

Community Broadcasting: Publics, Participants and Policies

Henry Loeser PhD

Media Theory

Publics

Perhaps because community broadcasting is a relatively new concept, with identifiable structures beginning only in the latter half of the twentieth century, there is a limited amount of theory and applied research on the subject (O'Connor 2004). In fact, a casual survey of some media studies texts would be hard pressed to even find a mention of community media (Demers 2005), much less a substantial investigation of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the body of scientific knowledge regarding to community media is growing. Established media theorists as well as new scholars are taking up the challenge and offering their contributions to the field (Gordon 2009). Though currently limited, some academic institutions are establishing community media courses, curricula, and in some cases bachelor and master degrees of study in the field.¹ Doctoral and post-doctoral research investigating community broadcasting is also adding valuable content to the body of work (Scifo 2012, Doliwa 2015, Peters 2015). In addition, a UNESCO Chair for Community Media has been established.² These rising experts bring enthusiasm and fresh new perspectives to both academic and advocacy initiatives, and in the process inform the discussions central to the sector.

Community media are often described in the context of their attributes and/or functions, for example Melville (2007, 16) describes community broadcasting as being “sustained by the principles of access and participation, volunteerism, diversity, independence and localism”. Numerous scholars have explored the multifaceted link to social movements as an important attribute of community media (Bob 2005, Juris 2008, Bimber 2015). On community radio, Pavarala and Malik (2007, 17) assert: “A community radio or television station may represent a

¹ See the program details of University of Lincoln MA Community Radio at:

<http://www.lincoln.ac.uk/home/course/mhmacrs/>.

² The UNESCO Chair in Community Media is here: <http://ucommedia.in/about-us/vinodpavarala/>.

social group, or any combination of groups, so long as it is 'of, by and for' its constituent groups". South African community broadcasting pioneer Zane Ibrahim from Bush Radio in Cape Town described the phenomenon of community radio as: '90% community and 10% radio' (Korbel and Fogg 2005, 12). His iconic remark reinforces the fundamental and perhaps most important aspect of community broadcasting: the inextricable link to community. Carpentier, Lie and Servaes (2003) suggest that community media is at once both specific and diverse, and these seemingly incongruous attributes contribute to its conceptual elusiveness. In addressing that elusiveness, they categorize community broadcasting environments and organizations according to a matrix of theoretical approaches, and their work has enabled subsequent researchers to examine community media within a participatory context.

In their multi-theoretical approach, Carpentier, et al present a matrix of motivations (see Figure 1) that reflects firstly the source of identity for the broadcaster, and secondly the relational dynamic between the public sphere and civil society. In serving a community, the essentialist symbiotic relationship between community and community broadcaster is credited with validating the legitimacy of the medium, and empowers community members to participate. Community broadcasting in this frame can strengthen the identity of multiple constituent groups and facilitate their agency for effecting social change. The relationist orientation of alternative broadcasting, compared to the mainstream, positions community broadcasters as independent and local, with alternative output and funding sources. With these attributes, community broadcasters supplement mainstream media content, contest preconceived popular representations, and resist dominant paradigms (ibid).

	Media centered	Society centered
Autonomous identity of Community Media (Essentialist)	Serving the community	Part of civil society
Identity of Community Media in relation to other identities (Relationist)	Alternative to the mainstream	Rhizome

Figure 1: Community Media Typologies (Carpentier, Lie and Servaes 2003)

Where alternative media structures exist as a component of civil society, they both reflect and promote their community values internally as an organization, and externally into the societal realm. Further identifying community broadcasting with civil society, the Irish community

media activist Jack Byrne (2006, 34) suggests: “Democratic media can develop a specific strategy to become the voice of this emerging civil society, enlarging this network tendency and linking non-profit organizations for greater awareness and strength”.

Frances Berrigan (1979, 14) defines community media as: “Adaptations of media for use by the community for whatever purpose the community decides”. Kevin Howley (2010, 7) states “While dominant media tend to conceal the interconnected and mutually dependent character of social relations, community media work to reveal this fundamental aspect of human communities”. Media scholars have built upon the descriptions of community to examine the corresponding ethos of community media, but may understate the role of individuals in deliberative democracy and the development of the sector. (Carpentier 2003) suggests that communities are indeed made up of individuals and their agency, which grow like crystals to form a bottom-up structure of groups and organizations in opposition to the traditional forces that dominate commercial and public service mass media in much of the world today.

This rhizome effect describes the society-centered role of community media as a connecting hub combining social groups and interests, both internally and externally. Community media and the communities they serve utilize civil society as the site of their sociopolitical activities, firmly situated between the government and commercial sectors in the standard western democratic model. Through their participation in civil society, individuals and groups exercise their human rights of free expression, assembling in public spaces, and communicating through mass media platforms. This phenomenon is exemplified by the ability of a local community broadcaster to link participants to other sectors and institutions, and is especially valuable to promote the communication, cooperation and collaboration that facilitate the development of effective policies and environments for community broadcasting (Carpentier, Lie and Servaes 2003).

While Harcup (2005, 361) suggests that “definitions of alternative media are not fixed or universally accepted”, community broadcasting is often defined in opposition to the philosophies and functions of mainstream media that comprise the first two sectors of broadcasting. Those functions include propagating mainstream political views, mainstream culture, and mainstream values (Elghul-Bebawi 2009). Public service media are often too closely controlled by political interests, and commercial media carry the burden of profit, leading scholars such as Hollander and Strappers (1992) to suggest that dominant media have compromised their legitimacy as genuine components of a true public sphere, whereas community broadcasters are free from such constraints. Commercial and public service broadcasters offer content comprised of dominant representations designed to attract and serve large homogeneous audiences that serve the interests of commercial corporations, state

government, and power elites (Taghizadeh 2012). Many commercial operators do exist in the smaller, local spaces of terrestrial broadcasting, however the consolidation of commercial broadcasting continues unabated, as smaller operators are co-opted by larger groups seeking economies of scale (Wright 2013, Barnett 2010). A similar trend also exists in the public service sector, as shrinking government budgets and competing technologies put stress on public service broadcasters to reduce expenses by cutting local services (Humphreys 2012).

Some scholars see community broadcasting, juxtaposed against commercial and public service models, as a more appropriate public sphere. Fairchild (2001:93) notes "the nature of the power relations formed between an institution and its constituency are what distinguishes community radio most clearly from public and commercial broadcasting", and Lewis and Booth (1989) position community radio versus mainstream commercial and public service as "an open or implied criticism of mainstream radio in either of its two models" (9). The degradation of Habermas' public sphere by these dominant media results in what Hardt (2001, 43) describes as: "a flat, shallow mass production of symbols, denying the individual access to the real depth and understanding of life".

Herman and McChesney (1998) see mainstream media as becoming even more national and homogenous in content, while becoming less diverse and less responsive to the needs and interests of local communities. The rise of community broadcasting on local FM radio and cable television since the 1990s has subsequently created viable alternative broadcasting in societies across the world (Rennie 2006, Downing 2011). In the United States, the Low Power FM (LPFM) role in providing alternative output was revealed in a 2015 report from the media regulator Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The commission noted the important diversity of output exhibited by the LPFMs in comparison to commercial radios, with 32% of LPFM formats reported as "miscellaneous", compared to 1% of their commercial FM counterparts.³

In his study "Empowering Radio: Good Practices in Development and Operation of Community Radio in Five Nations" the community radio researcher and advocate Bruce Girard (2007) of Fundacion Comunica authored a comprehensive account of community radio in five nations across both Latin America and Europe, positioning the sector in larger societal socio-political contexts. Based on available information without any new empirical research, Mr. Girard made note of the dearth of new research carried out in the community broadcasting sphere. The report provides a good foundation for comparative analyses with regard to policy, sustainability, and social/cultural representations by community radio and its participants.

³ The US FCC report on LPFM is here: <https://www.fcc.gov/document/lpfm-economic-study-and-report-congress>.

Participants

So what are the expectations, roles, rights and responsibilities of participants as they actively participate in community broadcasting organizations? As is the case with many concepts related to community broadcasting, the notion/s of access and participation is at once complex and multifaceted, overlapping in its components and explanations. For the purposes of this text, the term “participation” relates not to receiving or consuming media output, but rather the participation in the production and delivery of content. Access for an individual or group of individuals with a common free speech agenda in today's world often involves having access to mass media structures, which can include the microphone, camera and transmission facilities of a community broadcaster. The legitimacy of participation in media is a right and responsibility of citizens in pluralistic democratic societies (Rodriguez 2001), and because community media are highly democratic in philosophy and structure, they can be seen as legitimate and productive contributors to a public sphere of participation and discourse (Melody 1990, Devereux 2007). Participation in the democratic public sphere depends on the right to communicate for actors of all types by accessing media platforms for their individual and community productions (Fisher and Harms 1982). Carpentier (2011, 179) describes participation in community broadcasting as “the articulation of the concept of ordinary people – for instance as an active, relevant social group with valuable opinions and knowledges, or as a passive mass – contributes to (pre)structuring the positions people can take in society, and may enable or limit their role in participatory processes”. Melucci (1989, 174) suggests that participation has a double meaning: “It means both taking part, that is, acting so as to promote the interests and the needs of an actor as well as belonging to a system, identifying with the ‘general interests’ of the community.”

Access is a bedrock component of the community broadcasting paradigm according to Berrigan (1979, 8): “Community media are media to which members of the community have access for information, education, and entertainment when they want it. They are the means of expression of the community, rather than for the community”. Access-driven participants in this alternative public sphere seek, first and foremost, the right to communicate, and with that they expect the freedom to produce content they so choose. Peter Lewis (1993, 12) suggests “Access is the processes that permit users to provide relatively open and unedited input to the mass media”.. James Curran (1998, 196) speaks of a movement for changing priorities in the broadcasting paradigm “which is intent upon extending social access and expanding the range of voices and views on air”.

Ultimately, access is an important function of community broadcasting, but as is the case in many mixed-model broadcasting environments and organizations, it is symbiotically related to other functions and phenomena. The access seekers may be exercising their democratic right and duty to participate in civil society, but access by definition does not require such an identity; it only presumes that a person or group of producers utilizes the media form in some manner (Higgins 2007).

Communities constituted of ethnically diverse citizens are historically active in developing alternative media forms, and are often tasked by mandates from policy guidelines to ameliorate institutionalized lack of ethnic diversity in society (Downing and Husband 2005). Citing the role of community radio in the United Kingdom, Guy Starkey (2011, 14) asserts: “Local media (including local radio) can reflect and encourage cultural diversity within small and large populations.”. For example, in the UK more than 30 licensed community radios are owned and operated by ethnic community groups, and hundreds more broadcast some ethnic programming.⁴ Mainstream media tend to under represent and/or erroneously represent ethnic and minority groups, marginalizing them in comparison to more popular notions of their role in society, whereas alternative media can do the opposite by illuminating and educating minority as well as majority population audiences (Matsaganis, Katz and Ball- Rokeach 2011). “Multiethnic” and “non-discriminatory” are terms that exhibit the philosophy of diversity in the personnel makeup of community broadcasting organizations (Mitchell 2011). Underserved minority groups in such organizations have the opportunity to develop their social and political capacities through participation as producers, managers, and even owners (Borger and Bellardi 2010).

Policy

Media policy is rooted in the social, economic and political governance of the society in which it is situated (Golding and Murdoch 1991), and the articulation of cultural policy in many western democracies is often influenced by the policies enabling pluralism in media (Ellmeier and Ratzenbock 2001). Community broadcasters rely upon policy and regulation to facilitate the successful operation of radio and television platforms through which they access the public sphere, and scholars have argued that the regulatory environment can have a profound effect on the behavior of community broadcasting participants and their organizations (Rennie 2006,

Howley 2010, Buckley 2008, Gosztanyi 2013). The Council of Europe⁵ has recognized the importance of policy to third sector media by proclaiming "Member states should encourage the development of other media capable of making a contribution to pluralism and diversity and providing a space for dialogue. These media could, for example, take the form of community, local, minority or social media". Buckley (2008, 3) argues that policy considerations for community broadcasting should be "fair, open, transparent, and clearly defined by law, with criteria developed in consultation with civil society".

The policy development process is also informed and influenced by actors in government, business and civil society (Powell 2013) in what Hogwood and Gunn (1984, 24) understand as a "process involving many sub-processes" of discussion and debate. These processes could be seen as the actualization of an idea, facilitated by the system of policy development. Harold Lasswell (1971, 28) identified a number of distinct stages of policy creation:

1. Agenda
2. Policy Formulation
3. Decision-Making
4. Implementation
5. Evaluation

In democratic societies, the policy development process ostensibly takes place in a complex system of public-private interaction of actors and institutions cooperating to achieve policies deemed equitable to all sectors (Kingdon 1984). However, tensions among these informants can lead to conflict and policy destabilization, and increase the need for public intervention in defense of a democratic public sphere (Mansell and Raboy 2011). Coyer and Hintz (2010, 275) observe that: "Community media advocates are emerging as significant actors in media reform movements and efforts to orient policy environments towards more democratic normative and legal frameworks".

The relationship between the efficacy of media and the media policy that governs them serves to define and categorize nations and their community media environments (Price-Davies and

⁵ See the Council of Europe recommendation 173 (2005) on regional media:

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=866605&Site=COE>, and recommendation Rec (2007)2 of the COE Committee of Ministers: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1089699>.

Tacchi 2001). Regulation is a key dimension of the overall construction of any media environment, and a model from which to compare systems. In their comparative media systems analysis, Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue that media governance and regulation are a product of the larger political paradigm in which they are situated. The authors created a composite of variables essential to understanding Western media systems in the frame of three models that reflect the socio-political environment that media operate in, and the subsequent forms of media organisms which evolve within those environments. The three environments are

1. Mediterranean Polarized Pluralist: minimal civil society - government cooperation, dysfunctional media legislation and regulation, over-commercialization, and restricted access to the broadcasting public sphere for alternative media (Spain, Italy, Greece)
2. North Atlantic Liberal: minimal civil society - government cooperation, powerful commercial sector, functional public service sector, functional media legislation and regulation, limited access to broadcasting public sphere for alternative media (USA, UK, Ireland)
3. North Central European Democratic Corporatist: extensive civil society - government cooperation, functional media legislation and regulation, limited commercialization, strong public service sector, extensive access to broadcast public sphere for alternative media (Denmark, Netherlands, Germany)

Hallin and Mancini's original work has generated scholarly debates, some raised by the authors in a subsequent text, related to assumptions about the universality of the models (Hallin and Mancini 2012), the lack of consideration for cultural influences Jakubowicz (2010), and the authors predictions on the effects of globalization in transforming media systems Hardy (2008). Other scholars have built upon the Hallin and Mancini composite to produce subsequent research. Dobek-Ostrowska *et al* (2010) published their edited volume of media systems in Central and Eastern Europe, while Blum (2005), and Curran *et al* (2009) conducted studies that further explored the relationship between media and political environments.

In an initiative to assess media policy, The European Commission⁶ financed a 2009 research project identifying indicators of media pluralism in member states that created a media pluralism monitoring tool for identifying threats based on legal, economic and/or socio-cultural consideration. The contributors included several recognized community media experts such as Josef Trappel of Austria and the late Karol Jakubowicz of Poland who created legal, socio-

⁶ The EU Media Pluralism Monitor is still active and can be seen here: <http://monitor.cmpf.eui.eu/results-2014/>.

demographic and economic indicators of media pluralism in a model as evidence for evaluating media policy. The authors beta tested the model in group interviews with media trade associations before assessing it themselves as evaluators. The project then deployed a Likert scale-based survey of stakeholders to evaluate the usefulness of the monitoring tool (Trappel and Maniglio 2009). Though primarily focused on policy issues, it did not initially make any policy recommendations, but co-author Peggy Valcke (2009, 149) noted: “It recognizes that all types of media – public service, commercial and community media – play important roles in creating pluralism and that a wide range of media types and channels/titles are important for providing pluralism” The Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom project continues to inform European policy debates, as evidenced by a presentation of the Media Pluralism Monitor⁷ results for the Czech Republic by the scholar Vaclav Stetka to a meeting of a Czech parliamentary committee in 2016.

While neither the Hallin and Mancini nor the Media Pluralism Monitor models directly address community broadcasting in their research, other scholars have. Price-Davies and Tacchi (2001) examined the relationship between the efficacy of community media and the policy that governs it in their study of Australia, Canada, Ireland, Holland and South Africa. In a report similar to the work of Hallin and Mancini, community media scholars Coyer and Hintz (2010) also constructed a theoretical modeling framework for measuring the environments for community broadcasting. The researchers identified two factors for their model: supportive policies (from which well-established sectors result) and state financial support (from which sustainable organizations result). They state that across Europe, community radio stations fall roughly under one of the four following frames:

- well-established sectors with supportive policies, sustainable models that include strong state financial support (France, Netherlands);
- well-established sectors with supportive policies, but minimal state financial support (United Kingdom, Ireland, Hungary);
- medium-developed sectors with some supportive policies but no state financing (Italy, Spain, Sweden);
- under-or undeveloped sectors where there are limited or non-supportive policies and funding (Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovakia, Greece).

⁷ More information about the Media Pluralism Monitor 2015 stakeholders meeting - Czech Republic is available here: <http://cmpf.eui.eu/News/All/160105MPM15CzechMeeting.aspx>.

A research study by Johnson and Menichelli (2007) combined academic theory with empirical research to present a snapshot of the community broadcasting environment in the United States. The study titled “What's Going On in Community Media” was a collaboration between the University of Massachusetts and the Benton Foundation. Arising from an initial project examining the role of community broadcasting in community health projects, it produced a report on community media practices, primarily focused on issues related to sustainability and adoption of new technologies. The authors conducted a series of small group semi-structured discussions and individual interviews with a selection of community media participants across the US. The study also addressed questions of community media identity in the context of public service and commercial models, community participation, and the engagement of various marginalized groups. The research report presented an overview of the community broadcasting paradigm in the USA, profiling 42 broadcasting organizations and 28 aggregating organizations that support the development of community broadcasting. The authors concluded that improved cooperation among government and civil society in policy development was needed, and they noted that: "policies and regulations that exist for community media represent hard-won political victories, but they do not address the needs of community media in a holistic way." (ibid, 26).

Another valuable tool for referencing and examining media policies is provided by the Global Media Policy Group (GMPG) – a subgroup of media scholars organized within the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) (Cola 2013). The section on community broadcasting policy contains a substantial array of institutions and actors from around the world. It facilitates the research of processes and actors in the development and implementation of media policy using an online tool for mapping media policy around the world, including a database, website and interactive archive tool for accessing and researching media policy. The GMPG⁸ text states that the tool: “serves to identify actors, processes, outcomes and resources; foster access to relevant information; build and share new and existing knowledge; and enhance actors' capacities to intervene in policy setting.”

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⁸ The Global Media Policy mapping Tool can be viewed here: <http://www.globalmediapolicy.net/>.

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