Community Broadcasting – Country Case Studies

Austria

Community broadcasting in Austria is recognized, legalized, and supported by law. Thousands of Austrian citizens devote their time and energy as volunteer participants in 14 radio and three television community broadcasting organizations. These organizations are regulated and funded by government in a cooperative and collaborative environment. The policy that enables the effectiveness and sustainability of community broadcasting in Austria was developed with substantial contributions from scholars, advocates and leaders in the sector. But the road travelled to arrive at this point was long and difficult.

Media Landscape

Mass media broadcasting in Austria throughout the 20th century is largely the history of Österreicher Rundfunk (ÖRF), the state-run radio and television monopoly. The radio services that became the structure, mandate and programming of ÖRF originated in the 1920s, and evolved as a component of the changing Austrian society (Frank 2003). The identity of ÖRF and its monopoly of terrestrial radio and television frequencies, without competition from commercial or community broadcasters, was established in 1957 and affirmed by legislation again in 1985[1]. That changed in 1993, when the European Court of Human Rights, in an action brought by Austrian alternative media activists, examined the public monopoly on broadcasting. The court, in the case of Informationsverein Lentia and Radio Agora, found violations of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights[2]. The court ruled that the interferences which the ÖRF monopoly had caused the applicants were "not necessary in a democratic society" (Council of Europe 2007, 62). The verdict forced open the radio airwaves to private broadcasters, and subsequently led to the 1995 Austria Regional Radio Act[3], which finally broke the ÖRF monopoly and fundamentally changed the public broadcaster.

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[1] The full list of legislation and guidelines enacted pertaining to Österreicher Rundfunk is here: https://www.rtr.at/de/m/ORFG.

[2] Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights can be accessed here: http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf.

[3] The 1995 Ausria Regionla Radio Act is described in detail here: http://merlin.obs.coe.int/iris/1996/9/article22.en.html.

In television, several court rulings and legislative actions at both the European and Austrian levels, coupled with new digital distribution platforms, opened the spectrum to private broadcasters in the 2000s. Concurrently, ÖRF itself went through a structural change resulting from the 2001 Audiovisual Law[4] that reorganized the institution as an independent, semi-autonomous entity, legally separate from the government. Among the reforms, ÖRF was now charged with offering programming that: "serves the general public with special consideration of ethnic minorities" (Thiele 2009, 253). Funding of ÖRF operations has recently come under increased scrutiny for its ability to effectively deliver on its mandate within the prescribed financial budgets. Nevertheless, ÖRF radio and television today are generally considered legitimate and independent public service broadcasters with both national and regional outputs garnering significant shares of audience, though somewhat less than earlier years due to competition from the commercial and community sectors (Peissl 2013).

Community Radio

The community radio sector, known as "Freie Radios", originated in the Second Republic's monopolistic media environment of the 1970s, when unlicensed pirate radios in Vienna, Linz, Klagenfurt, and elsewhere in Austria were established as non-conforming illegal enterprises. Through the 1980s, they grew along with social movements outside of the mainstream to become important components of the alternative political and cultural scene. Ironically, despite their counter-public identities, some of these pirate radios were receiving government arts and culture funding for their activities (Peissl 2013). The 1990s saw continued growth of illegal pirate operations, but also brought increased enforcement by the regulator, as dozens of transmitters were seized and substantial financial penalties assessed.

The political activities of community broadcasting activists in collaboration with the Green Party and Social Democrats were also laying the foundation for a new legal private radio sector with access to the restricted FM radio frequencies. Even before the legalization of the sector and the establishment of radios, the association of the free radios was established 1993. The Verband Freier Radios Österreich (VFRÖ) was founded to provide leadership for the community radio sector through interventions in policy discourse (Wahl 2013). It still operates today, supporting the effective and sustainable operation of member radios with capacity-building initiatives, and the charter of the organization guides the sector with a set of principles which govern the participants and organizational members (VFRÖ 2015).

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[4] The 2001 Audiovisual law: Bundeskanzleramt Rechtsinformationssytems "Bundesrecht Konsolidiert: Gesamte Rechtsvorschrift für Fernseh-Exklusivrechtegesetz" is available here:
https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20001413.

The Regional Radio Act of 1995 was amended in 1997 with new provisions creating both regional and local radio services, allotting 42 local frequencies from more than 300 applications (Haller 1996). From that allotment eight new not-for-profit radios were granted licenses in 1998, and the community broadcasting sector of Austria was legally established (Hirner 2003). After 2002, several educational channels were re-licensed as community radios including Radio Helsinki in Graz, and Campus/City Radio in St. Pölten. Further development of the sector yielded the licensing of Radio Freistadt in 2003, Radio B138 in Kirchdorf an der Krems in 2008, and Radio Oberpullendorf in 2009, bringing the total to 14 community radios in Austria (Tremetzberger 2016).

The collaboration among legislators, regulators and practitioners, which began during the formation of the community radio sector in the 1990s, was reaffirmed after a difficult decade in the 2000s as insufficient funding mechanisms threatened its sustainability. The various stakeholders worked together to formulate new policy initiatives designed to set community radio on a path of effectiveness and sustainability (Peissl 2015). As a result, many of the guiding elements from the VFRÖ charter were used in developing new recognition and funding guidelines for non-commercial broadcasting, established in 2009 by the Rundfunk und Telekom Regulierungs GmbH (RTR). That new policy initiative created the "Fonds zur Förderung des nichtkommerziellen Rundfunks"[5] (Fund for Non-Commercial Broadcasting), which diverts a portion of the broadcasting user fees to community radio and television. To manage and control this funding program, the RTR established a set of guidelines for applicants in the "Fonds zur Forderung des Nichtkommmerzialen Rundfunks Richtilien" (Funding Guidelines for Non-Commercial Broadcasters)[6]. Under these guidelines, annual proposals by the individual radios and televisions are submitted to the media regulator for review, and roughly €2 million per year is competitively granted over and above a minimum standard amount for every qualifying applicant (Altendorf 2014). Although a high degree of dependence on government funding is an ongoing concern of the stakeholders, government support continues to assure the relative financial sustainability of the sector.

As a result of their shared history, Austrian community radios are very similar in their characteristics. The organizations that comprise the Austrian community radio landscape are

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[5] A description of the Austrian fund for non-commercial broadcasting can be seen here: https://www.rtr.at/de/foe/NKRF_Fonds.

[6] The guidelines for the Austrian non-commercial broadcast funding are here: https://www.rtr.at/en/foe/RichtlinienNKRF_Fonds/NKRF_Richtlinien_20150930.pdf.

generally mixed-model broadcasters that cover a local geographic area, aspiring to serve the communities identified within their geographic reach. Thus, they typically feature a wide range of programs about social, cultural, and political subjects important to the local community, produced by individuals and teams of mostly volunteer participants. These volunteers are tasked by organizational charters and regulatory guidelines to observe and promote the values and philosophies of community broadcasting, both in the programs they offer, and within the organizations they operate.

Because the Austrian technological model for community radio deploys citywide standard FM broadcast coverage areas, the largest cities in Austria predictably also have the largest radios in terms of volunteers, staff and subsidies. In Vienna, Radio Orange is an iconic institution among the diverse population, with more than 500 participant producers making programs in more than 15 languages (Moser 2013). Radio FRO in Linz and RadioFabrik in Salzburg are also large organizations with hundreds of volunteer participants from a diverse number of communities (Wahl 2013). A second tier of free radios in smaller cities and towns is highlighted by the successful organizations of Radio Helsinki in Graz, Radio Salzkammergut in Bad Ischl, Radio Agora in Klagenfurt, and Freirad Radio in Innsbruck, all of which are estimated to have more than 50 volunteer participants each. The balance of the sector is comprised of local radios usually with fewer than 50 volunteers serving smaller towns across the country (see figure 9), from Radio Proton in Dornbirn in the west, to Radio Freistadt in the north, to Radio Ypsilon in Hollabrunn in the east[7]. In terms of enabling policy, organizational development, volunteer participation, and service to diverse communities, the Austrian community radio sector can be seen as among the most successful in Europe (CMFE 2011).

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[7] Austrian activist and practioner Alf Altendorf reports these numbers are highly problematic: the radios publish their user numbers following different principles, such as active users, members of organisations (if any), number of programes and so on. For example, Radiofabrik (2016) has 320 active producers, 220 members, 160 programes.
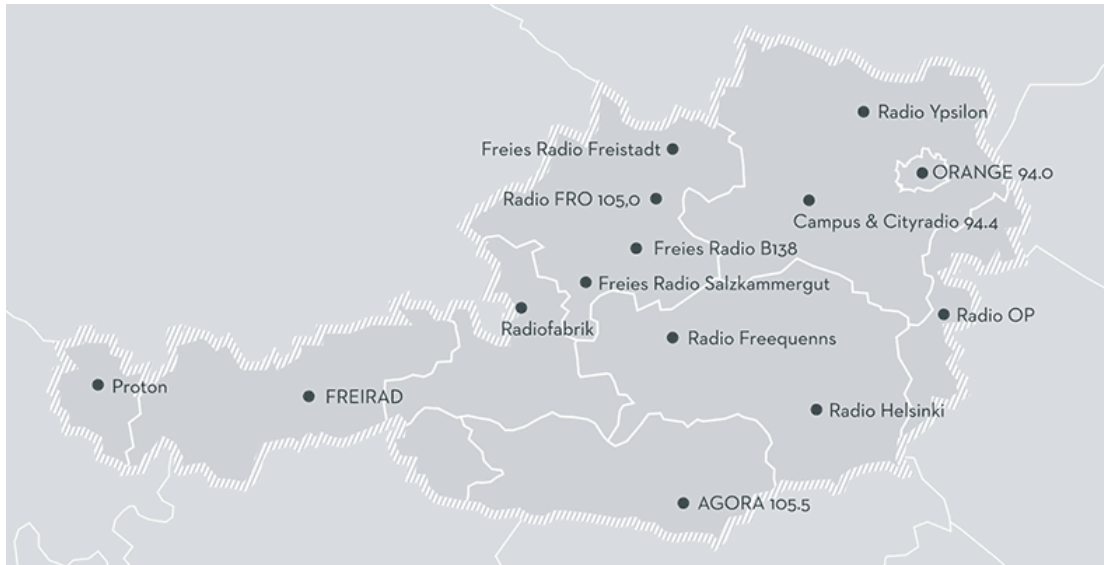
Figure 9. Map of Community Radios in Austria. VFRÖ 2015

Community Television

The success of the community radio sector also helped spawn the community television sector in Austria, as activists from these radios substantially contributed to establishing new community televisions in Austria (Tremetzberger 2014). The ÖRF television monopoly ended in 2001 when the Federal ÖRF Television Act opened up the television delivery spectrum to private operators[8]. This development led to the establishment of a number of regional and local TV commercial channels on terrestrial and cable platforms, as well as numerous popular foreign-based commercial channels (Trappel 2007). It also provided the first opportunity for establishment of a legal non-commercial community television sector.

In Austria, similar to neighboring Germany, despite the ÖRF monopoly, the community television ideal did manifest itself in some small project initiatives emanating from academia and civil society as far back as the 1970s and 1980s. The Styrian Academy and the City of Graz supported a non-profit organization under the name: "Workers Making Television" that produced videos from 1976-1983 with the aim of "promoting political and cultural education, school and extracurricular elementary and adult education, especially by means of the implementation of video work " (Schutz, *et al* 2002, 66). "Local Television Burgenland" was launched in 1976 with support from the regional government culture ministry and was followed

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[8] The Federal ÖRF Act can be seen here: https://www.rtr.at/en/m/ORFG.

by "Local Television Styria" which grew to locations in four cities in the region. These video services lacked access to broadcast spectrum, were project-based, and lasted only a few years.

Ironically, although Austrian community television as a genuine sector was not established until 2005, the 1970s video pioneers of Austria were seen to be an inspirational model in the much earlier establishment of open-channels in Germany (Schutz *et al* 2002). The first alternative television in Vienna was initially realized in the founding of "True Image Vision", a commercially-funded project offering two hours of programming per day, distributed on the local cable system from 1999-2001 (Stachel 2002). Though this commercial model of an alternative channel proved unsuccessful, several participants in the venture, including Amina Handke and Alf Altendorf, later went on to help establish the community channel TV Okto in Vienna, and subsequently FS-1 television in Salzburg (Bauer 2013).

In the latter half of the 1990s and into the 2000s, the drive to establish a true alternative community television in Vienna was supported by a wide range of activists from civil society (Alf Altendorf, Barbara Eppensteiner), academia (Thomas Bauer, Johannes Schutz), politics (Christoph Chorherr, Marie Ringler), and community radio (Fiona Steinert, Thomas Thurnher). The 2002 report for the city of Vienna: "Studie zur praktischen Umsetzung des offenen Fernsehkanals Wien" proposed the establishment of Okto TV, citing the success of community channels in the Netherlands, Australia, and Germany, but recommending an "independent" model with autonomous ownership and control (Schutz, *et al* 2002). Led by a coalition of political parties, the city council in 2003 approved a measure authorizing annual funding for the new Vienna community television channel of approximately one million euros (Bauer 2016). Subsequent organizational development saw the formation of a board of directors led by Thomas Bauer, and a management team headed by Christian Jungwirth. They incorporated the student television at the University of Vienna into the technical development of studios and transmission capacities, resulting in the launch of Okto TV in 2005 on channel 8 of the Vienna cable television system. Okto TV has grown incrementally in the more than ten years since its founding, eventually moving into new studios and offices which now accommodate a team of salaried employees and more than 500 volunteer participants comprising 150 production groups (Jungwirth 2016a). Annual funding from the City of Vienna continues apace, as do grants from the RTR Fund for Non-Commercial Broadcasting and fees for services, assuring at least on annual basis, the sustainability of the channel.

An outgrowth from the successful ARS Electronica Festival[9] in Linz, DORF TV was conceptualized in 2005 by a group of artists and media activists including Otto Tremetzberger, Gabrielle

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[9] More information about the ARS festival is here: http://www.aec.at/festival/en/.

Kepplinger and Georg Ritter as an interactive open access TV channel. The concept was based upon experiences of Stadtwerkstatt TV[10] and the Austrian community radios to be "TV as an instrument of art" (Tremetzberger 2005). A 2008 funding and development program supported the initiative, and the first broadcasts took place via digital video broadcast (DVB) in 2010. After repeated refusals of the Linz cable system operator to offer access, the group filed a "must carry" complaint with the Austrian media authority in 2013, and the cable system was ordered to carry DORF's programs. The channel is supported by shareholding organizational scheme that supplements local, regional and national government funding, and includes more than 180 registered local arts organizations, as well as more than 800 individuals registered as supporters and/or volunteers. DORF TV is especially noteworthy for its technological development of systems that encourage production of user-generated video via mobile telephones (Tremetzberger 2014).

The development of community television in Salzburg originated with a public proposal by Salzburg´s community radio Radiofabrik in 2009 by managing director Alf Altendorf. In 2010 Markus Weisheitinger-Hermann (IMB – Institute for Media Education Salzburg) joined along with the collaboration of more than 30 local cultural organizations. Together they founded the legal organization "Community TV Salzburg", and in 2011 the group secured a commitment for transmission of a new community television channel via a local digital television service and by the local cable system Kabelnet Salzburg AG. After some delays due to legal and financial concerns, the channel was reorganized as a legal shareholders' entity with local individuals, groups, and institutions co-owning the not-for-profit enterprise. The new shareholding organizational scheme proved effective in generating local private revenue[11], and also secured an annual funding grant of €193,000 from the Non-Commercial Broadcasting Fund of the RTR in 2012 (FS-1 2015). Later that year, the TV was renamed FS-1, and proceeded to launch its video broadcasting service from newly-reconstructed studios and offices in the arts quarter of Salzburg (Altendorf 2016).

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[10] Te original Stadtwerk TV website can be found here: http://www.stwst.at/kunst/stwsttv/stwsttv.htm.

[11] Though not commonly found in community media, shareholder's organizational schemes and similar membership models of funding have also proven successful at Radio Populare in Milan, with more than 10,000 supporting members (CMFE 2015) and community TV Sheffield Live in the UK, which raised 160,000 selling shares for its launch in 2014 (Sheffield Live 2015). One of the world's largest non-profit shareholders' enterprises is the Green Bay Packers Football Club, with over 350,000 shareholders and an estimated value of nearly $2 billion USD (Forbes 2014).

FS-1 provides a 24-hour daily program service supported by more than 50 registered members and 150 active volunteer producers, managed by a small salaried management staff. The organization is sustained financially through the shareholder's scheme and an ongoing combination of private and public support, highlighted by grants from the RTR, city of Salzburg, and Salzburg regional government. FS-1 prioritizes the recruitment and training of youth video producers, many of whom contribute to a robust selection of youth-based programs on the channel.

The three television channels of Austrian community television sector developed in sequential overlapping time frames, beginning in 2005 with OKTO TV in Vienna, followed by the 2010 debut of DORF TV in Linz, and finally in 2013 with FS-1 TV in Salzburg. Each television originated as an independent organism within their local, social, economic, political, and technical environments, and each developed within the governance and funding of the media regulator RTR, complemented by local and regional government support (Tremetzberger 2015).

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