Editorial

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Recent developments in the study and practice of Community Radio have given to both academics and practitioners a wide range of issues to be discussed and networks such as OurMedia, where both sides and policymakers come periodically together, have given a platform to the increasing convergence of interests while focusing the attention also on geographical areas traditionally overlooked by the literature published in English[1]. At a European level, fora like the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE)[2] and recent events organised by Budapest's Central European University (CEU)[3] and London Metropolitan University[4] in 2007 have contributed to the discussion on the status of community media in the continent, focusing particularly on policy, regulation, funding and the issues emerging from the eventual transition to digital of these services. A comprehensive report recently published by the European Parliament, is also a signal of a growing recognition among EU institutions (European Parliament, 2007)

In the last few years, academic publications in the area of community media have analysed the sector at a global level (Rennie 2006), focused on nation-wide studies (Pavarala and Malik 2007; Day 2007), cross-national comparative research (Howley 2005) and the critical evaluation of cross-European projects that have provided training, access and participation to the media to community groups whose communicative needs are often neglected by mainstream media (Lewis and Jones, 2006; Dowmunt, Dunford and van Hemert, 2007).

The two publications reviewed in this issue by Lawrie Hallett have approached their analysis from an alternative media perspective (Bailey et al. 2008; Coyer et al. 2007) and, by including a wide range of case studies from across the globe, give an insightful and up-to-date picture of the creative possibilities in contexts that are very different from each other in terms of recognition and funding of the sector, the latter being still one of the main concerns especially in culturally diverse major urban centres (Lewis and Scifo, 2007)

In his suggestions for future community radio research Lewis (2002) had drawn an agenda based on the traditional areas of media research (production, text and audience) and this issue of *Westminster Papers in Communications and Culture (WPCC)* is an attempt to address some of the concerns raised in the areas of production processes, textual analysis and audience research in community radio.

Scarce funding resources have often resulted in a lack of extensive audience research on community media publics, preventing a thorough debate on this matter. The first paper, part of a wider research project carried out in Australia, home to one of the most developed community media sectors in the world (Meadows et al. 2007), offers an exciting insight into the developing role of community radio in enhancing local public spheres and audiences' engagement. The growing commercial pressure on public service broadcasters and economies of scale in the commercial media sector have resulted in a restriction of services provided at a very local level and to a culturally diverse population. By breaking down the barriers between the audience and the production process, community media in Australia are enabling local groups to participate more actively and directly in their local community life and offering an outlet for an engaging 'local talk'.

Stefania Milan then takes an 'unusual' approach to research in this area by exploring the feelings of practitioners involved in community radio production and asking the reasons that make them happy in being part of it. Drawing on interviews to sector's representatives and people that attended two major events in 2006/7, the article discusses the idea of radio as a 'free space' and as a tool that facilitates the articulation of the debate in local communities, its role as amplifier for the social groups that constitutes those communities and the collective dimension of community radio projects. What emerges here is the important role played by emotions in motivating radio practitioners in their activities and how gratification and happiness are also 'functional to the social change objectives but also crucial in sustaining projects which often have instable financial bases'.

The following article, by Dickie Wallace, focuses on the issues emerging from the everyday activities at WMUA, an 'hybrid' community radio station based in Western Massachusetts. Where the station formally fits in the category of US college radio and undergraduate students technically control its management, there is a ongoing negotiation over the schedule and editorial matters with the local community component, which provides an important contribution to the content, especially in off-term times, and helps to make the station financially sustainable due to its long term established roots in the area. In this sense, the station is closer to 'traditional' community radio formats adopted elsewhere in the country. Elaborating on the Habermasian ideal of public sphere and, among others, on van Vuuren's study (2006) applied to community radio stations, Wallace vividly

describes how this two groups see WMUA either as a stepping stone to a possible mainstream media job or as a tool to promote social change and give space to music and speech genres overlooked by other stations broadcasting to the area.

Jan Pinseler's paper on the politics of talk in German Free Radio offers an important contribution to study of texts produced in community radio practice, by employing textual analysis in the case study of current affairs programmes. What emerges here is that they incorporate forms of talk that encourage political participation and empower people to take part in the political discourse, but also that tend to imitate forms typical mainstream media practices and their structures of power, therefore diminishing the radical potential of free radio. Among others, financial pressures and the reliance on public funding are also threatening to influence the degree of social critique and action of these radio stations and the realisation of fully emancipatory forms of talk by its participants.

In the final piece of this issue Cankaya, Güney and Köksalan provide an historical perspective on Turkish radio broadcasts in The Netherlands and examine the degree by which stations and programmes have contributed to a participatory debate in this immigrant community, assessing also their community media credentials. The contradictions emerging from the production processes of the broadcasts addressed to the Turkish community, its organizational weakness in framing common interests and objectives, changing media consumption habits and the wider context of Dutch multiculturalism policies are included in an analysis that provides a comprehensive account of the reasons that have so far prevented the development of a distinctive community media network addressing their communicative needs.

Notes

[1] Ourmedia conferences have been held in Colombia (2003, 2005), Brazil (2004), India (2005). The 2008 conference will take place in Accra (Ghana). The network operates a website at http://www.ourmedianetwork.org/

[2] See http://www.cmfe.eu

[3] 'Broadcasting Community: a Workshop on Policies in Europe' (May 2007). A workshop on 'Access to communication and democratic media structures in the digital environment' will take place in May 2008. These activities have been organised by CEU's Center for Media and Communication Studies (CMCS). Website: http://cmcs.ceu.hu/

[4] Finding and Funding Voices: the inner city experience. An international colloquium, London Metropolitan University, 17 September 2007. Conference report available at: http://www.communitymedia.eu

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