



**THE MISSION TO FORM
“THE STRATEGIC WHO-S”:
EPF AS MEDIA AND A NEXT
GENERATION MEDIA MODEL**

In 2010, when EPF began its first large media program, in partnership with Media Initiatives Center (MIC, then called Internews Armenia) and funding from USAID, professor Davit Hovhannisyanyan¹ led a creative game² where one of the groups was called “I am a newspaper”. Many years have gone by since then, but this thinking continues, reflected by the slogan “People are the media” used by the very important resource media.am created by MIC. This is not just the continuation of Marshall McLuhan’s thinking, it is also an admission of the fact that the information and internet revolution in the world is irreversible, and this is the most important event in human development since Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press.

The internet revolution changed everything, including the proportion of impact attributable to previous means of mass communication (newspapers, radio, television) and the new ones in existence today. This is the basis for the strategic planning of media programs at EPF.

The media is no longer an authority from whose words you cannot escape, which pursues people 24/7 like an Orwellian “Big Brother”, dictating its “sole truth” without any options for feedback.

The media is turning into citizen support, a real means of communication, supportive and congruent, and the professional and citizen media, being radically different from each other, are complementary through their values-based approaches and missions.

Considering that we work in these programs with such organizations as MIC, Yerevan Press Club (YPC) and others, that have laid the foundation for the development of the media sphere in independent Armenia starting from the first Law on Mass Media (1991), EPF and its partners focus on issues that address

- the simple fact that “each citizen is a potential or actual media source”

1. Hy.wikipedia.org. (2019). *Davit Hovhannisyanyan, Orientalist*. [online, Armenian] Available at: <https://bit.ly/2WslcyR> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019]

2. Gtergab.com (2010). *The Information World: A Group Report, December 2010 - Nouvelle Observatoire Kreatiff 3*. [online] Gtergab.com. Available at: <https://gtergab.com/en/news/projects/the-information-world-a-group-report/110/> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

- the fact that traditional media must quickly adapt and change in order to remain competitive in the era of the internet revolution, and
- the “EPF is media and the media is EPF” approach.

This is the reason why EPF has traditionally been working in the following three areas since 2010 –

- a. developing citizen media activities (“I am the media”),
- b. supporting other professional media programs that would not have been implemented otherwise,
- c. to be a source of media on the one hand and, on the other, to make the media in Armenia strong and capable “like EPF”, from an organizational point of view.

A. “I am the media”

With the support of its partners in the marzes, EPF has developed a unique network – the **Infotun** system³. These structures help citizens, particularly the youth, become media sources, develop their skills of performing meaningful work online and in social media, learn media literacy and critical thinking, use their citizen media activities to influence a more “bottom up” approach to their local self-governance, address human rights and transparency issues, as well as bring people together to implement important, positive reforms.

The Infotun system is complemented by the **Mardamej** annual Social Innovation Camp⁴, where young people learn, via a special technique, being more creative and innovative, and develop innovative ideas to address the needs of their communities, which are then supported and turned into reality⁵.

This system is reinforced by annual sessions of the **Critical Thinking School**⁶, through which around forty young people from all over Armenia and Artsakh participate in active discussions and learn to discern information from fake over three days in Yerevan. Various types of schools are also organized in the Infotuns in the marzes. EPF is one of the pioneers of critical thinking development in Armenia – it has created several videos⁷ and

3. Epfarmeria.am. (2005). *Infotun Telecommunication Centers (2005-2009) / EPF*. [online] Available at: <https://epfarmeria.am/project/Infotun-Telecommunication-Centers> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

4. EPF YouTube channel. (2019). *Mardamej 2019*. [online] Available at: <https://youtu.be/nwdm0Jg3Bns> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

5. See details and examples in the text on “Urban development” Epfarmeria.am (2019). *Urban Planning and Development*. [online, Armenian] Available at: <https://epfarmeria.am/document/urban-planning-and-development> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

6. EPF YouTube channel. (2019). *Critical Thinking School* [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vbp6l5Zqa5A&t=1s> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

7. EPF YouTube channel. (2016). *Critical thinking: Theories. Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan* [online, Armenian] Available at: <https://youtu.be/EhfkeITgcGO> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019]., YouTube. (2016). Introduction to critical thinking of texts. Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan [online, Armenian] Available at: <https://youtu.be/i6ADipZCcqW> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

recently published one important booklet⁸ on this topic.

This school is closely related to another educational initiative of the EPF cross-border programs, the ***Conflict Transformation School***⁹: both formats are dedicated to teaching young people how to overcome stereotypes and discuss issues considered taboo, to separate the true from the false and to develop defenses and tools against the aggressive trolls common in this “post truth” era, and against campaigns of archaic and retrograde (regressive) thinking¹⁰ that aim to stop human development and progress. In order to do this, it is necessary also for the Infotun beneficiaries to develop a value system that is clear but not primitive¹¹, because values form the fundamental basis for orientation and decision making in life.

It is rewarding to see that the leaders of the Infotun movement and the beneficiaries of the EPF “I am the media” direction and its non-formal education strategy have become “resource people” and outcome multipliers, taking on the education of more and more networks with the same values-based and professional approach.

B. Supporting what would not have been implemented otherwise

The other part of EPF’s work, in close partnership with MIC and usually with funding from USAID, consists of support to professional media. MIC and EPF pursue several objectives on this front as well –

- a. Allow the professional media to use new technologies and genres,
- b. Reduce or eliminate the gap between the traditional media and people who develop media such as the beneficiaries of the “I am the media” direction,
- c. Strengthen the impact of the most important and innovative products of the professional media by exposing them to audiences that might otherwise not be aware of them.

The latest multimedia genres, fact checking, investigative journalism, the data revolution – these are all topics that MIC and EPF address in their media support programs.

An example of innovation is the series of debates that were broadcast by H1 before the December 2018 parliamentary elections.¹²

8. Epfarmeria.am. (2019). *Critical Thinking: Logical Fallacies and Misleading Rhetorical Tricks* | EPF. [online, Armenian] Available at: <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/document/Logical-Fallacies-and-Misleading-Rhetorical-Tricks-Critical-Thinking> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

9. Epfarmeria.am. (2017). *Conflict Transformation School. Towards a New Generation of Peacebuilders* | EPF. [online] Available at: <https://epfarmeria.am/document/CTS-infoleaflet> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

10. EPF YouTube channel. (2019). Archaic Thinking: Part 1. Vision and objective – a necessary part of critical thinking [online, Armenian] Available at: <https://youtu.be/JsZ6JPrwMyQ> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019], YouTube. (2019). Archaic Thinking: Part 2 [online, Armenian] Available at: <https://youtu.be/jeXR1PWlp8g> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

11. Boon TV (2018). Our values | Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan | :Boon TV. [online, Armenian] Boon.am. Available at: <https://boon.am/values/> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019]., Epfarmeria.am. (2017). The issue of defining art, culture, civilization, value (Jam Session 27) | EPF. [online] Available at: <https://epfarmeria.am/hy/video/art-culture-civilization-lecture> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

12. See, for example: 1tv.am. (2018). *Election debate: Education, science, culture (My Step, RPA, Bright Armenia, Rule of Law Party)*, [online, Armenian] Available at: <https://bit.ly/2o2RNku> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

Tigran Paskevichyan's multimedia *GALLERY Textile* "essay"¹³ was a new step in using the potential of this genre in order to tell the Leninakan Textile Factory's story.

The database developed by *Hetq.am* of assets and financial resources owned by state officials¹⁴ heralds a new level of transparency.

C. "EPF is media and the media is EPF"

EPF is not media from the professional point of view, but one thing is already clear today – any organization or even individual that wants to influence society must also be a media source. For that reason, EPF—while conscious of the fact that most of its products will remain at the level of "civil media"—has been producing its own media material for several years, such as the Jam Session series¹⁵, presenting such issues as critical thinking, peace-building, civil society development, conspiracy theories, archaic thinking, Armenia in the 20th century and many more. This is one of the main methodological principles of EPF – every person or organization can be a teacher if they can do something well. They must learn to share their knowledge and start doing so. It would, naturally, be strange for our organization to educate people in an area where we do not exist.

EPF's other mission, particularly related to the professional media, is the guarantee of quality from the point of view of the consumer, i.e. to teach the professional media to consider their product in its final version from the point of view of the consumer and to change it, to improve its quality in order to make it better suited for the consumer, before it is released.

This is also one of the methodological principles of EPF. It is a basis of our peacebuilding work ("put yourself in the other's shoes") and educational methods, where we do not apply "top down" or "authoritarian" methods, but rather use a participatory and interactive approach, eliciting knowledge and creativity from "within" the beneficiaries and helping them systematize and organize their pre-existing knowledge. In doing so, EPF is as much in the role of learner from the beneficiaries as the teacher, and vice versa.

There is still a lot of work to do both in the area of sector policy as well as by way of institutional investment in media literacy and critical thinking. And, finally, we understand well that formal and non-formal education as well as public awareness raising are constant needs.

But several important steps have been taken and these are ongoing. Beneficiaries are gradually learning to capitalize what they have been given and to become, in turn, the pioneers and leaders of these approaches, i.e. they are becoming "**Strategic Who-s**" – individuals and structures that are implementing successful initiatives aiming at development and progress.

13. GALLERY TEXTILE. (2019). 'GALLERY TEXTILE' by Tigran Paskevichyan. [online, Armenian] Available at: <https://readymag.com/u49594707/1274026/> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

14. Data.hetq.am. (2019). <https://data.hetq.am/en/> | Database of Officials' Property. [online] Available at: <https://data.hetq.am/en/> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].

15. Epfarmeria.am. (2019). *Jam Session | EPF*. [online] Available at: <https://epfarmeria.am/Jam-Session> [Accessed 30 Sep. 2019].