

Community Broadcasting: Country Case Studies

The Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, community broadcasting on terrestrial channels doesn't exist, and is limited to a select few alternative online forms. Legalization, licensing, and support for community broadcasters are the natural steps in the process of development; steps the Czech Republic has yet to take.

Public Service Broadcasting

Public service broadcasting in the Czech Republic consists of Ceska Televize and Cesky Rozhlas, both delivering programs featuring information, opinion and entertainment similar to their Austrian and European counterparts. Operated from their respective headquarters locations in Prague and regional sites, the broadcasting organizations are recognized as legitimate institutions with continuing government support (Krupicka 2014). Since its founding in 1923, the state-run Czechoslovak radio has also earned a degree of iconic status in Czech history for its role during various conflicts, including providing the setting for street battles over Czechoslovak sovereignty in 1945 and 1968. Following the 1989 Velvet Revolution and through the 1993 secession of the Slovak Republic, these broadcasters transformed from state-run censored institutions to models of public service broadcasting operating in a new democratic, free-market environment (Culik 2001).

In the generation that followed, Cesky Rozhlas and Ceska Televize through their national coverage and regional/local extensions, seem to have incrementally regained their legitimacy.¹ By international standards, Cesky Rozhlas and Ceska Televize provide a comparatively small interactive discourse on political issues, but this may be a merely a reflection of the overall lack of political participation on behalf of Czech society as a whole. Local insertion of news, information and entertainment is part of their offerings; the degree of localism limited by time allotted, resources devoted, and the perception of need.

Diversity and inclusion have been subjects of discussion among lawmakers and regulators with regards to broadcasting in the Czech Republic. Citing European Union (EU) mandates for the

1 The Czech radio Annual Report 1998 can be accessed at: <http://media.rozhlas.cz/binary/00294547.pdf>.

protection and inclusion of marginalized groups in societal institutions, government officials proclaimed their intentions to integrate minorities into Czech public service broadcasting (Romea 2007). The 2001 Act on Radio and Television Broadcasting (RRTV 2001) encoded these intentions into law, requiring every broadcast licensee to contribute to the development of national and ethnic minorities. Monika Metykova notes public service broadcasters' responsibility to democracy and diversity: *"There are many references in legislation to diversity – public service broadcasters should cater for the needs of diverse groups such as ethnic minorities, children, the deaf and blind etc. The obligation includes the provision of programs in minority languages."* (2006, 107). Some programs which meet these responsibilities are shown on the Czech public service broadcasting platforms, but in a very small percentage, relative to the overall output. For example, Cesky Rozhlas serves the Romani minority with a regular Roma-based show called *"O Roma vakeren"* which was awarded the 2013 "Roma Spirit" award.²

Funding for Czech public service broadcasting is provided by the radio and television user fee charged to households, supplemented by a small percentage of revenue from advertising. Czech public service broadcasting has strived to be an accepted and trusted source of news, information, and entertainment, despite weathering several well-publicized conflicts concerning government interference and control (BBC 2001). These incidents seemingly compromised their role as an important voice of democratic pluralism, and as a watchdog of powerful public and private interests. Nevertheless, Cesky Rozhlas and Ceska Televize currently can be viewed as legitimate institutions fulfilling their mandate as national public service radio and television providers in a bipolar public/commercial broadcasting environment (Metykova 2006).

Commercial Broadcasting

Since the political changes of 1989, the private commercial radio and television operators of the Czech Republic have emerged ostensibly as the independent media component in a developing open and pluralistic society. In the formative stages of the new democratic political system, the politicians, regulators, and license applicators/holders were enthusiastic in their embrace of western commercial broadcasting models. The initial Czech model in the early 1990s was built to most resemble the Anglo-American paradigm establishing a bipolar system of strong commercial operators, balanced by a public service broadcaster supported primarily by

2 For details see the report "Cenu Roma Spirit získala i vedoucí romského vysílání Českého rozhlasu" at: http://www.rozhlas.cz/radiozurnal/zpravy/_zprava/cenu-roma-spirit-ziskala-i-vedouci-romskeho-vysilani-ceskeho-rozhlasu--1431456.

government funding (Smid, Kaplan and Trager 1996). This model, with modifications along the way, is generally still in place.

The commercial broadcasters are both national and local via their networks of program distribution and advertising sales, delivering mostly entertainment output with limited news and information. While subject to licensing and regulation activities of the media regulator Rada pro Rozhlasove a Televizni Vysilani (RRTV), they are truly independent and mostly immune to undue government interference in their news coverage and programs. In addition, the broadcasters' political influence and ability to seek successful redress in the courts to overturn decisions by the regulator has minimized most regulatory issues. National radio stations Frequency 1, Impulse, and Europe 2, and televisions Nova and Prima combine with local stations serving all major regions and cities. They effectively cover the country with predictable, commercially viable programming similar to their European and American counterparts. The market-based paradigm continues to deliver substantial profits from media properties, led by TV Nova, the most profitable commercial television in Central Europe.³

Czech commercial broadcasting is expected to be a viable source for “independent” news and information for Czech citizens, and provide an effective counterbalance to output from the state-controlled public service broadcasters. Commercial stations are licensed to serve local communities and in the process should serve those local communities with important local news, information and culturally relevant or appropriate programs. Recent consolidations of ownership in the Czech commercial broadcasting sector have resulted in the centralization of programming, and in a subsequent reduction in locally focused and locally originated programming. Continuing consolidation also makes acquisition by foreign ownership easier and perhaps more likely as already American, French, Irish and German operators have significant presence in the national stations and national sales networks. In addition, the media scholar Vaclav Stetka (2013) identifies a new trend of media consolidation by wealthy Czech oligarchs in search of new platforms of political power, likely to further marginalize civil society and local communities.

Community Broadcasting

In the Czech Republic, many alternative interests and perspectives are served by print publication of books, magazines, newsletters and brochures. Some alternative cinema can be found in major cities such as Prague and Brno and Zlin. Neighborhood live-production theaters are a regular fixture across the Czech landscape, serving their communities as a non-profit

3 Go to Central European Media Enterprises Operations: TV Nova for more details at: <http://www.cetv-net.com/en/operations/nova-tv-cr.shtml>.

source for access, community development, and cultural representation. The situation with terrestrial broadcasting is virtually the opposite. While a few small cable-access television production studios generate local programming, their footprint is minuscule in relation to the powerful public service and commercial television broadcasters on terrestrial and cable delivery platforms. Some online radios and televisions offer student radio (Radio R, Radio Up Air) (see Figure 12), alternative radio (Radio Streetculture), and minority-based programs (iRoma Radio). Currently, no recognized community broadcasting exists on any Czech terrestrial frequency.

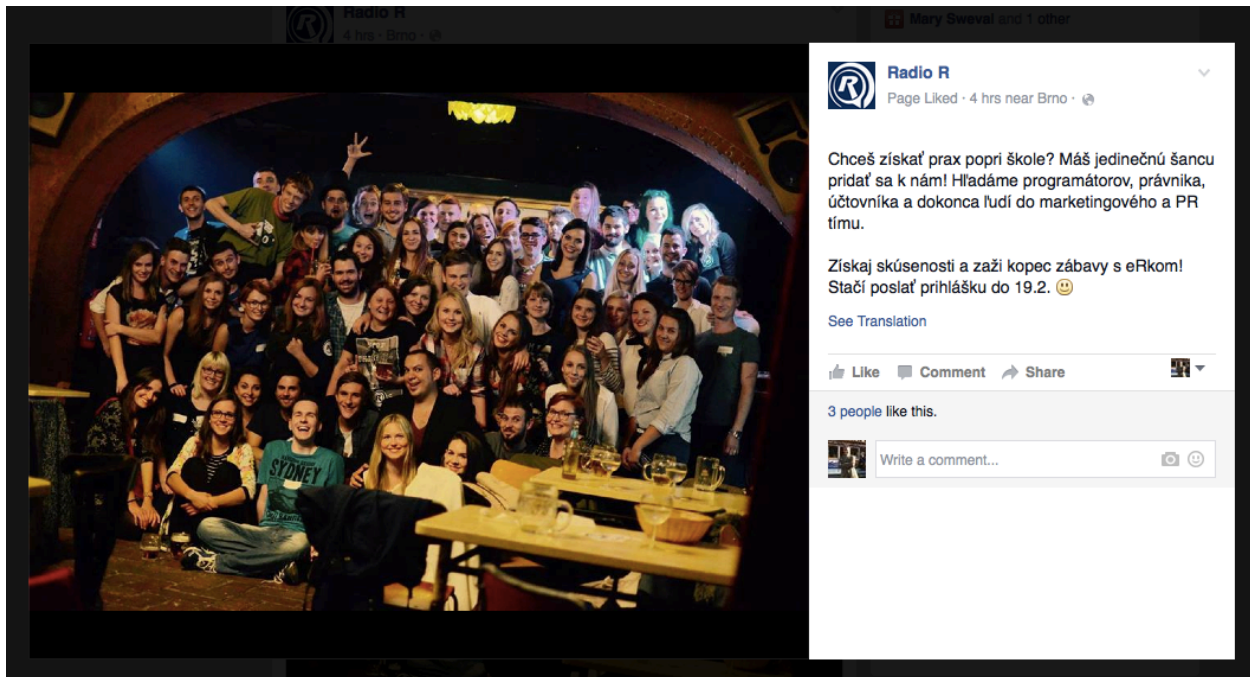


Figure 12: Facebook page of participants at Radio R in Brno, Czech Republic

One interesting aspect of the Czech case has been the role of the media regulator RRTV attempting to find ways to implement their mandates for inclusion and diversity in programming. The RRTV has, through its regulatory powers, sought to intervene in several procedural processes in the interest of carrying out those requirements. In the licensing process for any broadcaster, the RRTV first solicits programming proposals with a general guideline, then approves specific proposals by candidates, often with little or no changes or amendments. This process has enabled it to develop opportunities for creating broadcasters who will deploy programs with the desired attributes of alternativism and diversity.

An early example of this commitment can be seen in the case of Radio 1 in Prague. It was originally established started by students in the 1980s as the illegal Radio Stalin, so named due to its location under the iconic statue of Josef Stalin on the Letna Plain. After the Velvet

Revolution, it was licensed in 1991 as Radio 1, the first legal commercial radio in the Czech Republic (Radio1 2015). Radio 1 has very specific requirements that stipulate it remains alternative to the mainstream by broadcasting only content deemed alternative, new and artistic. Should the radio violate the mandate by programming more popular commercial fare, it would be subject to sanctions from the media regulator. This avant-garde music format proved popular among successive generations of young listeners⁴ as Radio 1 staked out a sustainable position in the competitive Prague radio market, later bolstered by the influx of expertise in management and advertising sales by its foreign ownership. Today it maintains that position as a relatively successful legal alternative commercial broadcaster, seemingly an endorsement of the regulator's use of the licensing process to implement alternativism in the broadcast spectrum.

The narrative of the now defunct Radio Student in Brno offers another interesting example of the media regulator's commitment to the values of diversity and alternativism. The case illustrates the importance of enacting enabling legislation to assure the opportunity for success of alternative broadcasting organizations. Radio Student won the 2005 tender for a new radio in Brno targeting the large student population, and was awarded the license to broadcast on 107 FM frequency. In awarding the license, the RRTV endorsed the licensee's proposed commitment to multilingual, diverse, and alternative programming. Radio Student owner Petr Holecek promised: *"Student radio program will have a different format than commercial radio...should broadcast in different program blocks twenty four hours a day...will be broadcast in foreign languages...devoted to minorities of various types and will focus on xenophobic sentiments in our society"* (Ondruskova 2004, 1). These attributes of the program are typical components of the community broadcasting ethos, and it seemed as if the RRTV had accomplished its goal of establishing an alternative radio for Brno.

Although designed and approved as an alternative to the mainstream, Radio Student was still a commercial radio however, completely reliant on the selling of advertising spots for its revenue, and the owners soon realized the harsh realities of the competitive commercial radio market. Alternative programming is not inherently designed to be commercially viable, so the radio failed to attract enough listeners to make an impact in the audience surveys, or the advertising market. That defect, coupled with the owners' backgrounds in academia and culture, not business, put them at a serious disadvantage against the skill and experience of their competitors in the highly developed commercial broadcasting industry. After a short 2-year existence, the station, with the approval of RRTV, was sold to a competitor and converted to a

4 For the complete survey report on the report, see: <http://apsv.netgate.cz/data/vsichni%201.4.%20-%2030.9.2013.pdf>.

commercially viable format which jettisoned all the alternative and diverse aspects of the original.⁵ In this case the media regulator was unable to fulfill its goal of implementing the mandates of alternativism and diversity by intervention in the licensing process. Inserting a true community-type alternative broadcaster into the commercial market without adequate support was a failure.

Another “hybrid” type terrestrial radio is the religious broadcaster Radio Proglas, which transmits programs by and about the Catholic Church on frequencies located throughout the Czech Republic. Although a registered charity under Czech law, the radio is organized as a commercial enterprise in order to qualify for the terrestrial licenses under Czech broadcasting regulation. Questions of whether the institutional form of religious broadcasting is actually a community medium is an ongoing debate among international stakeholders (Doliwa 2015). Attributes such as open access, alternative programs, social and cultural representation are conspicuously absent from this model, and would disqualify it as a true form of community broadcasting to many observers.

In the Czech Republic, the FM band is limited by geography to prevent interference with neighboring systems. It is already largely allocated to the bipolar operators of public service and commercial stations, leaving little opportunity for further expansion to accommodate any aspiring community radio stations. In addition, the current regulatory system requires potential licensees to conduct all necessary technological feasibility research themselves, with their own financing. This further increases the difficulty and raises the bar for a community organization without prior broadcasting expertise and/or funding to obtain a license. With the possible switchover to digital terrestrial technology (O’Neill 2010), more frequencies could be available to potential new radio operators, but community broadcasters may not even be considered as a candidate for this spectrum access. If the current Czech media power paradigm holds true to form, the large public broadcaster Cesky Rozhlas, and the politically powerful commercial sector could dominate the spectrum allocation process. For now, alternative broadcasting in the Czech Republic is denied access to the primary terrestrial delivery systems, struggling for legitimacy and sustainability, limited to online distribution for their programs.

Community Broadcasting Policy Development

Community broadcasting development in the Czech Republic, as a component of the larger Central /Eastern European broadcasting landscape, is also of particular interest to European community broadcasting advocates. The Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE), leaders in

5 For more details about the history of Radio Student, see Marketing & Media at: <http://mam.ihned.cz/c1-61769050-puvodni-radio-student-se-po-vstupu-strategickeho-partnera-zmenilo-na-free-radio>.

policy interventions at government institutions and bodies across Europe, have actively pursued strategies to promote the establishment of community broadcasting in nations of the former communist bloc. The Board of Experts at CMFE⁶, an assembly of advocates, practitioners and scholars, formed the Czech Community Broadcasting Working group in 2009, with the intention to support the establishment of community broadcasting in the Czech Republic. The group facilitated the attendance of several members of the Czech media regulator RRTV at CMFE-sponsored European conferences on community media in Nicosia, Cyprus in 2011 and Salzburg, Austria in 2012 at which they consulted on best practices and strategies for the implementation of community broadcasting. The RRTV then opened a consultation in 2012 on the prospects of developing community broadcasting in the Czech Republic, for which the CMFE experts group provided several interventions (Marketing & Media 2012). The first was a presentation of the processes and benefits of community media from a theoretical perspective authored by the scholar Nico Carpentier (RRTV 2012) which was introduced at a public meeting of the consultation in Telc.

Also provided for the 2012 RRTV consultation was a proposed new community broadcasting policy and plan composed with input from the CMFE Czech working group (see Appendix). The plan follows a step-by-step format for the design, construction, management, funding and control of a community broadcasting sector of radio, television and telecentres. Because every society and media policy is different, it stands to reason that no single policy can be optimal in every environment. The proposed policy text is based on a compilation of best practices taken from existing broadcasting environments, policies and practices from around Europe and the world, combined with several new ideas for effective funding and sustainability.

The proposed policy document opens with a very simple definition of community broadcasting: "not-for-profit audio-visual services provided by and for a local community on terrestrial and wired delivery services". Perhaps most important of these attributes are the delivery platforms, as the lack of access to terrestrial frequencies is a major impediment to the establishment of community broadcasting in the Czech Republic. The next section lists a number of "reasons why" the sector should be established and includes many of the basic philosophies upon which community broadcasting is based in other countries and environments. Important among these are its role in active citizenship, community development, individual development and promoting local culture. One additional role, that of independent media watchdog, could be valuable to the Czech Republic and other states of Central/Eastern Europe that currently lack effective watchdog media in the commercial and public service sectors (Doliwa and Rankovic 2014).

⁶ The CMFE Board of Experts can be seen here: <http://cmfe.eu/?cat=10>.

The section of the plan regarding license eligibility presents a detailed list of requirements for individuals and groups to participate in community broadcasting, including specific language designed to avoid conflicts of interest and co-opting of licenses by outside parties. It also outlines the fulfillment requirements that must be met in order to retain the license, the most important of these are requirements that maintain the primacy of volunteer participants in the broadcasting organization, and that the majority of programs are produced by volunteers from local communities. Sustainability of the sector is supported first by an innovative structural funding scheme that combines national funding from the broadcast user fee combined with funds from local municipalities. That is augmented by project-based funds awarded in competitions by the various national government ministries. Finally, a community media trade association, funded by the national government and member fees, would provide expertise and support to the sector, further assuring its sustainability.

The Proposed Community Broadcasting Policy and Plan for the Czech Republic is intended to provide a template for the process of enacting community broadcasting policy, and establishing a genuine community broadcasting sector in the Czech Republic. In 2014, the Czech Republic Ministry of Culture commissioned a report authored by Jan Krecek (2014) of Charles University to examine the feasibility of establishing a new community broadcasting sector. That document incorporated concepts and features of the CMFE policy proposal, and in 2015, the ministry was considering the inclusion of community broadcasting elements in an upcoming revision of the general media law.

Community Broadcasting Policy & Plan for the Czech Republic

DEFINITION

>Community Broadcasting is not-for-profit, audio-visual services provided by and for a local community on terrestrial and wired delivery systems.

REASONS WHY

- >Inform the community about issues, activities, and events
- >Provide access and participation
- >Strengthen local communities
- >Promote local arts & culture
- >Serve marginalized and underserved groups
- >Provide discourse for civil society and promote active citizenship
- >Independent media watchdog role
- >Improve media literacy
- >Development of employment skills

REQUIREMENTS

- >Not-for-profit social enterprise
- >Local community-based
- >Volunteer supported
- >Open to all voices
- >Sustainable
- >Alternative to the mainstream

LICENSING

>RRTV endorses and implements the "Community Media Sector General Plan" licensing mandates.

Eligibility

- >Not-for-profit civic associations, public benefit corporations, churches, schools (all must have DIC); no individuals
- >Must be transparent & registered for min 1 year; Consortiums are welcome if at least 50% of partner orgs have min 1 year legal registration; min 50% of board members must live in the designated coverage area; Board members must be volunteer
- >No owners, licensees, board members or salaried employees of commercial media, elected officials, or political party officials may be board members or salaried employees.

Application

>Temporary Service License (TSL) - max 60 days; no funding available (CapEx expenditures applicable for re-imbursment under guidelines if full-term license granted); max 2 TSL's per applicant/ year

Fulfillment

- >Standard license: 6 year term, award licenses in open competitions among eligible community non-profit orgs utilizing points system; then open renewal competition with current license holder given points for effective operation;
- >Applicant must submit a standardized "License Applicant General Plan" containing proposed business plan, budget, technical plan, social gain plan, access & participation plan, volunteer plan, and program output plan.
- >License is non-transferable; must be re-allocated by RRTV
- >Licensee must keep a "public file" of relevant information relating to the delivery of their key commitments that must be available for inspection within 2 business days of any written citizens' request
- >Licensee must adhere to the terms and conditions set forth in approved license application
- >Upon repeated, deliberate and/or serious breach of the terms of its license conditions or RRTV codes by licensee, RRTV may impose sanctions including fines, restrictions and/or cancellation of license. The penalty must be appropriate and proportionate to the breach for which it is imposed.
- >Licensee must submit to RRTV a standardized "Annual Licensee General Report" with P&L, balance sheet, public file, technical report, social gain report, participation & access report, volunteer report, updated business plan/budget and tax filing; due according to gov't fiscal year deadlines.

Programming

- >Licensee must maintain a minimum ratio of volunteer hours to paid staff (1 volunteer hour for each 1.000kc of salary)
- >Salaries may not exceed 50% of total expenses
- >The fair and comprehensive journalistic coverage of community activities, concerns and issues.
- >No advertising: including no call to action, specific items, prices, or offers
- >Paid sponsorship announcements maximum 15 seconds length; maximum 8 announcements per hour
- >Clearly distinguish sponsorship from regular program content
- >Minimum 50% of total output must be original content from licensee facilities
- >Maximum 20% of total output from network programs
- >Ensure that reasonable efforts are made to correct substantial errors of fact at the earliest possible opportunity

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- >RRTV endorses and implements the "Community Media Sector General Plan" technical mandates.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >RRTV, and/or external providers to analyze spectrum (analogue and digital), identify available frequencies, and provide access to those frequencies >"Must Carry" rules apply to all platforms >Ceske Komunikace, private tower, multiplex, IP, telephone network and cable systems operators guarantee special non-profit access rates in negotiation with RRTV & CMA >"Platform Neutral" policy applies to all platforms >Allocated frequencies shall fulfill coverage mandates
REGULATORY ROLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >RRTV responsible for the successful deployment of the "Community Media Sector General Plan" >Separate RRTV sections for licensing, technical, funding >No implicit obligation is attached to "structural" funding, and requirements for any management decisions or program output by any government agency (state or local) other than RRTV is prohibited. Agreements related to "project" funding are subject to separate rules and regulations of the appropriate ministries. >Government ministries are responsible for developing and executing project-based funding initiatives which comply with RRTV licensing regulations
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> >RRTV endorses and implements the "Community Media Sector General Plan" funding mandates. >Due to it's important role in civil society, community media could be funded directly from the TV/Radio tax, or from the General Fund. >Both state and local gov't funding is mandated (no option out) upon license approval and subsequent annual endorsement by RRTV. >All structural funding must be in accordance with the approved "Applicant General Plan" <p>Capital Expenditures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Capital Expenditure fund (CapEX) available only at the start of full-term license; licensee submits "License Applicant Capital Expenditure Plan" for approval; one amendment permitted; expires after 18 months; 80% gov't (state & local combined) 20% matching funds required. <p>Operating Expenditures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Operating Expense fund(OpEx) available each year subject to approval of required documentation by RRTV; 80% (state & local combined) 20% match <p>Project funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >Project funding directly from ministries for specially designed projects utilizing CM; 20% match required; application approval/ terms & conditions autonomous to each ministry

COMMUNITY
MEDIA
ASSOCIATION

>Project funding requires separate P&L; no salaries or CapEx; limits on travel spending; volunteer minimums apply; 20% match (donated labor OK); activities report included in Licensee Annual General report

>RRTV endorses and implements the "Community Media Sector General Plan" mandate for the Community Media Association.

>Non-Profit org with volunteer elected board, paid president and staff person.

>Subject to same CapEx/OpEx funding requirements, including 20% match

>Submit "CMA Annual General Report" with P&L, balance sheet, public file, technical report, social gain report, participation & access report, tax filing; due according to gov't fiscal year deadlines

>Responsible for liaison with government and bureaucracies - especially RRTV, participate in media and telecommunications policy discourse, cooperate with other media sectors and stakeholders, promote good practice by providing tools, training, exchange and awards, research important trends in technology and innovation, organize annual congress & conference, communicate information internally and externally, cooperate with community media groups worldwide.

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