Promoting social cohesion: the role of community media[i]

by Peter M. Lewis, London Metropolitan University, and Caroline Mitchell, University of Sunderland.

In Chaparro, Manuel (ed) (2015) *Medias de Proximidad: Participión Social y Políticas Públicas*

published by COMandalucía, Universidad de Málaga, Laboratorio de Comunicación y Cultura

Introduction

This chapter examines the relationship between community media and social cohesion, summarises various definitions of "third sector media" and outlines the discussion on the positive and negative aspects of the role of this kind of media in society. The original report, of which this chapter is an edited and shortened version, was commissioned by the Council of Europe's Group of Specialists on Media Diversity (MC-S-MD) and was completed in 2008. It was able to make use of data available from research on European community media commissioned by the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament. (European Parliament (2007). Some updating has been necessary for this chapter which ends with a summary of the actions taken by the Council of Europe and the European Parliament since the report was published.

Theoretical perspectives

Growing academic interest in situating "third sector media" within theoretical perspectives has been evident in recent years (Atton 2001, 2004; Cammaerts 2007; Couldry & Curran 2003; Downing 2001; Howley 2005; Jankowski with Prehn 2002; Rennie 2006; Rodriguez 2001;). Public sphere theory (including modifications of Habermas so as to recognise alternative or counter-public spheres) is the area most drawn upon by commentators (e.g. Rodriguez 2001), but other theoretical sources include hegemony (Gramsci), social capital (Putnam, following Bourdieu) and Paolo Freire's pedagogical writings, in particular his notion of conscientisation which, whether consciously acknowledged or not, underlay much of the practice throughout the 1970s.

The earliest publications in this field were reports of projects commissioned by UNESCO (Berrigan 1977; Bordenave 1977; Lewis 1984, 1993), and the Council of Europe (Beaud 1980); histories and case studies (Downing 1984; Gumucio Dagron 2001; Jankowski et al 1992; Lewis & Booth 1989; Mitchell 2000); handbooks of good practice (Fraser & Restrepo Estrada 2001); and international policy comparisons (Price-Davies & Tacchi 2001;CM Solutions 2005a & b).

Community continues to be a key concept. Contemporary experience of community is for most individuals, at least in European cultures, of belonging to multiple communities, most of them reaching beyond the confines of geographical locality ('communities of interest') and, with internet use, extending globally. Membership of one community, that of the nation, has become, in the form of rights and obligations of citizenship, a major concern in contemporary Europe. One scholar has written of migration representing

> a perceptible if not yet a conclusive change in the nature of national
>
> cultures and their capacity to sustain traditional boundaries and identities…
>
> the struggles for community, identity and a place in the culture of region,

nation and continent are becoming the central ones in the present century.

(Silverstone 2007: 83)

Definitions: The three sectors

A discussion of the role of "third sector" media and social cohesion cannot ignore the other two sectors: public and commercial. Each sector defines itself by its difference from at least one other, and this is more than an analytical difference: the public and commercial sectors are competitors for audiences, and ultimately that means for funding as well. Some 25 years ago, a British formulation of the principles of public service broadcasting (PSB) included two which are relevant to the present discussion:

• Broadcasters should recognise their special relationship to the sense of national identity and community.
• Minorities, especially disadvantaged minorities, should receive particular provision.
(Broadcasting Research Unit)

If it is true that Europe is currently witnessing "a change in the nature of national cultures and their capacity to sustain traditional boundaries and identities" as Silverstone (op.cit.) considered, then PSB is facing a difficulty, facing it moreover at a time of intense and increasing competition which is forcing the sector to prioritise its operations at the expense of services at local and regional levels. In the commercial sector, a growing multiplicity of channels and maturity of markets leads to the identification of an increasing number of niche audiences. But such consumers are only worth targeting if they can afford the products advertised, and thus older people, young children and the marginalised must be added to the list of social groups receiving inadequate attention from the mainstream media. As these trends become more marked, it is no coincidence that increased attention is being paid to third sector media and the possible benefits it can deliver to such social groups.

Operational definitions of third sector media

The practice of "third sector media" preceded theory in most cases. The pioneers and social groups involved did not wait for academics and regulators to define their activity. The first models, KPFA in Berkeley, California, and Radio Sutatenza in Colombia in the late 1940s, described themselves respectively as "listener-sponsored radio" and "radio school". In North America the prefix "community" came into use by the late 1960s to describe the open access channels on cable in the US, and was used in Canada by the regulator, the CRTC, to distinguish "community programming" – involvement of the community in ownership and production – from "local programming" produced by a staff team about local people and events. The Canadian National Film Board's Challenge for Change/ Société Nouvelle programme encouraged the use of portable video by communities, especially in Quebec, contributed to the CRTC regulations obliging cable companies to carry community channels, and was an important influence on developments in Europe. By the mid-1970s, the US listener-sponsored radio stations had become known as "community radio," and formed the National Federation of Community Broadcasters. The NFCB's rules of membership included references to non-profit organisation, public access, involvement of women and "Third World people" and diversity of culture and opinion. These were to influence the UK's community media movement and AMARC's[ii] various formulations. By the time of AMARC's founding conference in Montreal in 1983, *radios libres*/free radio had become a

significant feature in the broadcasting landscapes of Portugal, Italy, France and Belgium. "Free" connoted freedom from regulation and from the monopolies of centralised state broadcasting organisations, but as the French *radios libres* began to be taken over by commercial networks, *radios associatives* became the official label in that country for radios in the non-profit sector, while *communautaire* was applied to the general field of media projects. In Latin America, "radio schools" continued, but "people's radio" and "participatory media" were widely used. In the repressive political climate that lasted until the 1990s in much of the region, many projects learned from bitter experience that participatory development involving as it does "the strengthening of the democratic processes at the community level and the redistribution of power, [...] directly threatens those whose position [...] depends on power and its control over others" (Servaes 1999: 93).

Community, local, minority, non-profit media

"Community" is widely used and has the imprimatur of AMARC and UNESCO. "Local" could include the local services of commercial and public service broadcasting. While the majority of community media projects are locally based, with the Internet dimension many can be said to be both local and global. Services for minority ethnic and minority language communities are certainly an important element within the third sector but are also to be found in the public and commercial sectors. Non-profit is a defining feature in relation to commercial projects – sources of revenue might include advertising, for example, but profit is ploughed back into the project. The term is sometimes necessary in a context where the use of "independent" does not sufficiently distinguish between commercial and community. Among academic studies "radical" (Downing) and "alternative" (Atton) have been canvassed, but perhaps "citizen's media" (Rodriguez), with its reference to the public sphere, best captures the spirit of the genre. "Civil society media", with similar connotations, has recently made an appearance.

Finally, then, although "third sector media" is a useful umbrella term, "community media" (CM) and "community radio" (CR) will be used in the remainder of this chapter.

Characteristics of third sector media: Focus on content and delivering ´social gain´

Although a supportive legislative and policy infrastructure is the critical condition for sustainable CM, this section focusses on content. For this, the UK's Community Radio Order 2004 provides a useful starting point[iii]. The key characteristic is the ability to deliver "social gain". In the first instance, "social gain" is defined as (a) reaching audiences underserved by existing radio, (b) facilitating discussion and the expression of opinion, (c) providing education and training to members of the public [this implicitly recognises the importance of volunteers] and (d) understanding the particular community and the strengthening of links within it. A further set of "objectives of a social nature" are: (e) delivering, and/or disseminating knowledge about services provided

by local authorities or other organisations;(f) the promotion of economic development and of social enterprises; (g) the promotion of employment; (h) the provision of opportunities for the gaining of work experience; (i) the promotion of social inclusion;(j) the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity; (k) the promotion of civic participation and volunteering. Community media experience over three decades provides many examples of the fulfilment of such objectives.

Important for the delivery of social gain are the collaborative partnerships which stations and projects form with organisations of civil society. These may range from the basic use of airtime by an organisation to publicise its activities, through programme slots taken over by a local organisation, to the kinds of training schemes, known as tandem training, in which radio trainers and community organisers "fuse" their mutual expertise to share joint responsibility for training volunteers to create a sustainable editorial and production team (Lewis & Jones 2006: 90).

Music is a large part of content in community radio and tends to be overlooked in discussion of social gain. Community media can provide the "nursery slopes" on which local music talent can try out their skills and gain performance experience. A good example is the Soundnezz project, based in a youth centre in Freiburg, Germany, which provides young musicians and bands with the opportunity to record, upload and present their music on a website. In France, BeurFM streams music, news and chat for young people of Maghreb origin.

A number of official reports have testified to the contribution community media make to community development and social cohesion. A report to the representative organisation for community radio in Ireland (CRAOL) in 2003 concluded that "there is a high level of collaborative work between community radio and community bodies. This is especially true of community-based groups that have a focus on social inclusion issues" (Unique Perspectives 2003:41). The identification of delivery of "social gain" is a central focus in both reports assessing the UK's pilot Access Radio projects (Everitt 2003a & b), and the UK Government report on the established sector a few years later confirms the continuing success in social gain delivery (DCMS 2006:12). A report commissioned by the Community Media Association in Scotland found that "community media provides a platform for those who are often voiceless in society. Radio, moving image and internet are all powerful campaigning tools to bring attention to inequality and injustice in communities [...] [and] to present their perspectives and challenge negative images of themselves." (Paul Zealey 2007:5).

Training and lifelong learning

An important contribution to lifelong learning is made by the third sector media. The chance to work with media attracts people in the role of volunteers who are often not reached by formal educational systems, or whose original educational experience was a disappointment. The presence of volunteers working in community media is part of the raison d'être of the sector: it ensures that the community is represented at the heart of the project. Training is, then, an integral part of the operation. A survey conducted for AMARC-Europe in the mid-1990s estimated that between 40 000 to 50 000 people were working in the community radio sector in countries of the EU, and commented that "the significance [of training] is increasing as the effects of free market competition weaken the training provision which has been a traditional feature of the [mainstream] industry" (Lewis 1994). In supplying the mainstream with trained recruits, the sector could justifiably claim to be a "gateway to employment". But the sector's contribution to the mainstream in this area is not nearly as significant as the wider and longer-term effects of community media training which should be considered as coming under the category of lifelong learning. As a recent publication on the empowering effect of community media training puts it:

"Those whose opinions are rarely given a hearing may have forgotten, or never learned, how to express them. If technical training is combined with research, production and presentation skills, which community radio routinely offers, the experience can also equip people with a

self-confidence that is motivating. It can lead to employment – not necessarily in the media – and a fuller participation in today's information society."(Lewis & Jones 2006:6)

Making learning more attractive: The training includes and leads to work in community media – which is unpaid, voluntary work, but can lead to paid employment in mainstream media or elsewhere – one of the reasons training is so attractive. The other is that the work is creative, takes place alongside interesting workmates of different ages and cultures, and often involves research and interviewing that "turns the tables" on normal power hierarchies, e.g. a young person with limited formal education is assigned to record an interview with a local politician and afterwards edit and broadcast the interview, or a woman, trained by women, becomes an expert in technical areas.

Learning to learn: Both in the training and in the subsequent experience in community media, the incentive to learn will be strong, driven by the desire to tell a story, find out about oneself or others, or learn a technique necessary to fulfil those desires. A momentum is established which can be transforming and lead along new pathways to entry into further education.

Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence:
Media work involves teamwork and community media projects are committed to a democratic process of decision making and accountability which forms everyday work as well as longer-term policy. Civic competence is learned through the negotiations a community radio station must make in dealing with local civil society and local authorities.

Media literacy: Work in community media raises the level of awareness of the status and power of mainstream media in society and at the same time provides skills in creative expression through use of media.

Entrepreneurship: Stories must be "sold" as well as told. Negotiation (entrepreneur- ship) comes into the business of persuading colleagues and project manager about length, scheduling, budget, etc. Fund-raising is part of the process and when collaboration is involved with, e.g. a local NGO, further negotiating and administrative skills are required.

An example of best practice in training is the work of Radio Regen in Manchester, UK, to which the European Parliament report rightly draws attention. The organisation provides accredited training and offers the online Community Radio Toolkit which offers advice on running and funding community media projects (European Parliament 2007: 6)

Multiplatform
The arrival of technologies which facilitate social networking (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) and make it possible for individuals to record events (with phones and cameras) and contribute images, sounds and opinions through blogging software has created a new context for what might be described as traditional community media. On the one hand, mainstream media are urgently trying to adapt and co-opt the intrusion of "citizen journalism" and "user-generated content"; on the other hand, community media projects are beginning to use a wide range of web applications to complement their local activity (see for example the work of COMAPP [iv] in the area of using smart phones and geo located maps and CAPTCHA[v] in the area of online cultural archives for community media).The simulcasting of web and FM transmissions is increasingly common among licensed CR stations, and

webcasting itself is a stand-alone alternative for stations unable to obtain a licence. The global reach of the Internet makes webcasting particularly important for diasporic and migrant communities, keeping them in contact with their homelands. Live streaming of events has enabled connection and collaboration between CR stations from different continents. Radio Orange 94.0 in Vienna effected a live exchange with Radio Número Crítico in Santiago, Chile, on International Woman's Day, 2003, each making use of simultaneous translation into German and Spanish (Mitchell & Jones 2006:140).This transnational radio activity is also explored in the Transnational Radio Encounters project (www.transnationalradio.org/)

Do third sector media contribute to social cohesion or threaten it?

The political aspect of the question first has to be answered by the government of a country, (see McQuail´s "dual perspective" on the relationship between media and social order 1994:72). What view is taken by the authorities of initiatives which, if not exactly centrifugal, represent diverse or minority opinions? India's decision to licence thousands of community radio stations is significant because for so long this important democracy had decided against such a devolution of power. Across the world, community media are widely used for the expression of marginalised or disadvantaged groups who define themselves by gender, age, sexual preference or geographical isolation to name the most common examples, but in the contemporary European context the question is mainly concerned with minority ethnic groups and this, together with broadcasting in minority languages, will be the focus of the discussion that follows. Within that focus, a distinction has to be made between (1) language communities that pre-date the nations within which they find themselves, such as Basque, Occitan, Gaelic and Welsh, and (2) those that have arrived in Europe as a consequence of colonial and post-colonial connections or as refugees from persecution such as the Jewish diaspora. One might describe these latter groups as older minority communities in comparison with the more recent arrivals. In many of the western European countries, the older minority communities have had to wait a long time before seeing some concessions in mainstream media that begin to represent their views and cultures. Still less do more recent arrivals feel satisfied:

Recent shifts in patterns of migration, and the creation of new democracies since the demise of Soviet- or Yugoslav-style socialism, have meant the arrival of new minority language communities, without previous experience of the host countries – let us categorise this group as (3). Again, to focus the discussion, it is the relation of groups (2) and (3) to community media that will be addressed here. Community media will be understood to include "minority ethnic media" in the third sector, recognising that broadcast media may take the form either of slots assigned to a minority ethnic group within the schedule of a station owned by a broader group – the more usual situation, or might in some cases be a station wholly owned by a minority ethnic group. Assuming that there is political will to deal fairly with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers on the basis of their human rights, the question is: to what extent do community media assist in the dual role of according space for the expression of minority cultures and languages, and of assisting minority communities to settle in their new home?[vi]

A handbook on Intercultural Media Training in Europe, the outcome of a two-year EU Socrates project, distinguishes between "polylingualism" in community media – the existence of many programmes, each of them in a different language, and "multilingualism"– the use of different languages in one programme. It is common to find, across Europe, the polylingual approach in which different languages are used in separate

programmes in the schedule. There is an increasing tendency, however, within the programmes, for the local majority language to be used as well. "These multilingual programmes seek to make the concerns of their language community understandable for a much broader audience – a crucial step in the direction of genuine exchange between majority and minorities" (Intermedia 2006:52)[vii].

An example of this was the Hispanic programming of Vancouver Co-op Radio, Canada.[viii] The two co-presenters understood that they were addressing three language groups, two monolingual and a third, the bilingual listeners. To retain the interest of each group, the presenters maintained a lively inter-change which avoided exact translated repetition of each other's contributions, so that monolinguals were never left too long "on their own" and the bilinguals were not bored. A third, important strand in the programme was music which appealed to all three groups. In fact the Intermedia handbook sees an advantage in those moments of incomprehension for members of the language majority:
"[...] listening to a multilingual programme, [they] are confronted with a situation that usually only migrants experience: finding it difficult or even impossible to understand parts of the programme, not being able to join in the discussion, being 'outsiders'. Through the alternation of languages, however, they are repeatedly 'drawn back in'. This makes it easier to accept a foreign language, both for non-migrants and for migrants." (ibid)

A further opportunity for strengthening multicultural relations, the Handbook adds, is in "the mutual production of programmes by migrants and non-migrants, working together, can be a means of establishing situations based on an equal footing." The point is confirmed by the experience of Radio Salaam Shalom, in Bristol, UK, where the two founding producer/presenters agree that the benefits for the two communities are more significant and far-reaching in the research and planning that go into a programme than the resulting on-air broadcast, important though that may be for listeners.

The contact between different community groups contributing to a community media project as they negotiate the allocation of airtime and/or resources underlines the importance of the co-presence necessitated by community broadcasting of this kind. That different members of the local public sphere come together facilitates social cohesion. As the Intermedia handbook says, "most community radios take for granted the idea of giving migrants a platform".

No overall survey of the European third sector's contribution in the area of multicultural programming exists, and for general principles Australia provides the best example. The Griffith University study already mentioned, is the best state-of the-art example of audience research into community media. It examined minority ethnic programming as a quite separate category from the important indigenous media sector. Community radio reaches about 28% of people who speak a language other than English (LOTE). LOTE speakers make up nearly 20% of Australians and most of these live in metropolitan areas. Among the reasons for listening to ethnic programming, maintaining culture and language was found to be important. Focus group participants spoke of the "need to hear their own language and to engage with their own culture". At the same time, the maintenance of community connections and networks within their new home was important to the new citizens. "The radio, this radio station is not separating us from Australia [...] it's integrating us to Australia. It's very important. Our children are growing up Australians anyway, maybe they're having difficulty adapting culturally, but through the radio, they will be able to get some help or adapt anyway. And also we see our differences as richness, in Turkey too, where we come from different backgrounds [...] we're living the same thing here too and

we're happy about that. Everyone's got their own different folklore, folklore and songs and everything else so we have that here too and we're happy with that." (Turkish focus group, listeners to 3ZZZ community radio, Melbourne. Meadows et al 2007:79)

Music programming is important. It "is not just a source of entertainment [...]. Put simply, music is considered by ethnic community radio audiences to be a central component of creating and maintaining cultural and community connections" (ibid. p.82). News for minority ethnic communities comes from two main sources. The news from their country of origin is valued but, equally, information about their new home is vital. The National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council (NEMBC) recommended to the House of Representatives Standing Committee inquiry into community broadcasting that locally produced news services for ethnic communities "are an essential part of smoothing the migrant settlement experience and assist with cohesion among ethnic communities in Australia" (ibid. p.84).

The experience of the UK community radio sector, brief as it is in comparison with Australia's, may be judged particularly relevant where Muslim communities are concerned now that, since 9/11, they are being subjected to social and political pressures. What kinds of discussion are taking place within "minority language" programmes, and to what extent is non-Muslim opinion involved? Does "multi-lingual programming" in the sense used by the Intermedia project, feature in a strategy for social inclusion? Additional research for this report has provided some answers which must be regarded as provisional given the current fluid state of UK public opinion. Although short-term licences (RSLs = restricted service licences) had been on offer by the regulator for some years and many had been taken up by religious groups including Muslim communities, and by minority language groups, regular community radio broadcasting only began in 2001. The Radio Authority issued licences for 15 groups for a pilot period under the title of Access Radio. The evaluation of this pilot exercise comments favourably on the record, under the headings of social inclusion, linguistic impact and cultural diversity, of those of the stations which were wholly or in part serving Muslim communities. Awaz FM in Glasgow, for example, was recognised as an important delivery platform for information by many agencies, while at the same time, in the other direction, having a "beneficial influence on the development of Asian languages in Glasgow" (Everitt 2003b:52).

Proposals to the Council of Europe
These proposals apply at three levels: European, national and individual community media projects.
The Council of Europe could lend weight to the proposals by encouraging member states to:
• create legislative infrastructure without which community media cannot develop;
• preserve analogue frequencies that may, in some countries, continue to be needed after the digital switchover, and to ensure that community media are not disadvantaged in the digital environment;
• recognise the social value of community media and its role as a form of local public service by committing funds to support the sector, both directly, with schemes such as the French levy on the commercial audiovisual sector (FSER), the allocation of a portion of the licence fee (Ireland, some German *Länder*) or by lowering the cost of licences, and indirectly, through funding projects as part of government programmes directed towards health, community development, education, social inclusion, support for minority ethnic communities, etc. There are also areas in which the Council of Europe could play a more active role. The sector needs support at European level to understand and identify relevant

polices and potentially supportive programmes, to lobby and organise events that raise the profile of the sector, for networking and knowledge exchange.

Some specific opportunities:
• commissioning studies of best practice in community media, surveys of emerging needs such as multicultural programming, and audience research on the Australian model;
• supporting a trans-European network to monitor policy, in effect a community media observatory;
• encouraging training schemes as part of lifelong learning and media literacy;
• supporting programme exchange within the European community media sector – and beyond, with regions which are the "homelands" of diasporic communities;
• supporting exchange of staff and volunteers for short periods between community media projects;
• facilitating workshops to study funding opportunities;
• inviting representatives of AMARC and the CMFE to attend relevant Council of Europe committees as observers and to participate in meetings and conferences.

Postscript

The recommendation for observer status at MC-S-MD meetings for CMFE and AMARC representatives resulted in the CMFE being invited to assist Council of Europe staff in drafting the Declaration which was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 February 2009 (https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1409919). [ix]

Before this, in September 25, 2008, the European Parliament unanimously adopted a 23-point Resolution which "stressed that community media are an effective means of strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity, social inclusion and local identity" (http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2008-0456&language=EN&ring=A6-2008-0263).

These two documents, the European Parliament's September 2008 Resolution and the Council of Europe's Declaration of Committee of February 2009, both encouraging Member States to support community media, have been used by campaigners, chiefly the Community Media Forum for Europe, at national and European level to persuade governments to support this type of media activity.

Conclusion

In a hugely changed media landscape, community media have an important role to play. The perceived need to communicate a sense of and participation in the European project at local and regional level, and the challenges posed by the presence of migrant communities – as well as the benefits they bring to their host communities– are issues that can be addressed most effectively at local level. The sector is already making a substantial contribution to social cohesion, community engagement and regeneration. It is time to give it the support it deserves.

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[i] This chapter is a shortened version of Peter M. Lewis´s 2008 report for the Council of Europe "Promoting social cohesion: the role of community media", edited by Caroline Mitchell and the author. Detailed case studies and examples of community media in the full report can be found at the link below. The copyright on the original version in English is held by the Council of Europe © *Council of Europe* http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/Doc/H-Inf(2008)013_en.pdf

[ii] Association Mondiale des Artisans des Radios Communautaires or World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters.

[iii] Notes of Guidance for Community Radio Licence Applicants and Licensees 2004. Updated guidance notes can be found here: http://licensing.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/radio/community/thirdround/notesofguidance.pdf

[iv] COMAPP (Community Media Applications and Participation) has pioneered a train the trainers course, which explores how innovative uses of mobile telephone technology apps may help create multimedia guides. http://www.comapp-online.de/

[v] CAPTCHA aims to empower community media,   … to increase the accessibility of their programs, by promoting the exchange of content and exploring sharing platforms, tackling the economic, technical and legal issues they face, and increasing awareness and practical know-how about the digital tools that are available now to facilitate collaboration and accessibility. (http://livingarchives.eu/)

[vi] For a discussion of "dual role" see Riggins 1992 p.4.

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vii In many cases of broadcasting by established minorities the broader audience is likely include not only the native speakers of the majority language but the younger generation of the minority group who have less proficiency in their parent's mother tongue.

viii see Lewis & Booth 1989:129.

ix When the CoE's MC-S-MD Group was phased out, the CMFE was granted observer status on both the Steering Committee on the Media and new Communications Services (CDMC) and the newly formed Group of Specialists on New Media (NC-NM) of the Council of Europe