, members and volunteers.

### ***3.3.2 Research limitations***

Although fast and efficient, electronic correspondence is unreliable. The survey was sent out to respondents via e-mail. It was impossible to determine the exact number of e-mails that reached the intended recipients. It was possible to track and count the reports of erroneous and non-existent e-mail accounts. However, no data can be collected on the number of e-mails that were blocked by e-mail servers and unsolicited e-mail (or spam) filters. Regardless of the limitations, the author is of the opinion that the survey response rate was satisfactory.

## **4. Empirical findings**

### **4.1 General information on respondent organizations**

The survey yielded 77 responses. Four returned questionnaires did not qualify for analysis due to contradictory or incomplete answers. Five organizations refused to participate in the survey. The final count of surveys that were included in the analysis is 73. Forty (40) respondent organizations were members of NENO and the remaining 33 were listed among the ITI organizations.

Majority of respondents (52) were located in Tallinn or Harjumaa; 11 organizations were from Tartu. Other regions that were covered included Elva, Haapsalu, Rapla, Paide, Põlva, Lihula. The legal form of 56 respondent organizations was non-profit association. The remaining 17 were registered as foundations.

The average age of respondent organizations is 11 years. Five organizations were initially established during the first Republic of Estonia between 1918 and 1940, and reestablished in the end of 1980s or beginning of 1990s. The average number of employees in an organization is 5. Fifteen organizations have no people on payroll, whereas 11 organizations have 10 or more employees. The average number of volunteers per organization is 33. Seventeen organizations have no volunteers, whereas 8 organizations have 100 or more volunteers. The average number of members is difficult to establish because non-profit associations can have individual members as well as serve as umbrella organizations for other NPOs. Foundations on the other hand, do not have any members. The estimated number of people who are directly involved with the surveyed organizations either through employment, membership or volunteer work is at least 200,000. The largest membership numbers are in student and youth organizations.

The sphere of activities of the respondent organizations is diverse. Respondents were allowed to choose multiple appropriate fields of activity. The largest sphere in the sample is education and training with 27% of organizations. This is followed by the social sphere with 16%, culture and art with 12%, child protection and welfare 10% and also sports 10%. Other noted fields were nature and environment (9%), legal sphere and politics (8%), administration and distribution of financial resources (7%), health and medicine (7%), youth and student organizations (6%), support and administration services (4%), artistic association or trade union (3%), religious organizations (2%). Also, other non-listed fields of activity were mentioned such as: security, development of volunteer work, co-operation with local municipalities, project development for EU grants, media, and science.

## **4.2 Strategic planning activities in NPOs**

In order to evaluate the communication activities in respondent organizations the survey included questions on more general issues and activities such as strategic planning and the mission statement.

Mission statement defines the purpose of an organization and it is the basis of all organizational operations including communication related activities. Thus, the survey respondents were asked to state the organizational mission and goal of activities. Though, seemingly a trivial request not all replies were straightforward. Ten of the 73 respondents did not specify a mission statement in their reply. Eight mission statements can be considered very long and having a complicated phrasing.

Majority of respondents (82%) confirmed the existence of a development plan or operating strategy from which they proceed in their activities. The remaining 18% of respondent organizations that did not have a development plan or operating strategy operated either on a project-basis or were formed as a legal body for uniting a group of people with specific interests in a sphere or activity. Four of the organizations are in the process of developing or updating the strategy. In one organization the newly recruited executive director replied that regardless of his advice, the supervisory board of the organization has so far not deem a development plan or operating strategy necessary. In one organization there was a lack of resources to execute an operating strategy, thus it was not developed. The organization operated on project-basis and depended heavily on funding from outside resources.

### 4.2.1 Communication strategy

In 27 (40%) organizations a general communication practice had been developed over time but it was not documented. In 7 (11%) respondent organizations there was a written communication manual in use. In 11 (17%) organizations communication-related activities were a part of the management or marketing strategy. Thus, in total almost two thirds of the respondent organizations have communication related activities either in a written format or as practical experience stored in 'organizational memory'. Nineteen (29%) of respondents reported that there is no communication strategy or manual in their organization. With one exception, the same organizations that did not have a development plan or operating strategy reported that they also do not have a communication strategy or manual.

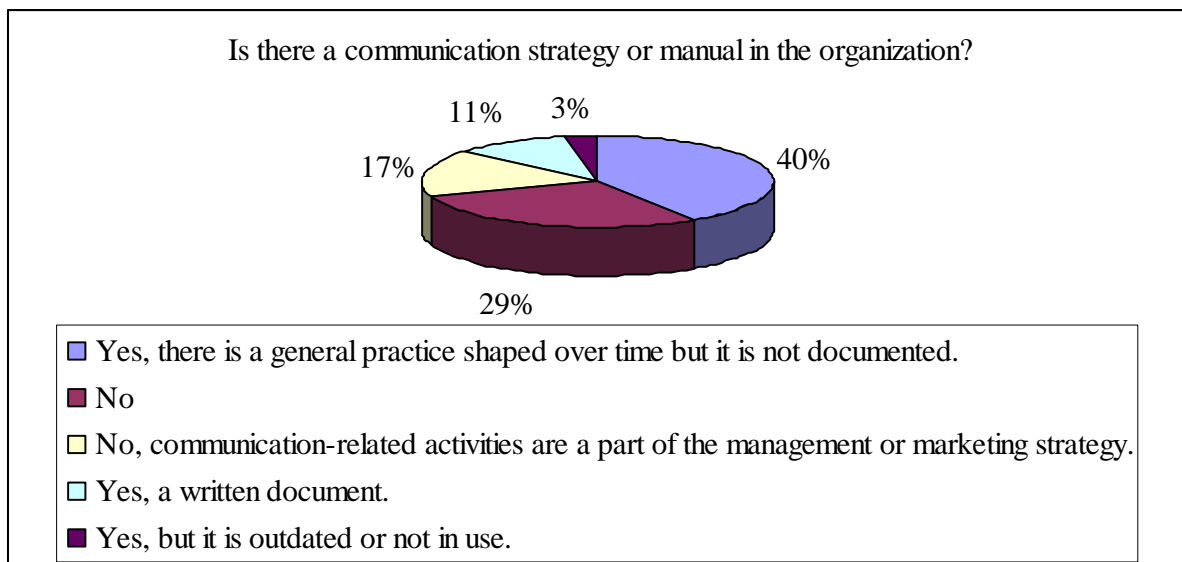


Figure 2. The existence of a communication strategy or manual in the organization, n=64.

#### 4.2.2 Public image research

More than half of respondents (58%) had taken an interest in the public image of their organization or field of activity. Of those, 32 % had investigated the topic from other sources or had heard about it at an event. Twenty six percent of respondents had conducted their own or outsourced a public opinion or image research. A quarter of the organizations would be interested but lack resources for research. The remaining 14% of respondent organizations do not take an interest in public opinion as it does not directly influence their activities.

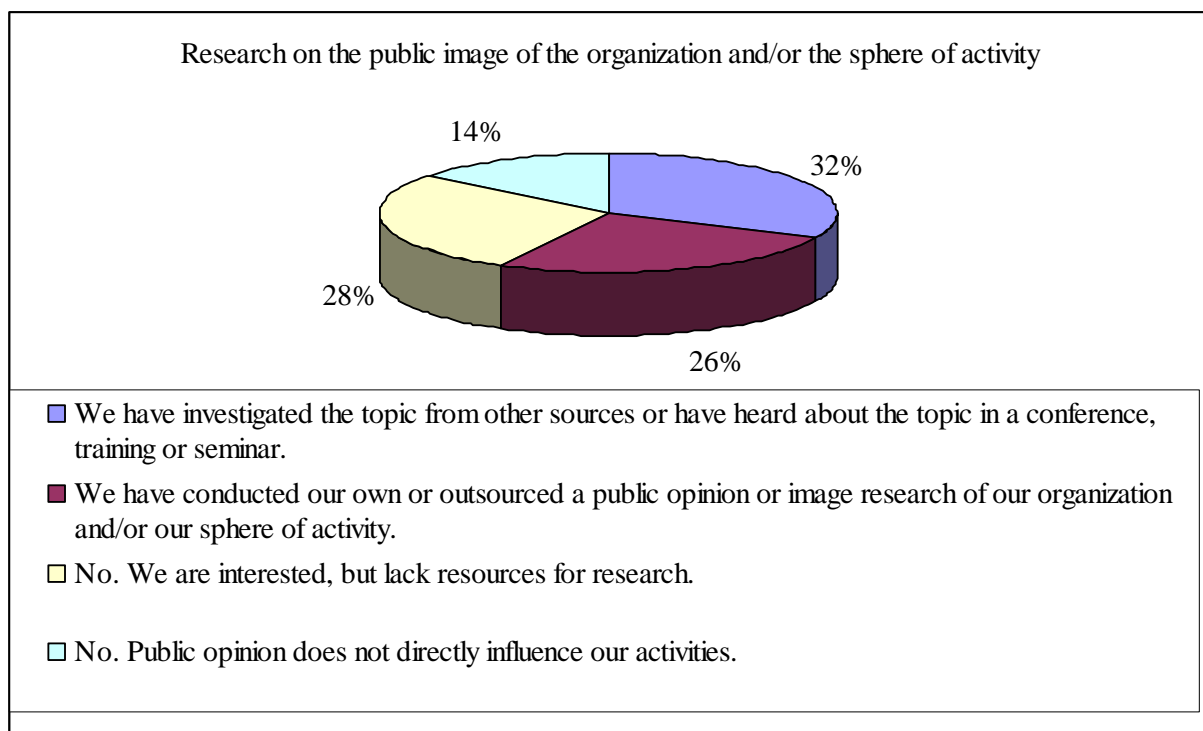


Figure 3. Research on the public image of the organization or the sphere of activity, n=73.

The nine organizations that did not have any media relations, also, had not researched the public image of their organization as they reasoned that public opinion does not influence their activities.

### 4.3 Media relations

Respondent organizations were divided into two groups: those who interact with media and those who do not. Sixty four (88%) of the total 73 respondents confirmed their relations with media. Whereas, 9 of the 73 respondents (12%) replied that their organization does not interact with media. Two primary reasons given to explain this fact were: the operations of the organization are targeted at a specific group of people, thus, interaction with the target group takes place via alternate channels (39%), and the organization is too small for media and the public to be interested or the organization has nothing important to announce via media (38%). One organization specified, however, that their experience in media relations is too short and does not enable them to give a more appropriate answer. Two organizations (15%) reasoned that regardless of their attempts media does not take an interest in their sphere of activity and they have quit trying. One organization admitted to having had a negative past experience with media.

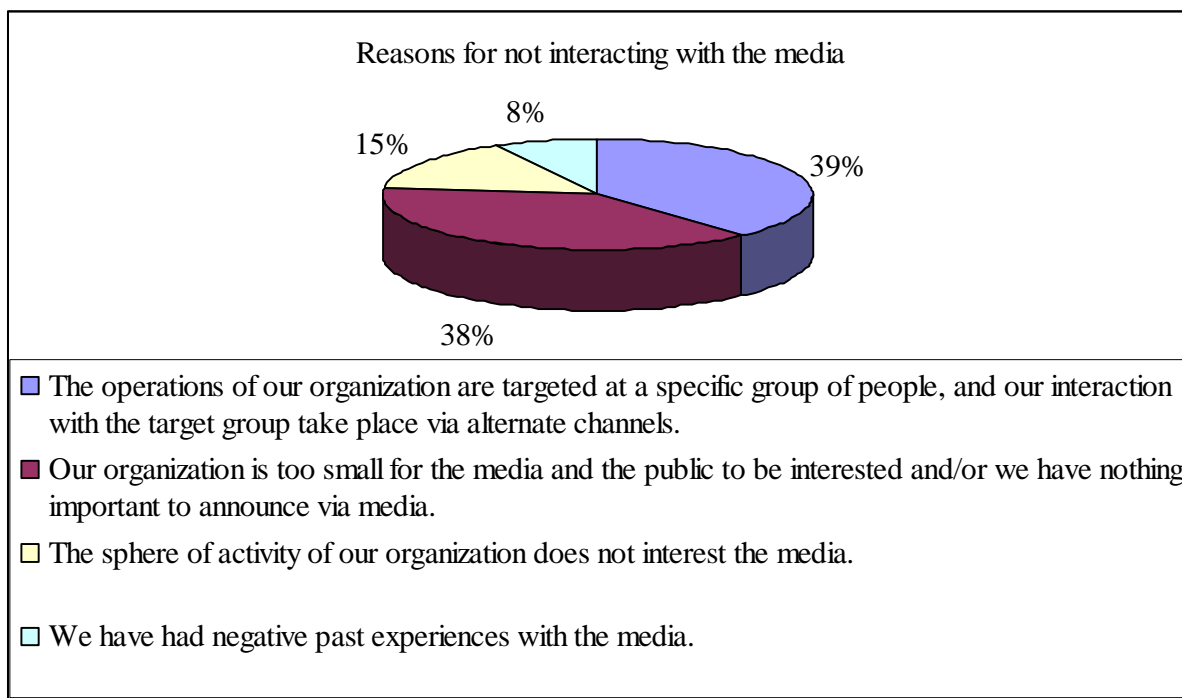


Figure 4. Reasons for not interacting with media, n=9.

### 4.3.1 Distribution of media relations responsibilities

The implementation of media communication activities within the organization determines the level of success. In nearly half of respondent organizations (49%) there is a single employee who is responsible for media relations. In the other 51% the responsibilities are divided among several employees.

In 47 respondent organizations (73%) media relations activities are performed by the manager. In addition to the manager also the project manager interacts with media in 16 organizations (25%). In 14 respondents (22%) other organizational members, such as members of the board or members of volunteer work groups perform the media relations duties.

In 13 respondent organizations (20%) there is a communication manager or similar on payroll. Five organizations (8%) outsource the media communication services.

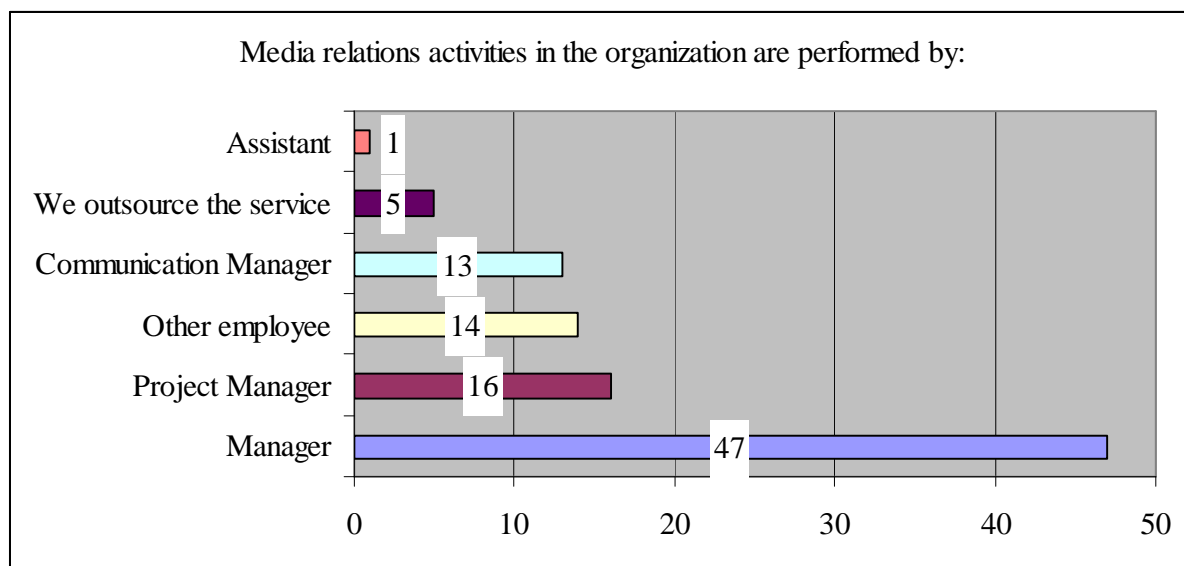


Figure 5. Distribution of media relations responsibilities, n=64.

### 4.3.2 Target audience

The author identified nine major target audience categories defined by NPOs who they interact with via media.

Target audience category	Identified by the number of respondent organizations	Target groups
Specified target group	48 respondents (75%)	Parents/families/children (13) Students / Youth (11) Pedagogues (6) Disabled people/people with medical diagnoses (5) Local inhabitants (3) Social workers (2) Consumers (2) Estonians abroad (2) People who practice a sports or activity (2) Voters (1) Pensioners (1) Lawyers (1) Immigrants (1)
The public	26 respondents (40%)	Terms used: The public All citizens regardless of ethnicity, gender, age Average citizen All Estonians
The public sector	10 respondents (16%)	More specific classification by various government organizations: Politicians (4) Local governments (3) Municipalities (3) Ministries (2) The government (2) Civil servants in a specific sphere (e.g. social and education sphere)
The third sector	10 respondents (16%)	Other NPOs (4) Organizational members (2)

		Organizational competitors (2) Organizational partners (2) Employees (1) Volunteers (1)
'Those who are interested'	9 respondents (14%)	People interested in culture (3) Those interested in our activities (2) People interested in folk dance/folk music/sports/religion/nature preservation (5)
Prospective target groups	7 respondents (11%)	Prospective members (3) Prospective clients (2) Prospective sponsors/donors (2) Prospective volunteers (1)
Media	4 respondents (6%)	Media organizations (3) Journalists (1)
Business sector	2 respondents (3%)	Enterprises (1) Entrepreneurs (1)
Clients	2 respondents (3%)	Organizational clients (2)

Table 1. Primary target audience categories identified by NPOs , n=64.

### 4.3.3 Proactive and reactive media relations

The experience of the majority of respondent organizations (74%) shows that initiation of contact between NPOs and the media takes place on the initiative of both sides. Fifteen of the 64 organizations (23%) have constantly been proactive by initiating all their contacts with media. Media first sought contact with two organizations (3%).

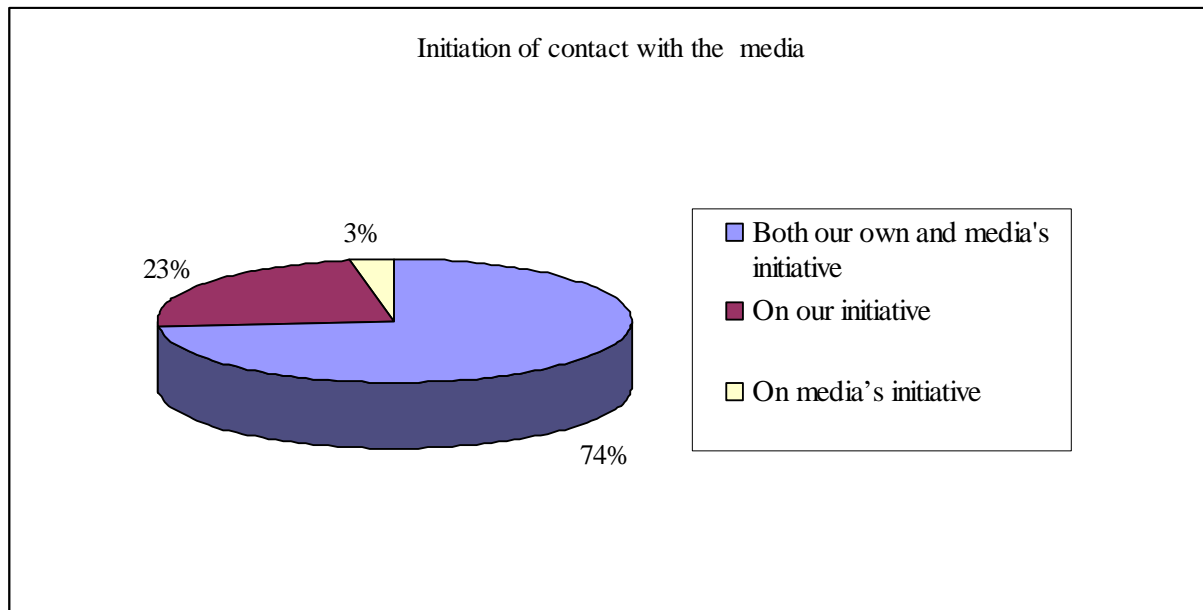


Figure 6. Initiation of contact with media, n=64.

More than half of respondents (61%) had one or several journalists that they are accustomed to interact with. It was noted by a few of the respondents that journalists change too fast in media organizations making it difficult to establish a solid long-term relationship.

In cases when media had initiated the contact, there were generally five types of reasons and cause-effect type of phenomenon.

<b>The cause of media interest</b>	<b>Experienced by the number of respondent organizations</b>	<b>Specific occasions and situations</b>
Event or project report	21 respondents (33%)	The media reported prior to, during or after seminars, conferences, concerts, charity events, sports events, anniversaries or other celebration and similar. Also, various projects were reported to the public via media, such as survey results and various statistics; scholarships, grants, and various awards; various public awareness campaigns, and similar.
Publicity or broadcast on members and organization	18 respondents (28%)	Organizations were contacted by media in order to write or broadcast about the activities of the organization or its members.
Professional advice or expert opinion	13 respondents (20%)	Organizations were contacted by media to inquire about professional advice or expert opinion on various issues.
Information inquiry upon a press release	7 respondents (11%)	Press releases sent out by the organizations resulted in an interview, news story or broadcast. In those cases a media representative had contacted the organization to inquire for additional information.
Unique / extraordinary / sensational / newsworthy	5 respondents (8%)	Organizations were contacted by media in order to write on a topic that is unique, extraordinary, sensational, or otherwise newsworthy.

Table 2. The cause of media interest in NPOs, n=64.

#### 4.3.4 Reporting frequency, channels and method

The average reporting frequency via mass media among NPOs is approximately once every few months. Twenty-eight respondent organizations (44%) have something newsworthy to announce to the public once a month. The same proportion of organizations reports their messages via mass media once every quarter. Significantly fewer organizations interact with the media once a week (6%) or once a year (6%). Some respondents also pointed out that reporting tends to be seasonal or project-based rather than regular throughout the year.

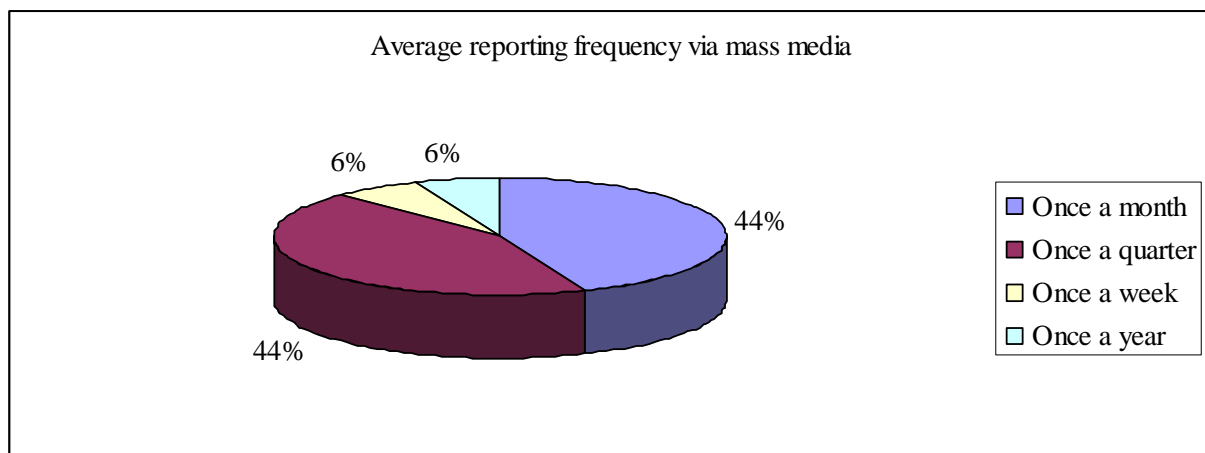


Figure 7. Average reporting frequency via mass media, n=64.

The usage of various mass communication channels among NPOs did not reveal any strong preference of a certain medium. All but two of the respondent organizations (62) had used print media to forward their messages. Internet came a close second after print media as a channel for information dispersal used by 58 organizations. Radio as mass communication device was used by 55 respondent organizations. Television was the least favored channel.

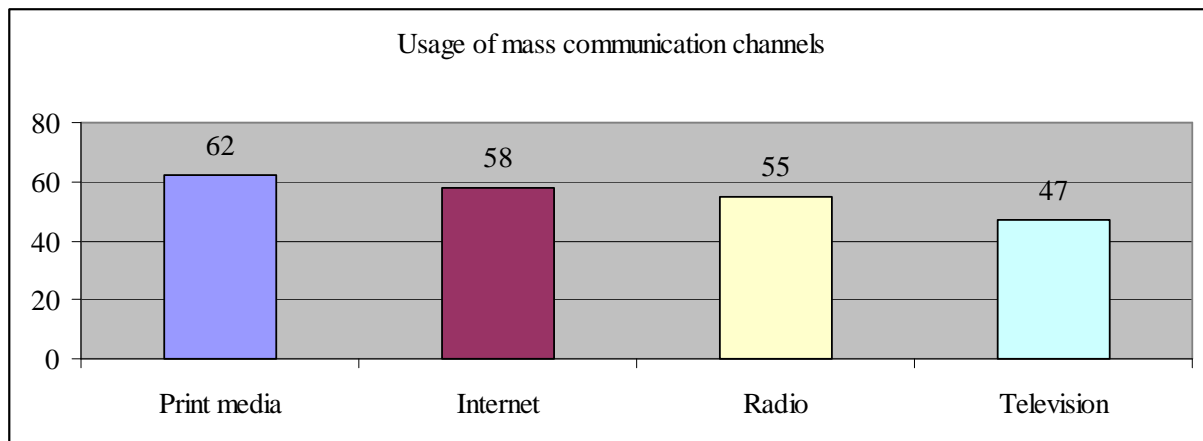


Figure 8. Usage of mass communication channels, n=64.

The most common form of information dispersal is sending out a press release. Other methods used in the order of preference include: meeting with a journalist, meeting or inviting a media representative to an event or function, dispatch of information materials, and a phone conversation with a media representative. Other methods indicated by respondents include: an online diary or weblog on the Internet (3), regular electronic newsletter (2), regular programs on the radio (2), articles and interviews ordered by media organizations, a special section for media on the organization's homepage. Two organizations reported having held press conferences.

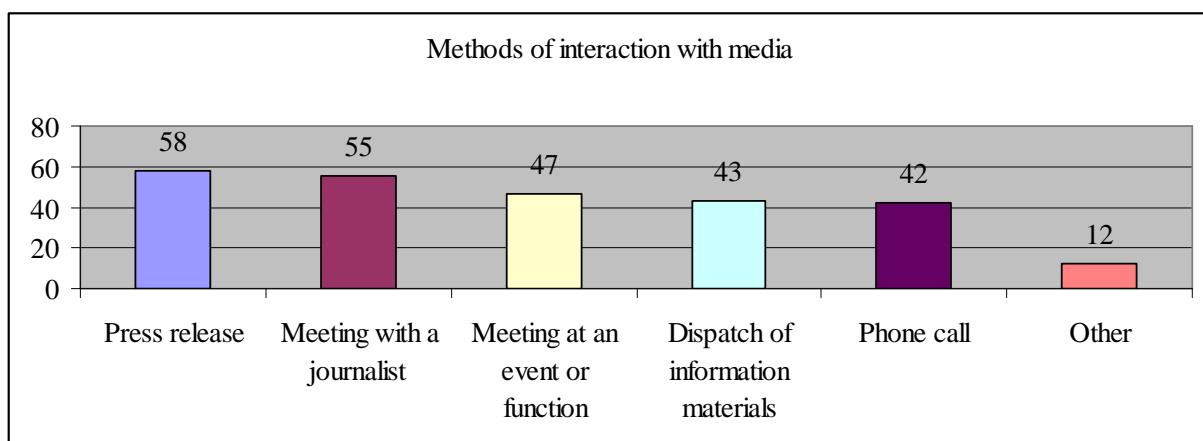


Figure 9. Methods of interaction with media, n=64.

#### 4.3.5 Media relations experiences

The subjective evaluation of media coverage by respondent organizations showed that an overwhelming majority of NPOs (87%) had experienced positive media coverage. Eleven percent of respondent organizations described their media coverage so far as neutral. Two organizations (3%) evaluated the media reporting of their organization as mostly negative.

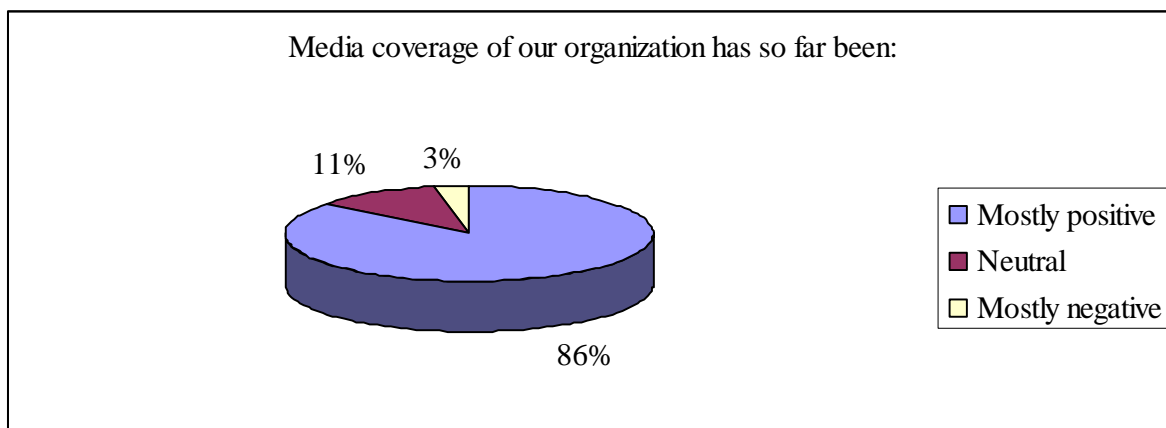


Figure 10. Media coverage evaluation, n=64.

Respondents were asked to give an evaluation of past experiences in their interactions with media. Appendix 2 lists the answers of all respondent organizations.

There were five primary points that were highlighted by respondent organizations to characterize their observations and experiences in media relations activities:

1. One must carefully formulate the message, watch what one says and re-check before publishing/broadcast
2. Media is seeking for sensation, serving their own interests and is not interested in us
3. One has to be consistent and proactive in interactions with media
4. Media is superficial
5. Personal contacts and 'private' journalists in media are important

Selected quotations from respondents' statements are printed below in quotation marks.

Conclusion or experience of respondent organizations	Identified by the number of respondents
<p><b>One must carefully formulate the message, watch what one says and re-check before publishing/broadcast.</b></p>	<p><b>20 respondents (31%)</b></p>
<p><i>“The more sufficient information you give the less likely an interviewer will have space for imagination.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is important to interact with a reason, using specific media rules, and communicating a precise message. Any noise has to be avoided.”</i></p> <p><i>“We have learned that being too outspoken doesn’t do any good, that the right words need to be carefully selected, and that we have to always check over every article before print.”</i></p> <p><i>“It may happen that an opinion is publicly presented in a slightly different context, i.e. the idea gets distorted. Usually journalists ask for a quick answer over the phone but we have started to prefer written answers via e-mail so that the opinion would ultimately be unequivocal.”</i></p> <p><i>“EVERYTHING has to be personally checked over. Never give oral answers.”</i></p> <p><i>“Every article has to be read beforehand to specify circumstances. There’s always a chance that the journalist has not understood correctly, or made factual errors etc.... the message has to be carefully thought through.”</i></p> <p><i>“Despite all the efforts journalist usually find newsworthiness from statements that actually shouldn’t have been said.”</i></p> <p><i>“To prevent the information from changing to its opposite a sense of caution is sensible while interacting with media. It’s better to send neutral messages, announcements or articles written by ourselves than leave everything to a journalist.”</i></p> <p><i>“Articles should always be read over before print in order to guarantee your own contentment as well as avoid later conflicts. Journalists may occasionally be very creative.”</i></p>	

<b>Media is seeking for sensation, serving their own interests and is not interested in us</b>	<b>17 respondents (27%)</b>
<p><i>“Our subject field is too dull as there’s no blood, sweat or tears, let alone sex, money or criminals”</i></p> <p><i>“Interaction with media is necessary but at the same time there’s always an underlying hope that they are not looking for bombshell for the cover page but actually write/talk/show about the real situation.”</i></p> <p><i>“Media’s main interest is, however, directed to anything extraordinary, and conflicts or problems. A simple good deed doesn’t always get media’s attention even when hundreds of people have been involved or it’s backed by years of work.”</i></p> <p><i>“Tabloids lose their interest fast if they can’t find out “who’s sleeping with whom”.</i></p> <p><i>“Journalists typically wish to expose themselves which makes the subject matter a mere tool for achieving that.”</i></p> <p><i>“Media works one day at a time and always has its own aims that have very little in common with our organization. Therefore, it may be a tool and sometimes an opponent but hardly ever an ally.”</i></p> <p><i>“Good news doesn’t sell if a bigger negative news story or event has conquered media at the same time.”</i></p> <p><i>“Regrettably newspapers Eesti Päevaleht and Postimees are not interested in the current situation and problems of pensioners, which is strange.”</i></p> <p><i>“Our work doesn’t really interest them as we are rather developing the environment than solving specific and sexy problems or clearing out consequences.”</i></p>	
<b>One has to be consistent and proactive in interactions with media</b>	<b>13 respondents (20%)</b>
<p><i>“You have to certainly be consistent while interacting with media and not give up after initial negative feedback.”</i></p> <p><i>“You have to interact openly, guardedly but consistently with media.”</i></p> <p><i>“Turning to media always pays off. It is important, however, to keep the conveyed information reliable and unequivocal... It is essential to keep up constant interaction and contact.”</i></p>	

*“Conclusion: be constantly on the horizon and report not only about negative cases but also positive developments.”*

*“There is a way to begin communicating with media but it takes a lot of time, and may not generate any outcome.”*

*“Be active and inform local publications of your plans and results.”*

*“In general, our experiences with media have been encouraging – the key is to be active and offer topics yourself!”*

*“Be active and offer information in a media-attracting way.”*

*“The key is to find out what makes media tick at that time. Presentation of survey results is a proven media magnet.”*

*“Proficiency in interaction with media comes through training, and the skills have to be put into practice. Improving media competency of pupils and teachers is of great importance in [our] school.”*

*“Becoming newsworthy is difficult, almost impossible. Reaching consistency requires resources.”*

*“Show initiative and come forth; information needs to be written/presented in an attractive way.”*

**Media is superficial**

**9 respondents  
(14%)**

*“Media has difficulties with separating the wheat from the chaff.”*

*“County newspapers prefer to publish peaceful, joyful, nice stories.”*

*“Media generally has very strict and rigid stereotypes about NGOs, which do not enable an intense, concise or professional coverage.”*

*“Incorrect facts and shallowness disturb the most. It often seems that the publication just needs to fill a space and then a story is rapidly “created”.”*

*“We tried to report our activities to the county newspaper in the past but what remained of the stories were just headlines, so we gave up.”*

*“Journalists are every shallow. They have no time or will to delve into the specifics of the event.”*

*“Media has extensive power but too little time to research subjects. Therefore, we have to make extra efforts to avoid factual errors in articles.”*

*“We have encountered very few journalists who have the needed expertise, broad-mindedness, and generalization skills for covering our subject. They are usually quickly promoted or they leave for other fields of activity. As a result personal contacts with journalists have been frightening regardless of the pervading positive media coverage.”*

*“All too often there are (incompetent) journalists who are not familiar with the topic, and therefore write deficient stories. Luckily this is not a rule of thumb – there are competent people as well who wish to cover the subject accurately.”*

**Personal contacts and ‘private’ journalists in media are important**

**8 respondents  
(13%)**

*“It is vital to have a “personal” journalist and to keep him posted on our activities as well as offer him topics for articles.”*

*“Having contacts counts! Strangers are not invited to the circle.”*

*“What comes to the local government newspapers then they publish stories that are profitable for them and chosen people, so the circle closes – we can’t get through with our information. A rule of thumb – if you are not a personage at the local government then you don’t really have access to certain information nor to publishing opportunities.”*

*“TV is the most problematic of all as you need to be a close “buddy” to get in.”*

*“Lessons: personal contacts matter. There’s no sense in trying to convince anyone who already has a disapproving mindset. Just find another journalist as they often think they know the best.”*

Table 3. Experiences and observations of NPOs about relations with media, n=64.

## **5. Discussion and conclusion**

The current research paper investigated the media relations practices and experiences in the third sector organizations of Estonia. Seventy three non-profit organizations from different regions of Estonia participated in the research. The following will be an interpretation and analysis of survey results on the basis of research questions initially presented by the author.

### **5.1 The need for media relations among NPOs**

Majority of NPOs that responded to the survey had interactions with media. Therefore, the need for media relations has been recognized among NPOs. Organizations that did not practice media relations identified two primary reasons. Their interaction with primary stakeholders takes place via alternate channels such as e-mail and phone. Others noted that the organization has nothing important to announce via media or the organization is too insignificant for media and the public to be interested in. The latter statement can be considered a subjective self-evaluation that downplays the importance of the third sector as an institution and thus, regenerates the ‘loser’ stereotype related to NPOs that was also identified by Peterson & Kaljund (2003) (qtd. in Rikmann 2007). The respondents that did not have any media relations had also not taken an interest in the public image of their organization as they reasoned that public opinion does not influence their activities.

Organizations that interact with media do it mostly on their own initiative rather than that of the media. Very few organizations have experienced strong media interest in their activities. Media contact is initiated in a few cases by a journalist with whom there is an acquaintanceship. Nevertheless, several respondents pointed out that once relations with the media have been established, it tends to become increasingly easier to get onto the media agenda and transmit their messages. “*When journalists consider you a significant opinion leader then making news is not a big problem*” was stated by one respondent. Media starts to seek contacts with the organization when a person associated with the organization has established himself as an authority and opinion leader, or the organization is able to distribute professional advice or expert opinion on an issue of public interest. Thus, the possession of information is the greatest asset in media relations.

Although time-consuming and difficult at first, consistent work and co-operation with the media eventually pays off the effort. On one hand research indicated that for young and inexperienced organizations it is difficult to get onto the media agenda. In the start-up and growth phase it is of great significance for the organization to get support from third parties such as representatives of similar interest groups, established opinion leaders or professionals in the same field. They would initially ‘lend their authority’ and act as spokespersons for the new organization until it

establishes its own reputation. On the other hand, if presented in a unique and interest-catching format, the media rather easily pick up on new initiatives to report about, thus, making it somewhat easier for young organizations to enter the media agenda. Once a relationship with media has been founded, it will take less effort to continue transmitting organizational messages via media provided that the information is presented following the news value guidelines.

### ***5.1.1 Target audiences***

The primary target audiences that NPOs interact with via media are specified stakeholder groups united by common interests, demographic variables and the like. Therefore, most NPOs that interact with media recognize the need for target group segmentation. Other target audience segments include: the public sector, which is a co-operation partner as well as a source of revenue for many NPOs; the third sector itself; the media; the business sector; and clients. Three organizations had shifting target audiences, which depended on the nature of the project currently in progress. Supposedly, this would make their relations with media a lot less consistent and more effortful.

When listing the target audiences respondent organizations identified all stakeholder groups or key publics as per Grunig et al. (2002). Of the key publics the most difficult seems to be communication with the community in which the organization operates. Specifically message formation and targeting needs more consideration. The community can be further divided into stakeholder groups to target the messages more accurately. The author hypothesizes that improved relations with the organizational community will ultimately pay off the effort as it will increase the overall credibility of the third sector institutions among the public.

Ten organizations named 'the public' as their only target audience who they interact with via media. The problem with a stakeholder group defined as 'the public' is the broadness and vagueness of the term. It does not enable to adjust the message to different audience segments. Not all members of the society literally and metaphorically speak the same language. Many stakeholder groups need the message to be interpreted into a language that they can understand. McQuail (2000) adds to the point that mass media audience is abstract and anonymous as well as dispersed and heterogeneous. Mass media audience lacks self-consciousness and a homogenous identity, and is therefore, unable to perform any actions in unison and in an organized manner to attain common goals. Thus, a message sent to 'the public' will not yield any results and will not find the intended recipient as there is none. According to Lasswell's (1948) communication model the receiver who decodes the message is missing from the communication process, thus no communication occurs.

In addition, it is impossible to evaluate the results of communication with a sole generic message transmitted to an abstract group named 'the public.' Proceeding from the nature of activities and stakeholder systems, most NPOs should, in fact, be able to specify more precise target groups for their communication activities. Furthermore, as Vihalemm and Lauritin (2002) have pointed out Estonian media system has become increasingly diversified and fragmented thus making the audiences more distinct and segmented. Therefore, with sufficient prior media usage research every organization should be able to aim their messages at specific target groups.

Similar criticism applies to the target group segment named 'those who are interested,' which was used by nine respondent organizations. The primary reasoning for using such vague target group categories is that the primary stakeholder groups are accessible via other channels, such as interpersonal communication, the Internet, phone, and direct mail; thus, reducing the need to transmit organizational messages via media. On the other hand, such a vague target audience segment is probably also not worth the organizational effort that the NPOs invest into media relations activities.

It is noteworthy that the number of organizations who target their media communication at prospective or potential stakeholder groups, such as possible future members, employees, volunteers and donors, is not very big. Due to the lack of resources, skill or managerial awareness many NPOs have not devoted effort to stakeholder mapping and thus, developing relations with all stakeholder groups.

## **5.2 Media relations practices applied by NPOs**

### ***5.2.1 Strategic planning of organizational communication***

The research determined that most organizations practice strategic planning in their communication related activities. Strategic planning proceeds from the mission and vision of the organization, which have to be unambiguous and understandable to all relevant stakeholders. A few respondent organizations were unable to specify a mission statement or goal of organizational activities, which would make their subsequent communication activities unmanageable. For organizations that have difficulties stating their mission and vision it is advisable to carry out a revision and update if necessary. It is very difficult to create consistent messages and target the intended receivers without a definite mission statement that serves as a solid base for all communication and helps to stay focused.

In total almost two thirds of the respondent organizations have communication related activities either documented in a written format or as practical experience stored in 'organizational

memory'. For the sake of consistency it is advisable to have a written document that formulates the organizational communication activities. The remaining one third of respondents reported having no communication strategy or manual in their organization. With one exception, the same organizations that did not have a development plan or operating strategy reported that they also do not have a communication strategy or manual indicating a lack of strategic planning in organizational activities.

Causality was identified with organizations that did not have a communication strategy, as they tended to have vaguer target group segments and reported having difficulties presenting their information as newsworthy and thus, getting access into media. It is also noteworthy that organizations without a communication strategy also tended to evaluate the media coverage they had received as neutral or negative rather than positive.

### ***5.2.2 Distribution of media relations responsibilities***

The distribution of media relations tasks is rather similar in all organizations. In majority of organizations the manager interacts with the media. Sometimes another employee, such as a project manager or member of the board performs the media relations duties. In half of the organizations that interact with media there is no single person responsible for communication with the media. This arrangement may work very well for small organizations, where the work load is limited and people are well informed of all spheres, to have multiple individuals performing media relations responsibilities. However, in larger organizations, for the sake of consistency, it is more functional to have a single employee responsible for media relations activities. It does not mean that this person alone must do all interaction with the media because there can be more than one spokesperson in the organization. One quarter of NPOs have a communication manager on payroll or outsource the media communication services indicating an higher than average awareness of the need for professionally managed communication activities.

Older and smaller organizations tend to rely more on the non-documented general practice shaped over time in their media communication activities. Younger and bigger organizations had either a communication specialist on payroll or had outsourced the service. The organizations that have either a communication manager or outsource the media relations service tended to be marginally younger and have slightly more members and volunteers. Also, these organizations tended to be somewhat more well-known compared to other respondent organizations. These facts demonstrate the cause-and-effect phenomenon that the increased awareness of the need for professionally managed communication activities will result in greater public awareness of the organization and its activities. In addition, organizations that proactively manage their public image will ultimately benefit as they have control over their reputation.

The author believes that the differences were marginal in the present research due to a small sample and the relatively short period of time that organizations have applied professional and strategic communication management. The author hypothesizes that a bigger sample in ten years time will demonstrate a greater gap between the organizations that manage their communication activities professionally and those that ‘go with the flow.’

### **5.2.3 *Tactics and channels***

More than half of respondents had one or several journalists that they are accustomed to interact with. Several organizations made a comment that journalists change at a rapid pace in media organizations making long-term relationships difficult to establish. The average reporting frequency via mass media among NPOs is approximately once every few months. The usage of various mass communication channels among NPOs did not reveal any strong preference of a certain medium. Almost all respondents had used print media to forward their messages. Also, the Internet and radio as channels for information dispersal were used extensively. Television was the least favored channel and several respondents pointed out that TV is a difficult medium to gain access to.

NPOs use a diverse variety of tactics for interaction with media. A press release is most commonly used to communicate information. However, a press release rarely results in subsequent media coverage. Organizations with established media relations are asked for opinion articles or are approached for professional advice and expert opinion. Interactive methods of communication tend to be more successful, such as meeting with a journalist or inviting media representatives to events. Also, the Internet is used extensively as a means of information distribution. Several organizations send out regular newsletters or keep an online diary or weblog, which is a great example of an interactive or two-way communication as instant feedback is possible.

### **5.3 Experiences and conclusions of NPOs in their interactions with media**

Most NPOs had experienced positive media coverage. One respondent pointed out that although the media coverage is positive or neutral in electronic channels it receives negative comments from readers. Whether anonymous readers’ comments on the Internet are reflective of the public opinion is a topic worth further research. Some respondents pointed out that due to the nature of organizational activities their reporting to the media tends to be seasonal or project-based, thus making media interaction rather irregular and inconsistent.

Approximately a quarter of the respondent organizations recognize that media relations activities need to be consistent and proactive for long-term success. Organizations have learned from experience that one must take great care in the formulation of their messages. When interacting with a media representative one must be cautious at all times about what is said verbally and non-verbally. For this reason many organizations prefer written interactions with the media and request to re-check their statements before publishing or broadcasting. Thus, respondent organizations have recognized that media constructs its own reality, which is not necessarily reflective of the NPOs reality as they see it. Media sets its own frame to the context in which the news are presented, which in turn influences the way it is perceived.

A few respondents pointed out in their answers that organizations must 'play by the rules of the media'. In other words, they realize that in order to attract media interest their organizational messages must be presented in a newsworthy manner to meet the media standards. Organizations with more experience in media relations had developed personal relations with one or several media representatives. The need for personal contacts in media was pointed out by a quarter of respondent organizations. It was noted by a few of the respondents that journalists change too fast in media organizations making it difficult to establish a solid long-term relationship. Please see appendix 2 for a complete list of respondents' observations and experiences in their interactions with media.

### ***5.3.1 Criticism of media***

The primary criticism towards Estonian media had to do with the level of access granted to NGOs to transmit organizational messages. Media is perceived as very selective in their sources of news and information. According to various media theorists (McQuail 2000, Hall 1982, Van Dijk) news selection subordinates to pressures from various interest groups. Thus, it can be concluded that according to NPOs themselves, they do not possess significant social power to influence the media agenda. This explains the common interpretation among respondent organizations that there is a lack of interest from the media's side and it is difficult for NPOs to pass the news selection process and get onto the media agenda. Whether the third sector organizations in reality get proportionally less coverage compared to other societal spheres needs to be backed up by further research though media monitoring and content analysis.

Television was pointed out by several NPOs as the most exclusive medium that is difficult to gain access to. This can be explained by the technical sophistication of the medium that attributes a great significance on the visual characteristics offered by the subject, which the NPOs are probably not able to readily offer due to lack of resources, skill and experience. Two organizations expressed their dissatisfaction with the local print media organizations for their

unethical preference of certain individuals and political interest groups as well as unequal treatment of information sources.

The common stereotype about sensation-seeking media was not strongly supported in the context of the current research. Only 8% of respondent organizations had been contacted by media in order to report information about the organization that can be classified as unique, extraordinary, sensational or otherwise newsworthy. Other critical statements about media included comments such as ‘media is serving their own interests and is not interested in us’ and ‘media is superficial’. The critical statements refer to the profit-driven commercialization of media, which is unable to focus deeply on specific issues and rather presents information in a sensationalist manner.

The current research confirmed that Estonian media tends to favor reporting on personalities, events and projects. Media does not handle well abstract concepts such as civil society or civil initiative. Specific problems, events, personalities are more easily digestible for media. According to McQuail (2000) abstract topics are often personified and simplified in order to make them more specific and interesting for the audience. The Western media prefers news where one or several persons, preferably well-known personalities, are central figures. Prominent persons in almost any field can rely on privileged access to media and, thus, get more media attention with less effort. It is not rare, that the media publicize the opinion of the celebrity about an event and not the event itself. *“It is not what is said but who says it that gets media’s attention”* to quote one respondent. It was also mentioned by NPOs that it seems to be rather easy to get media exposure by presenting survey or research results or various statistics.

#### **5.4 Future research**

The current research is by no means a complete and final study of the media relations practices of Estonian third sector organizations. The research affirmed some of the points highlighted in earlier studies and the study of the topic should be continued. The author proposes a few possible topics for future investigation. Proceeding from the current study it would be worth conducting an in depth research into the entire media communication cycle in an NPO from message formation, medium selection and transmission to measuring the effects of communication. A topic of interest would also be the usage of the possibilities of new media among NPOs as an alternative to traditional media. Another topic of interest would be the analysis of different types of media from the perspective of media relations. For instance, why is television the most difficult medium to gain access to? A study should also be conducted among media organizations to determine their conception of the third sector and to pinpoint the sources of obstacles that are perceived by NPOs in their interactions with media. The stated lack of trust among Estonians in the third sector institutions as per Kivirähk et al. (2006) is likely to pose more serious problems in

the long term. Therefore, a sociological study to get to the roots of the distrust will serve a beneficial purpose.

## Summary

The third sector in Estonia has gone through a rapid development process since the state regained its independence in 1991. Estonia is currently in a transition phase as totalitarian ideology is being replaced with democratic principles, thus transforming from a closed system into a civil society. Non-profit organizations are civil society institutions that function in the public interest for the purpose of improving the welfare of the members of the society. As of March 1, 2008 there were over 26,000 NPOs registered in Estonia and the number continues to grow.

The current research paper investigates the media relations practices of Estonian NPOs. The study was motivated by two factors. As per earlier research there is an outdated stereotype rooted among media representatives, which sees NPOs as a place for incompetent 'losers' unable to succeed anywhere else whose media relations practices are unprofessional (Peterson and Kaljund qtd. in Rikmann 2007). On the other hand, a survey conducted among NPOs identified public and media relations as an area that organizations have a keen interest in (Kübar 2006).

The primary function of media is to keep the public informed of issues that have a news value, are current and relevant and serve the public interest. More often the media focus on topics that have a real, perceived or prospective negative effect on the public. Media shapes public opinion, which either on a greater or smaller scale is significant for any organization. Therefore, taking the initiative to govern one's public image is productive and serves the objectives of the organization in the long-term.

A survey was conducted among 330 Estonian NPOs. The questionnaire was returned by 77 organizations. The survey sample included only NPOs operating in the public interest, which are approximately 1,200 organizations of all the 26,600 NPOs currently registered in Estonia (as per NENO). Thus, all extrapolations and inferences from the current research paper are applicable only to a small proportion of NPOs. Majority of respondent organizations (88%) had interactions with media. Nevertheless, the author hypothesizes that the actual number of Estonian NPOs, which operate in the public interest and have recognized the need for media relations is significantly smaller because the respondent organizations are deemed to be more active in all their operations, including communication related activities.

In most organizations the media relations duties are performed by the general manager. One quarter of NPOs have a communication manager on payroll or outsource the media communication services. Majority of NPOs have learned that in interactions with the media the messages need to be carefully formulated. Care and caution is taken when talking to a media representative in order to avoid unambiguous information. In addition, organizations prefer written interaction with the media and want to re-check their statements before publishing or

broadcasting. Fewer organizations recognize that in order to yield satisfactory results in relations with media, the communication activities need to be consistent, strategically planned and professionally managed. Increased awareness of the need for professionally managed communication activities will result in greater public awareness of the organization and its activities. Current research proved that organizations that did not have a communication strategy also tended to have vaguer target group segments and reported having difficulties presenting their information as newsworthy and thus, getting access into media. In addition, organizations without a communication strategy also tended to evaluate the media coverage they had received as neutral or negative rather than positive.

As per research results majority of NPOs do not regard Estonian media as well balanced and functional because it does not readily mediate the arguments and opinions of different societal interest groups, specifically those transmitted by the NPOs. A similar point is emphasized by Lauristin (qtd in Pilvre 2006) in that Estonian media is too centered on party politics and politicians; therefore, leaving less available media space for other spheres including the third sector institutions. However, when media initiates the contact with NPOs it is generally due to the following reasons: to report about an event or project that the organization is involved with, to broadcast or publish information about organizational activities and members, to inquire professional advice or expert opinion on various issues, or to report information about the organization that can be classified as unique, extraordinary, sensational or otherwise newsworthy.

The possession of information is the greatest asset in media relations. A good tactic for NPOs that are in the beginning phase of establishing relations with media is to find an ally or authority outside of the organization who would initially act as the spokesperson of the organization until it establishes its own credibility. In order to have organizational communication activities result in media coverage it is important to know the peculiarities of each medium, their news value criteria or the angle at which they look at news.

There is a mutual need, as journalists depend on NGOs for information on issues of public interest and organizations rely on media to mediate their messages. The interdependence of each other is yet to be fully realized on either side. Stereotyping prevails currently on both sides. There is a general assumption among NGOs about sensation-seeking superficial mainstream and commercial media as 'good news don't sell' and media 'is not interested in us.' On the other hand, as per Peterson and Kaljund (2003), journalists tend not to see representatives of NPOs as serious professional co-operation partners. These prejudices are used as a rationalization for the unpopular status of the activities of third sector organizations in media. A more realistic reason would be the insufficient interactions between NPOs and media, which is the result of lack of resources, skill and managerial awareness in NPOs.

The third sector must continue to put effort into consistent professional media relations in order to become a serious voice of the civil society and gain social power to further influence the media agenda and public opinion in Estonia. There are two primary aspects for NPOs to consider if they are to establish or improve relations with media: attain basic knowledge on the operating principles and news value criteria of Estonian media, and put an effort into composing the right message for the right stakeholder group and use the correct channel of communication to transmit the message.

## **Abbreviations**

PR – Public Relations

NGO – Non-government organization

NPO – Non-profit organization

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

NENO – Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations

ITI – Income tax incentives

CRIS – Center of Registers and Information Systems

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## **APPENDIX 1 Questionnaire to non-profit organizations of Estonia**

**Dear respondent,**

The following questionnaire has been compiled in order to conduct a research on the necessity and practices of media relations in non-profit organizations. Your answers are anonymous. If necessary, only the sphere of activity will be mentioned in the research paper.

The research is conducted by Iris Meigas, a student of Tallinn University, Baltic Film and Media School. Survey results will be used in the bachelor thesis.

**Thank you for your participation in the present survey!**

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**1. How have you defined the goal of activities or the mission of your organization?**

**2. Have you compiled a development plan and/or operating strategy in your organization?**

- A) Yes. We proceed from the plan / strategy in our activities.
- B) No. Our daily activities do not require the existence of a development plan / operating strategy.

**3. Have you researched the public image (or the way the society thinks about you) of your organization and/or your sphere of activity?**

- A) Yes, we have conducted our own or outsourced a public opinion or image research of our organization and/or our sphere of activity.
- B) We have investigated the topic from other sources or have heard about the topic in a conference, training or seminar.
- C) No. We are interested, but lack resources for research.
- D) No. Public opinion does not directly influence our activities.

**4. Is there a single person in your organization who is responsible for media relations?**

- A) Yes
- B) No, the responsibilities are divided among several employees.
- C) No, we don't see a need for interaction with media.

*If your answer to the previous question was A or B, then please proceed to question number 5.2 to continue.*

*If your answer to the previous question was C, then please answer the next question number 5.1 and then proceed to questions number 16-20.*

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**5.1. We don't see a need for interaction with media because:**

- A) The operations of our organization are targeted at a specific group of people, and our interaction with the target group takes place via alternate channels (e.g. e-mail, phone, regular newsletters, website, etc.)
- B) Our organization is too small for media and the public to be interested and/or we have nothing important to announce via media.
- C) The sphere of activity of our organization does not interest media.
- D) We have had negative past experiences with media. *(Please specify below, question number 15)*
- F) Other reason: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please proceed to question no 16.*

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**5.2 Who is responsible for media relations in your organization? (multiple answers possible)**

- A) Manager
- B) Communication Manager
- C) Project Manager
- D) Assistant
- E) Other employee: \_\_\_\_\_
- F) We outsource the service (e.g. PR or media agency,)

**6. Is there a communication strategy or manual in your organization?**

- A) Yes, a written document.
- B) Yes, there is a general practice shaped over time but it is not documented.
- C) Yes, but it is outdated or not in use.
- D) No, communication-related activities are a part of the management or marketing strategy.
- E) No

**7. Who are the primary target groups your organization interacts with via media?**

**8. Has contact with media been initiated by you (the organization) or by the media?**

- A) On our initiative.
- B) On media's initiative.
- C) Both

**9. Please describe the topic and context in which a media representative has approached you?**

**10. Is there one or several journalists who you are accustomed to interact with?**

- A) Yes
- B) No

**11. How often do you have something to report to the public via media?**

**On average:**

- A) Once a week
- B) Once a month
- C) Once a quarter
- D) Once a year

**12. Which mass communication channels have you used? (*multiple answers possible*)**

- A) Television
- B) Radio
- C) Print media
- D) Internet

**13. Which methods have you used to interact with media? (*multiple answers possible*)**

- A) Press release
- B) Phone call
- C) Meeting with a journalist (e.g. interview)
- D) Meeting at an event or function
- E) Dispatch of information materials
- D) Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

**14. Media coverage of our organization has so far been:**

- A) Mostly positive
- B) Neutral
- C) Mostly negative

**15. What have you experienced and learned about media in your interactions with it? What conclusions have you made?**

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**16. Number of employees in your organization:**

**17. Number of volunteers (*if any*):**

**18. Number of members (in non-profit associations):**

**19. Year of establishment:**

**20. Field of activity:**

- Education / training
- Culture / Art
- Child protection and welfare
- Nature / Environment
- Artistic association, trade union
- Youth or student organization
- Administration and distribution of financial resources
- Social sphere
- Sports
- Health / Medicine
- Support and administration services
- Religious organization
- Legal sphere / Politics
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR FINDING THE TIME TO FILL OUT THE QUESTIONNAIRE!  
YOU HAVE MADE A BIG CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS FINALIZING MY  
BACHELOR THESIS!**

## **APPENDIX 2 Respondents' observations and experiences in media relations activities**

*(Translation from Estonian)*

Respondents' answers to open-ended survey question # 15.

**What have you experienced and learned about media in your interactions with it?  
What conclusions have you made?**

Organization 1

“Media generally has very strict and rigid stereotypes about NGOs, which do not enable an intense, concise or professional coverage.”

Organization 2

“We must definitely interact more with Russian-speaking media. In addition, it is beneficial to have a “private” journalist. You have to certainly be consistent while interacting with media and not give up after initial negative feedback.”

Organization 3

“Media good, media necessary, without media there's nothing. You don't exist if you're not figuring on the horizon. You have to interact openly, guardedly but consistently with media. The more sufficient information you give the less likely an interviewer will have space for imagination. Offer colors, offer freshness, offer something new, and it might happen that you become newsworthy. It might happen...”

Organization 4

“Our domain is rather crowded. Media has difficulties with separating the wheat from the chaff. Our subject field is too dull as there's no blood, sweat or tears, let alone sex, money or criminals.”

Organization 6

“It is not what is said but who says it that gets media's attention.”

Organization 7

“Interaction with media is very important for the non-profit sector.”

Organization 8

“County newspapers prefer to publish peaceful, joyful, nice stories. Media covers stories that sell.”

#### Organization 9

“It is difficult to become newsworthy in our domain. It is vital to have a “personal” journalist and to keep him posted on our activities as well as offer him topics for articles.”

#### Organization 10

“It is important to interact with a reason, using specific media rules, and communicating a precise message. Any noise has to be avoided.”

#### Organization 11

“Turning to media always pays off. It is important, however, to keep the conveyed information reliable and unequivocal. The amount of additional explanations and materials has to be sufficient. It is essential to keep up constant interaction and contact.”

#### Organization 12

“Message has to be thought through, well-prepared and interesting. Preceding personal contact is essential.”

#### Organization 13

“Regrettably newspapers *Eesti Päevaleht* and *Postimees* are not interested in the current situation and problems of pensioners, which is strange.”

#### Organization 14

“We have learned that being too outspoken doesn’t do any good, that the right words need to be carefully selected, and that we have to always check over every article before print. This depends on publication, however. When we had an article in monthly magazine *Eesti Naine* then we weren't that keen on seeing it beforehand but when daily *SL Õhtuleht* asked for our comment then we demanded to see it. Incorrect facts and shallowness disturb the most. It often seems that the publication just needs to fill a space and then a story is rapidly “created”.

Ideally media should be our assistant and a good co-partner but in reality it doesn’t work that way. Interaction with media is necessary but at the same time there’s always an underlying hope that they are not looking for bombshell for the cover page but actually write/talk/show about the real situation.”

#### Organization 15

“Becoming newsworthy is not easy.”

#### Organization 16

“We tried to report our activities to the county newspaper in the past but what remained of the stories were just headlines, so we gave up.

What comes to the local government newspapers then they publish stories that are profitable for them and chosen people, so the circle closes – we can’t get through with our information.

A rule of thumb – if you are not a personage at the local government then you don’t really have access to certain information nor to publishing opportunities.”

#### Organization 17

“Quality press release helps to draw media’s attention better, and direct interaction with journalists also helps becoming newsworthy. It is often impossible to monitor how journalists process or edit the information they have been given. That may in turn lead to a situation where insignificant material gets published.

The attitude towards youth organizations is usually favorable. Media’s main interest is, however, directed to anything extraordinary, and conflicts or problems. A simple good deed doesn’t always get media’s attention even when hundreds of people have been involved or it’s backed by years of work.”

#### Organization 18

“That media communication is of significant importance in our work.”

#### Organization 19

“Need to interact more.”

#### Organization 20

“It may happen that an opinion is publicly presented in a slightly different context, i.e. the idea gets distorted. Usually journalists ask for a quick answer over the phone but we have started to prefer written answers via e-mail so that the opinion would ultimately be unequivocal.”

#### Organization 21

“When journalists consider you a significant opinion leader then making news is not a big problem.”

#### Organization 27

“If you don’t say a word then no one will notice you.”

#### Organization 29

“You have to be open but careful with words. If possible check the material over before print to correct mistakes.”

#### Organization 31

“Journalists are very shallow. They have no time or will to delve into the specifics of the event. Tabloids lose their interest fast if they can’t find out “who’s sleeping with whom”. For some reason it’s very difficult to get to the *ETV*’s sports newscast (even with the results of the national championship).”

#### Organization 32

“For now we have only had positive experiences. The published subjects expressed in an oral or written form have always been flawless.”

#### Organization 34

“We have learned that it is better to give an interview via email, in a written form. Then every sentence can be thought over, and it is harder for a journalist to distort words or take them out of context that regrettably often happens with interviews over the phone. Additionally, the article needs to be checked over before print to correct mistakes.”

#### Organization 35

“When an article to be printed is based on an interview then it definitely needs to be read over before print. Wording of the headline is important.”

#### Organization 36

“Media is important for building our organization’s reputation, and for educating the public regarding disabled people. Conclusion: be constantly on the horizon and report not only about negative cases but also positive developments. The rule “any news is good news” applies to non-profits as well.”

#### Organization 37

“Having contacts counts! Strangers are not invited to the circle. There is a way to begin communicating with media but it takes a lot of time, and may not generate any outcome. TV is the most problematic of all as you need to be a close “buddy” to get in.”

#### Organization 38

“Lessons: personal contacts matter. There’s no sense in trying to convince anyone who already has a disapproving mindset. Just find another journalist as they often think they know the best. Journalists typically wish to expose themselves which makes the subject matter a mere tool for achieving that. (There are very good journalist too who wish to delve into the subject before

communicating to the public). The key is to find out what makes media tick at that time. Presentation of survey results is a proven media magnet.”

Organization 40

“Sense of caution is always sensible while interacting with media. Every word has to be carefully thought through.”

Organization 42

“Be active and offer information in a media-attracting way.”

Organization 43

“EVERYTHING has to be personally checked over. Never give oral answers.”

Organization 44

“Media has extensive power but too little time to research subjects. Therefore, we have to make extra efforts to avoid factual errors in articles. For this reason, if appropriate, we prefer to communicate via email with journalists. In general, our experiences with media have been encouraging – the key is to be active and offer topics yourself!

Organization 45

“Our activities are usually not of interest for media.”

Organization 46

“Every article has to be read beforehand to specify circumstances. There’s always a chance that the journalist has not understood correctly, or made factual errors etc. One the other hand – journalism is a good and effective tool to deliver your message to the general public, sometimes even to the target group. Therefore the message has to be carefully thought through.”

Organization 47

“Information is generally subjectively interpreted by media.”

Organization 48

“For us media is an instrument for presenting our message at the chosen moment. Media works one day at a time and always has its own aims that have very little in common with our organization. Therefore, it may be a tool and sometimes an opponent but hardly ever an ally. Our subject field contemporary history is like a childhood disease – everyone thinks they know the best. It may seem like it concerns and fascinates everyone but in fact it’s rather a specific issue. We have encountered very few journalists who have the needed expertise, broad-mindedness, and

generalization skills for covering our subject. They are usually quickly promoted or they leave for other fields of activity. As a result personal contacts with journalists have been frightening regardless of the pervading positive media coverage. Despite all the efforts journalist usually find newsworthiness from statements that actually shouldn't have been said. At first it even created problems. This tendency also applies to journalists from the USA, Finland, Germany and other countries.”

#### Organization 49

“Every word has to be carefully selected, message precise, clearly presented and well-reasoned. Journalists may use all the information given to them during an interview. Therefore, ambivalent thoughts shouldn't be expressed even if it seems like the interview has ended.”

#### Organization 50

“What matters is sincerity and straightforwardness. A news story has to be extraordinary to get any attention at all. Press values negative news stories.”

#### Organization 51

“To prevent the information from changing to its opposite a sense of caution is sensible while interacting with media. It's better to send neutral messages, announcements or articles written by ourselves than leave everything to a journalist. There are positive examples too, of course.”

#### Organization 52

“All too often there are (incompetent) journalists who are not familiar with the topic, and therefore write deficient stories. Luckily this is not a rule of thumb – there are competent people as well who wish to cover the subject accurately.”

#### Organization 53

“Good news doesn't sell if a bigger negative news story or event has conquered media at the same time. For instance, after ‘the Bronze Night’ media showed no interest towards presenting of the country's biggest scholarship. A well known person associated with an event ensures better media coverage.”

#### Organization 54

“Be active and inform local publications of your plans and results.”

#### Organization 55

“Main conclusion: folk culture is not appealing for media.”

#### Organization 56

“Little groups occupied with traditional, profound cultural activities do not get that much attention.”

Organization 57

“Proficiency in interaction with media comes through training, and the skills have to be put into practice. Improving media competency of pupils and teachers is of great importance in [our] school.”

Organization 58

“When there’s enough money and space, everything will be published.”

Organization 62

“Our society’s members have been in contact with media mainly due to frequent publishing of articles covering pharmacy education and research in professional magazines *Eesti Rohuteadlane* and *Apteeker*. Contacts with mainstream media are rare. Experiences with professional media have been positive.”

Organization 64

“It is important to have content-rich news, and to know the right reporters who cover the topic.”

Organization 65

“We have to be moderate while interacting with media”

Organization 68

“Articles should always be read over before print in order to guarantee your own contentment as well as avoid later conflicts. Journalists may occasionally be very creative.”

Organization 69

“Becoming newsworthy is difficult, almost impossible. Reaching consistency requires resources.”

Organization 70

“Show initiative and come forth; information needs to be written/presented in an attractive way.”

Organization 71

“Have faith but check the facts over (as the things that might be self-explanatory to you may not be so for the journalist).

Journalists are generally positive and kind-hearted.”

Organization 72

“Mainly that our work doesn’t really interest them as we are rather developing the environment than solving specific and sexy problems or clearing out consequences.”

Organization 73

“Message needs to be simple with clearly stated public interest.”