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**The origins and development of community radio in Britain  
under New Labour (1997-2007)**

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**THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF COMMUNITY RADIO  
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(1997-2007)**

S.Scifo

PhD

2011

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SALVATORE SCIFO

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
of the University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2011

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the origins and development of Community Radio in the United Kingdom under New Labour, focusing on the decade that saw Tony Blair serving as Prime Minister between 1997 and 2007.

The research contributes to an enhanced understanding of Community Radio in Britain during this period, in two ways. First, it provides a factual contribution – namely, it places into the public domain hidden testimonies and evidence about how Community Radio developed. On the basis of a sample of stations, it uses case studies to examine how, if at all, New Labour policies affected actual practice on the ground. Second, it attempts to provide an intellectual argument – namely, that Community Radio in Britain today can be understood fully only in the wider context of New Labour’s period in office.

While Part I of the thesis focuses on the *ideals* of community radio advocacy, community media theories, British local radio practice and New Labour’s social and cultural policies, Part II discusses the *realities* and how the community radio sector developed its policy proposals and practices after 1997.

The evolution of Community Radio is studied using a mix of qualitative methods, including the review of a consistent body of ‘grey literature’, informal data gathering, oral history interviews, and a period of observational research in a selection of three case-studies: ALL FM (Manchester), Forest FM (Verwood), and Canterbury Student Radio-CSR FM (Canterbury).

The original contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes, is to demonstrate how the most important factor facilitating community radio lobbying in this period was the presence of a discourse within which the arguments of community media activists could make sense, and that led to the introduction of Community Radio as a third sector of full-time radio broadcasting in the United Kingdom.

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<b>MY PUBLICATIONS</b>	
1. Nuria Reguero i Jimenez and Salvatore Scifo (2010) ‘Community Media in the context European media policies’, <i>Telematics&amp;Informatics</i>	360

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would have not been possible without the support, patience, motivation and happiness given to me in the last seven years. First, I would like to thank my supervisory team, especially my Director of Studies, David Hendy. His continuous motivation, timely and thought-provoking feedback and his invitation to consider pursuing a Ph.D., at a time when Community Radio as we know it today, was only a plan, deserve a really big and warm thank you. His patience with my ups and downs has been no less than remarkable. Thanks to Roza Tsaragousianou, for her thoughts and important support, especially in the first years, and in her role as the Director of the Doctoral Programme. Although only for a brief period, I also enjoyed developing some ideas with Paddy Scannell while attending his ever-inspiring lectures.

The School of Media, Arts and Design, through its former Director of Research, Annette Hill, provided exciting opportunities to engage in project work and lectures and, with the two excellent research institutes, CREAM and CAMRI, a wonderful research environment. On this matter, thanks also to Peter Goodwin for his past and current support. I would like to thank my own institute, and its previous director, Colin Sparks, for having supported the cost of funding my visits to sites for my case studies and the attendance of conferences. The members of staff and doctoral students at CAMRI were incredibly supportive; I cherish and value their friendship. I hope they will not mind a collective and very warm thank you here.

Early support in developing my work also was provided by the collaborative atmosphere enjoyed with colleagues of the Radio Studies Network. In particular, Matthew Linfoot, Eryl Price-Davies, Janey Gordon, Kate Coyer, and Peter Lewis helped to shed light on my first steps. I also had the pleasure to share, albeit briefly, the title of Lecturer in Community Media at London Metropolitan University with Peter Lewis. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues there and particularly, John Gabriel, Anna Gough-Yates, and Bill Osgerby. In the UK, I also benefited from the support of fellow colleagues at MeCCSA, where I had the honour to

serve briefly on the Executive Board and enjoy the friendship and peer support of its Postgraduate Network. Such experiences were invaluable.

This work would have not possible without those who actually do community media every day. So, I would like to thank the Community Media Association and, among its past and present staff, Steve Buckley, Diane Reid, Jaqui Devereux, Alan Fransman and Bill Best. For the individual case studies, I would like to thank Phil Korbel, Alex Green, Steve Saville and Luke Nicholson for their time and support during my visits in Manchester, Verwood and Canterbury. Thanks, are also due of course, to the volunteers and other members of staff at Radio Regen, ALL FM, Forest FM, and CSR FM. In European circles, inspiration and friendship has been given by fellow colleagues of the Executive Boards of the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE), and the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA). Pieter de Wit and Nico Carpentier, thanks for your patience and understanding.

Back in Italy, where the ‘bug’ for community radio started in a small station in 1992, I would like to thank Gaetano Alessi and the whole team of Radio Popolare Raffadali. Doing community radio as a living was also a great privilege and I enjoyed the company, friendship, and motivation of the volunteers for four years. Thank you all, particularly Romeo Perrotta and Dario Di Zanni. We built up something unforgettable at Facoltà di Frequenza in Siena. In my new home, Istanbul, I would like to thank former and current members of staff at Marmara University for their support and friendship, and especially Nurcay Turkoğlu, Armağan Emre Çakır, and Levent Eraydin. Thanks also to Kathryn Kranzler for helping to improve my English skills. My special thanks to Aurogeeta Das for helping me to clarify my thoughts, all her valuable advice and her professional support. For their hospitality in the final days of editing, amending and printing this thesis, my warmest thanks to her and to Lawrie Hallett, excellent hosts who made me feel at home in Norwich.

Finally, all of this would have not been possible without the love, patience, and support of my family in Italy and Turkey. To ‘Super-Anne’ Özden Çankaya, my resilient grandfather Antonino, and my incredibly caring sister Jessica, my warmest thank you.

This thesis started under the best of circumstances by meeting the woman who would become my loving, patient, and sunny wife, Ayşecan. This journey would have not been the same without the light you bring to me every day. Our pet, a beautiful Scottish Fold cat, Leyla, kept me good company while writing the final drafts of this manuscript.

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Mimmo, and my mother, Giuseppina, who continue to inspire me from up in the skies, and to Thomas Kupfer, community media activist, scholar and friend.

## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Salvatore Scifo, hereby declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

## INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Community Radio in the United Kingdom as a recognised ‘third tier’ of broadcasting succeeded in 2004 after almost thirty years of campaigning. After time spent in piracy, community cable experiments, short-term licenses, and a pilot project, local communities were able to apply for five-year licenses, having finally gained recognition from policymakers and regulators. This recognition emerged in the context of a wider set of social policies instituted by New Labour. Indeed, the election of New Labour has been seen as a crucial element in the introduction of Community Radio in Britain.

Between 1997 and 2004, the Community Radio sector managed successfully to lobby for the introduction of a distinct radio broadcasting sector. First, the Community Media Association (CMA) showed demand with hundreds of community projects done under the Restricted Service Licence (RSL) scheme and argued that these projects were fitting in with a number of government priorities in the areas of social and cultural policies. Secondly, the successful evaluation of a pilot project helped to inform the discussions in advance of legislation and the drafting of the Community Radio Order 2004. Such discussions developed in a context in which both the BBC and the commercial sector kept claiming their own credentials as ‘community broadcasters’.

The paradox here is that, since Community Radio was a relatively late arrival in the UK, most of the conceptual and academic thinking about Community Radio – about its ethos, its value and purpose – has been forged in non-British contexts. Further, those in Britain who have long been involved in campaigning for Community Radio have been influenced by this international context. Yet, it would appear that Community Radio emerged in Britain as a result of very particular British contexts and specifically, as part of New Labour’s wider social policies.

Thus, there is a tension to be explored throughout what follows, between seeing a movement shaped by international thinking and strategies being developed within a uniquely British context – and moreover, being developed as a result of a top-down political initiative, propelled by broader social agendas. These tensions can be seen in a

number of juxtapositions: ‘international’ concepts of community radio versus ‘native’ models, ‘idealist’ perspectives competing with more ‘pragmatic’ concerns shaped by public policy, communal ambitions versus an emerging concern for individual empowerment, and so on. This thesis examines whether these tensions have been resolved and whether those principles have been violated, and discusses whether there is a need to redefine an understanding of what, at least in the British context, constitutes ‘community radio’.

There are many possible forms of community-based, non-profit radio. The focus of this study is analogue (AM/FM), licensed, full-time community radio in the United Kingdom. The aim of this study is to explore the factors that have contributed to shaping the definition of Community Radio as adopted by the British regulator, the Office for Communications (Ofcom) in 2004, and answer the following overarching research questions:

- *What has been the role of New Labour’s social and cultural policies in shaping Community Radio policy and practice in Britain?*
- *How does the reality of Community Radio, now that it has been established as a separate sector in the UK, conform to (a) original ideals, (b) the conceptual ideal of activists and theorists, and (c) Community Radio’s own contemporary ideals, as expressed in their rhetoric?*

The evolution of Community Radio in the decade under question (1997-2007) was studied using a mix of qualitative methods. First, there is a consistent body of ‘grey literature’ that consists of documents produced by the CMA (and its predecessor, the Community Radio Association [CRA]), featuring policy briefs, letters to MPs and relevant Government departments, feasibility studies, and reports on a series of training initiatives across the UK, with the latter having been the main source of income for many years. In addition to this, there is also a collection of documents published by the former regulator, the Radio Authority, and Ofcom, regarding the processes of consultation and licensing and a series of meetings that have preceded the introduction of Community Radio. Although all the documents of the regulators and the policymakers, as well as most of the CMA’s policy statements are publicly available, these have never been reviewed in academic literature.

Second, this historical period will be analysed utilising informal data gathering and oral history interviews with a group of key figures in the areas of academic research, policymaking, regulation, practice and international networks of community radio. These will, I hope, unveil the discussions about the social networks of community radio in Britain, and will help to understand the social, cultural and political contexts in which British community radio has grown. Finally, a period of observational research incorporating extensive semi-structured interviews with managing staff and volunteers in a selection of three very different case-studies (ALL FM, Forest FM, and Canterbury Student Radio-CSR FM) will provide further information for the discussion on contemporary community radio practices.

The thesis is divided in five parts: Contexts (Chapters 1 to 4), Research methodology (Chapter 5), Practice since 1997 (Chapters 6 to 10), Conclusions and Appendices.

The first chapter will summarise and reflect on, the main features and tensions underlying British community radio until 1997 and the political context within which they would develop after 1997. Chapter 2 will bring in the influence of the global perspectives on the British Community Radio model by examining core concepts at the heart of the Community Radio ideology and ethos: democracy, access, participation, and localism. The historical context of British broadcasting and the role played by local BBC and IBA/ILR stations, which incorporated some features of Community Radio in their earlier years, along with an overview of the grassroots movements' activities during the 1970s and the 1980s are discussed in Chapter 3. This is followed by a reflection on community radio practices, drawing on the literature on a selection of international and British examples. The final section of Part I will focus on the British social and political context, reviewing New Labour's social policy since the 1997 General Election. Concepts such as widening participation, urban regeneration and new audiences will be analysed before focusing on media policies and, finally, community radio.

After the discussion of methodological issues in Part 2, the following five chapters that constitute Part 3 will lead to the 'heart' of the thesis: an examination of British community radio practice since 1997, starting with the evolution of regulation and

licensing and ‘the case for community radio’ in the Government’s agenda by the start of the millennium. Chapters 6 and 7 will draw on ‘grey literature and oral history interviews to focus on the actions and initiatives of the main actors, with the CMA as representative of the ‘incoming sector’ on one side, and the BBC and the commercial stations (including those managed by ethnic minority groups), on the other hand, and their influence in shaping current and future media policy. Evidence emerging from the example of Restricted Service Licences (RSLs) and the findings of the ‘Access Radio’ experiment as the background to the final ‘go ahead’ by Government and Parliament will then lead to the analysis of a selection of three very different case-studies of community radio across the United Kingdom, in Chapters 8, 9, and 10. Chapter 8 will focus on Manchester’s ALL FM, an example of a multicultural station, in an area targeted by a large number of urban regeneration projects, which has been making the most of New Labour’s rhetoric and social policy funds. Chapter 9 will discuss the case study of Verwood’s Forest FM, which is rooted in a desire to have its own ultra local radio station, is inspired by North American experiences, and offers that musical diversity and localism that has increasingly been lost in local commercial radio. Chapter 10 will look at Canterbury’s CSR FM and discuss how two different experiences, grown under the tradition of British student radio, converged in a common project and the opportunities and challenges posed to it by the new licensing framework for Community Radio.

Access to the media, and the concepts of localism, community involvement in media production, and a concern for more democratic media systems have not been a claim of community radio practitioners exclusively. In their early years, both the local BBC and the commercial radio stations were introduced partly with the aim of providing a communicative space for local communities. Additionally, there were several experiments, albeit briefly, with community radio outside the duopoly and, since the second half of the 1970s, there has been an ongoing lobby for community radio. Coyer has rightly stated that this is a history ‘that runs alongside that of traditional accounts of broadcast history but unfortunately, is either not given adequate attention or is virtually ignored (...) there still exists the need for an account of British radio history whose narrative is focused on the needs and interests of amateurs and enthusiasts rather than institutions’ (the BBC and the IBA, 2006: 71-72).

Although some research has been undertaken in this area (e.g. *The Invisible Medium*, Lewis and Booth, 1989), I would argue that a detailed and critical history of this sector deserves to be further researched and discussed, not least because of the recent establishment of this sector as the third tier of radio in Britain. If we want to unveil the narratives behind it, an historical, social and cultural account of community radio needs to be among the priorities of future research agendas, not only among media scholars, but also among scholars in the fields of cultural, social and community development studies, so that we may fully assess the impact, and tell the stories, of practices spanning the last four decades.

## PART I: CONTEXTS

## CHAPTER 1

### REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCE: COMMUNITY RADIO IN BRITAIN BEFORE 1997

#### 1.1 Introduction.

This chapter will trace the historical contours in which the concept of community radio developed in Britain by showing how this was interpreted by activists and practitioners before 1997, and the influences of practice that originated elsewhere, especially in the US, Canada, Ireland, Australia, and France. It will review a number of key dates for the community radio movement in Britain, such as 1977 (the Annan Report) and 1985 (the aborted community radio experiment), as well as the contexts of the 1990 and 1996 Broadcasting Acts. Importantly, it will position the British experience in the European context and conclude by reviewing a sample of case studies and the lessons learnt from them. By reviewing these, it will show how the absence of a distinct policy framework did not prevent either demand for – or experiments in – community radio, and served to stimulate changes in public and commercial broadcasting. At the same time, it will show that it limited its structural development as a separate and distinct sector.

#### 1.2. A third local radio approach

The need for local radio stations was pointed out as early as the publication of the Beveridge Report in 1951, which advocated a wider diversity of programmes through stations broadcasting in the newly available FM space. Even though the report called for experimentation and local broadcasting run by universities, local authorities, and public service institutions, the advent of local radio was advocated most loudly through the BBC. Arguably over-shadowed by the debate and excitement surrounding the introduction of ITV, local radio only came into the spotlight a decade later with the Pilkington Committee, whose ideas for the use of VHF are described as less innovative by Lewis and Booth (1989: 25).

BBC historian Asa Briggs reports that by the early 1960s, there had been a few proposals to the Pilkington Committee involving stations that would ‘neither be managed by the BBC nor commercial oriented’. Among them, one was submitted by Birmingham University and another from Bristol and West of England Ltd, the latter claiming that ‘in an age of increasing centralisation people would welcome the opportunity to keep in touch with local affairs and local interests’ (*Report of the Committee on Broadcasting*, 1962, quoted in Briggs 1995: 631). This demonstrates that even in the 1960s, there were already other bodies interested in broadcasting locally that were neither the BBC nor the commercial lobby. A pamphlet published in December 1965, ‘Possibilities for Local Radio’, mentioned the term ‘community radio’, proposing 250 stations financed partly by the BBC’s licence fee, either under the loose control of the Corporation or by a separate trust (Powell, 1965: 19). Discussions for a separate, local, non-profit radio sector became more frequent at the start of the 1970s, in the wider social context of what Hollander (1992: 9) describes as the four types of forces driving towards decentralisation:

1. cultural and social organisations that wanted to promote citizen participation in the field of broadcasting;
2. broadcasting personnel, seeking to achieve more democratic control of their organisations;
3. political parties that wanted to oppose governmental policy; and
4. commercial broadcasters who wanted to gain access to broadcasting systems.

These forces produced reforms in national policies, the explosion of ‘free’ radio and television stations and the appearance of ‘access’ programmes that sought to achieve some form of audience participation. In Britain, as in some other countries, community cable radio and television experiments started more as a side-effect of policies for cable television and the regionalisation of broadcasting rather than as a result of explicit governmental policy (*ibid.*, 12-14). By the mid-1970s, cheaper and simpler broadcast production tools, together with interest in alternative media and community arts and politics, attracted an increasing number of practitioners to community and small-scale media. However, campaigns for the introduction of community radio in Britain also have been interpreted as a sign of the failure of local radio and, as elsewhere in Western

Europe, having the aim of reforming existing broadcasting structures and practices and opening the way for small-scale, locally controlled stations (Lewis and Booth, 1989: 105).

An illustration of the discussions going on in the mid-1970s is the booklet “Community Radio in Britain: A Practical Guide” (Turner, 1973), a publication drawn from an earlier pamphlet attached to the alternative magazine *Undercurrents*<sup>1</sup> written by David Gardiner, ‘Community Radio: Practical Advice on the setting up of Small Community-based Radio Stations’. Turner referred to the Brechtian ideal of radio as a two-way communication tool (Brecht, 1932, in Silberman, 2000), then turned to the discussion of the breakdown of ‘traditional family and community ties’ (Turner, 1973: 9) in British society in the 1970s and the attempt to reactivate this idea of community through community papers and shops at that time. Turner argued that ‘community radio is a concept that is very relevant to today. Stations can be used to help establishing a sense of community; they can be used as tools for the community’ (ibid., 10). To illustrate the potential of community-owned stations, he interviewed a US community radio practitioner, Tom Donahue, and gave space to the case of California’s station KTAO (Milam, 1972).

This shows how community radio practice in the United States informed the work of UK activists at that time. As will be seen throughout the thesis, the work of North American practitioners, and that of Canadian community television, and of global networks established in Montreal from 1983 onwards, had an important role in setting the debate of practitioners in the UK.

The pamphlet also included an overview of the British context with the cases of Radio Caroline, BBC Radio1, and London’s pirate station, Radio Jackie. An example of involving community members as radio producers, without profit and within the law, were the BBC local stations, with an extensive section on Radio Oxford. Turner believed that once a local community found how useful a community-owned station could be, it would ‘respond and lend its support’ (ibid., 12). He excluded listener

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<sup>1</sup> *Undercurrents* was a magazine that aimed to give space to radical views on scientific and technological subjects. It was published in England between 1972 and 1984. The complete collection is available at the British Library, Unique Identification Number (UIN) BLL01012249190.

subscription as a funding model in the UK case and said that indeed it could carry local advertising, without the need to operate for 24 hours a day, and offering a wide range of programmes: ‘a farmer talking about local farming conditions, a blues freak presenting an hour of pre-Second World War country blues, a round-up of local shopping bargains (...) Everybody has something to say, and a community station should be there to be used for the expression of an individual’s opinion’ (ibid., 13).

The publication raised a question about the diversity available in the British broadcasting scene at that time, as well as the social problems caused by the disintegration of local communities. More than the expression of a movement or network of people though, it appeared to have been a call for activists interested in experimenting with new possibilities for a medium already happening in the US (ibid., 15-21) and a means to encourage them to build up their own transmitter and desk, thanks to a DIY section included at the end of the book (ibid., 35-48). Indeed, by the mid-1970s, cheaper production technologies were making the set-up of a radio station a much more feasible option for groups of enthusiasts and amateurs. The lowering of the costs of production technologies also permitted hospital and student broadcasting to start, respectively, in 1951 and 1967. Both kinds of stations were small-scale, non-commercial and not part of the BBC, and their practitioners actively produced, and later advocated community-based radio (Coyer, 2006: 83).

Finally, Langham signals interest in community radio and local communities in broadcasting in the UK, by referring to two publications: when she confirms that ‘In 1974 the Crawford Committee on Broadcast Coverage which enquired into the development of rural broadcasting in England made recommendations about community radio’ (1986: 10), and in referring to the proceedings of the Seventh Broadcasting Symposium held at the University of Manchester (Langham, 1986: 173), which are published in Luckham’s edited collection, titled *Broadcasting and Local Communities* (1976).

Overall then, we can say that a nascent history of ‘community radio’ existed in the UK, where early demands for local radio services had been present in discussions since the 1950s, with the term ‘community radio’ itself appearing in the following decade and connected to the BBC throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as will be discussed in further

detail in Chapter 3. Proposals for a separate, independent and clearly distinct ‘third sector’ though, emerged in the early 1970s, prompted by developments in North America and in response to unmet demands from BBC local radio that arose in 1967 and commercial (‘independent’) radio in 1972. The increasing availability of cheaper production tools and demands for broadcasting relevant to localities and for communities under-served by existing services, quickly expanded across Europe. Advocates and activists started to exchange their experiences and bring back to their own countries examples of best practices that had been successful elsewhere. Such experiences would help to stimulate discussion and inform the lobby campaigning for the introduction of Community Radio into legislation.

### 1.3. The Annan Report and after

Following the increasing interest in community-based media, fuelled by the mushrooming of stations in countries such as Australia, Canada, France, and Italy, a lobbying group in the British community media sector, the Community Communications Group (COMCOM) was constituted in 1977, including individuals who had been active in those experiments and in community arts.<sup>2</sup> The group aimed to ‘co-ordinate and act as an information exchange for the development of community communication services’ (COMCOM, 1977) and to campaign for:

- adequate funding for community communication services from public and private sources;
  - the revision of broadcasting policy so as to establish the statutory right to *local* community ownership and/or operation of radio and television stations;
  - the statutory right of access and effective participation in national, regional and local communication and information services;
  - democratic control over national, regional and local communication services.
- (COMCOM, 1977)

Following the publication of the Annan Report (Annan, 1977), one of the first tasks undertaken by COMCOM was to produce a response to it. The Group was favourable to

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<sup>2</sup> A letter inviting interested members to join this group was sent in November 1976 (Partridge, 1982:13).

the introduction of a Local Broadcasting Authority (LBA), the main task of which would be the regulation of local BBC stations, IBA, and a third new tier of radio broadcasting. The report itself stated:

We believe that in the long run the best of present local broadcasting would be safeguarded if the station's primary concern were to improve its service to the community rather than to increase its profitability. The emphasis in local broadcasting must be on the shared interests and concerns of local communities (...) We all want to see the LBA breaking out of the present mould of financing broadcasting, and encouraging the growth of co-operative and other joint forms of financing to stimulate a direct involvement by the community in its own broadcasting services (Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting, 1977: 14.15/14.16).

The report triggered further discussions and publications such as Peter Lewis' *Different Keepers* (May 1977), which examined the structures and financing systems of community radio abroad, to inform the debate about its development in the UK. It included examples from the United States, Canada and Australia. These overseas examples aimed at clarifying the meaning of the 'community radio' concept and compared it to the British situation. In doing so, Lewis argued that none of the 39 local radio stations in Britain matched the definition of community radio that had emerged from this study, 'despite the frequent use of the phrase by the broadcasters particularly the BBC' (Lewis, 1977: 18). Lewis sought to position the term in the realm of 'local, autonomous non-profit radio' to which he believed it belonged (*ibid.*, 22). Lewis cites the costs of recorders and the building costs of a small studio, ideas for funding and references to the North American examples mentioned above, concluding that 'the technology and experience is now to hand that will allow lay people to use electronic media themselves effectively' (*ibid.*, 155).

On 12 April 1978, COMCOM's Local Radio Working Party (LRWP) presented evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Nationalised Industries (SCNI, 1978: 125-140). Apart from advocating the introduction of a new sector, often referring to North American experiences, and discussing such matters as financing, transmission

technologies, programme contents, policy and findings on the cable experiments, there was a call for more access to the existing IBA stations:

There would need to be decentralised production facilities; to have shop fronts where people know that they can go in and be trained in the use of equipment and make programmes – lots of radio workshops in other words (...) They [station staff] would have to see the station was there to serve communication purposes rather than one-way centre to periphery entertainment (...) If this were the case and this were communicated to people within that community, that they could come into the stations and be trained and assisted to make their own programmes... (ibid., 135)

Arguably, the lobbying action influenced the decision of the Select Committee to recommend that ‘future plans for broadcasting in the UK should encompass the possibility of frequency assignments to provide very low-power transmission facilities for voluntary community radio service within small communities’ (Partridge, 1982: 34). Furthermore, the lobbying group argued that they saw ‘no reason why the licence fee should be regarded as exclusive pocket money for the BBC’, as ‘the new local broadcasting trusts, non-profit distributing and communally-owned, will be as much a public service’ as the BBC (COMCOM, 1977). This eventual income, along with a diverse range of funding sources, could contribute to the financial sustainability of the new sector. The stated options included LBA funds, applying the same logic with which local arts and sports were funded by the Arts Council and the Sports Council, a small contribution from the Television Levy, local authority grants and local, small businesses advertising. Unfortunately for the COMCOM supporters, the Labour Government chose instead to expand only IBA and BBC local stations.

Nevertheless, the concepts and proposals developed by COMCOM became the *Community Broadcasting Charter*, published in 1979, and they were later adapted and used as a ‘Code of Practice’ by the Community Radio Association (as in Lewis and Booth, 1989: 213). This document, aiming to avoid the ‘use and abuse’ of the community radio concept by the BBC and the IBA, was influenced by the work of the US-based National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB). Among other things, it stated that Community Radio stations should:

- serve geographically recognised communities or communities of interest;
- meet the information, communication and cultural needs of their listeners;
- encourage the participation in the production process through the provision of training and the access to their facilities;
- involve those sections of the community who are socially disadvantaged or under-represented in the then available local radio stations;
- reflect the plurality and diversity of views among their community;
- draw their programming mostly from local or regional sources;
- have a decisional body, and therefore policies, made by a broad Council of Management representative of their community and being constituted as a non-profit trust;
- being financed possibly by a diversity of sources, including public grants, subscriptions and 'limited' and 'suitable' advertising.

(COMCOM, 1979)

SCNI's recommendations were then taken up by the Home Office, now under the Tories, following Margaret Thatcher's landslide victory at the general election held on 3 May 1979, and discussed in the Third Report of the Home Office Local Radio Working Party (HOLRWP), published in December 1980. A detailed discussion of the issues at stake and the viewpoints of the activists and the Government were illustrated in Partridge's *Not the BBC/IBA* (1982: 34-40). The report identified five key areas:

1. objectives of community radio services: 'they imply that the justification for services is that they would serve the interests of their respective local communities and not simply the tastes and interests of those who would like to broadcast' (ibid., 35);
2. programme standards: they 'would have a significant bearing on the appropriate regulatory regime for community radio and the resources which that regime would require' (ibid., 35);
3. who should be authorised, and by whom, to provide those services: among the possibilities were a first-come-first-served basis, or time-sharing among groups as evidence of community support (ibid., 35);

4. supervision and control matters: instituting a Community Broadcasting Authority or leave this matter to BBC or IBA, or independence from any such body (ibid., 35-6);
5. technical matters: the technical standards for community radio stations would be determined by the Home Office, which conferred licensing powers by legislation (ibid., 36).

The HOLRWP gave a positive response to a possible experiment with community radio, but remained sceptical that this could happen before some consensus about the regulatory framework (ibid., 36), with numerous doubts about the resources then available at the Home Office to evaluate and monitor the experiment itself. In conclusion, it stated that ‘the opportunities for community radio might be followed up at an appropriate time, and we remain of an open mind on this subject’ (ibid., 36).

The Conservative Home Secretary, William Whitelaw, then asked for comments about a community radio experiment. COMCOM, part of a coalition that included student, hospital, and cable stations, as well as radio and sound workshops, replied in an open letter during April 1981. It demanded the immediate authorisation of a pilot scheme for Community Radio, to make available frequencies and licenses and the establishment of a body, the Community Radio Working Party (CRWP), which would set up and monitor the scheme, as well as recommend future policies (ibid., 37). On 14 July 1981, the Secretary recognised Community Radio, acknowledging that ‘he had received many representations calling for such a service’ and ‘proposed to give further consideration to this matter’ (ibid., 1).

The Autumn of 1981 saw the start of the publication of a quarterly magazine dedicated to community radio, *Relay*.<sup>3</sup> The magazine informed its subscribers and readers about the development of the sector in the UK and overseas. It constituted a forum for exploring similarities and differences and for giving space to those who were ‘struggling to form new forms of radio – imaginative, accountable, democratic’ (ibid., 24). The community radio movement also pressured the government for low power

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<sup>3</sup> Its full name was *Relay: the other magazine about the airwaves*, collection available at the British Library, UIN: BLL01011184742

radio licenses for the most disadvantaged communities, in the wake of the civil unrest that spread through British cities in 1980-81.

As a sign of increasing momentum, a series of ‘standing conferences’ organised by the Community Radio Working Party, eventually led to the birth of the Community Radio Association (CRA) in 1983. Steve Buckley, who became its director, recalls how the conferences ‘formed the space where we started to articulate some kind of movement for community broadcasting’ and that ‘there was a critical mass of pirate stations present at these meetings’. He also recognises the work done by the movement’s leading person:

Simon Partridge was a key figure (...) Simon played a key role in these early stages, he was a real driver behind building a movement, the conferences and so on. He wrote this book *Not the BBC IBA: the case for community radio*. For all of us that were coming in without knowing the early history and the discussions around the community media concept, that was a very useful background (...) The Sheffield conference in 1983 was the one where Simon brought a paper and said ‘we should form this into an association’.  
(Interview, 4 April 2007)<sup>4</sup>

In 1980, members of COMCOM also formed London Open Radio (LOR), a pirate station that aimed to lobby the government ‘in support of community broadcasting in London’ (Coyer et al., 2007: 22). It sought to attract a wide variety of progressive interests across London and included programming on feminist, anti-nuclear, gay and anarchist issues. Further north, Sheffield Peace Radio, set up at the 1983 Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) conference, and originally planned to broadcast for just a weekend, did in fact continue transmitting for the following six months until it was shut down by the authorities (ibid.). During this period, the community radio movement also forged links with groups that were not primarily interested in media, who wanted ‘jobs, or better housing, health, education, childcare, public transport, arts and recreation facilities’ (Lewis, 1984: 148). Lewis ironically remarks that it took a Conservative

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<sup>4</sup> Buckley referred in the interview to a pamphlet that was influential in that period, ‘Radio is my Bomb’, (Anonymous, 1987; see also D’Arcy, 2000: 171). Simon Partridge’s book is listed under Partridge, S. (1982).

government to ‘teach this lesson to a movement which has till recently been over-concerned with means of communication and too little mindful of the political need for new social relationships’, given that they are ‘easier to construct at a local level’ (ibid., 148).

In 1983, the Greater London Council (GLC) also started to fund a Community Radio Development Unit that became ‘the best resourced centre of information, advice, research and funding in the country’ (ibid., 148) as part of its interventionist media policy at the local level. Minority ethnic groups, which had been neglected by the coverage of the BBC and commercial radio, became therefore prominent in the community radio debate (ibid., 148). The GLC, under the Labour government, had approached arts and cultural policy in a manner not unlike the creation of an Arts and Recreation Committee, chaired by the trades-union official Tony Banks, who had called a conference of London’s arts organisations in 1981. As British cultural historian Robert Hewison recalls in *Culture and Consensus*:

The GLC adopted a wider definition of the arts than the Arts Council’s to include photography, video, electronic music and community radio, and sought to re-radicalise all the art forms by giving representation on its sub-committees to the most active practitioners. In addition to giving grants, the GLC organised its own festivals and events (...) With the traditional working-class vote in decline, there was a need to establish links with new groups of voters: black British, Asians, middle-class people working in the public sector, and the small but articulate pressure groups of gays and lesbians. A cultural policy which addressed the interests of those groups became an alternative form of mobilisation and communication. (1995: 238)

During this period, radio broadcasting piracy had a strong increase and some of the biggest ethnic minorities (Asians, Greeks, and West Indians) managed to start successful radio stations that attracted funding from their own ethnic group’s businesses (Lewis and Booth, 1989: 106). The GLC’s Ethnic Minorities Committee then published a report summarising community radio concepts in the UK and abroad and suggesting initiatives that the GLC could take up (Greater London Council, 1982). Moreover, the GLC’s Finance and General Purpose Committee published a document outlining

strategies to support local radio in the city and to further develop community radio (Greater London Council, 1983). The Unit was active until 1986 when the Greater London Council was abolished by the Thatcher Government: ‘The progressive arts policy of the GLC and its attempt to empower minority groups was only one more reason for the Conservative government to wish to abolish it along with the metropolitan city councils’ (Hewison, 1995: 240).

Despite the consequences of the abolition of the GLC, it is important to note that, on the political level, in principle, the two main parties showed sympathy for the idea of Community Radio. But where the governing Conservatives saw it as a tool to enrich listeners’ choice and foster business enterprise, the Labour opposition foresaw its use as a forum for local democracy (Crisell, 2002: 224).

An important year in British radio broadcasting was 1983, as it marked the start of the Special Event Licences, the precursor of the Restricted Service Licences (RSL). These licenses permitted local groups to broadcast to a very small geographical area, over low power transmitters, for a short period of time. The British radio scholar Janey Gordon, who has written one of the few publications focused exclusively on RSLs (Gordon, 2000), has described the licence awarded to Green Belt ’83, a four-day Christian music festival, as an attempt by the Home Office to ‘put a very tentative toe in the waters of small-scale radio licensing’ (ibid., 8). Starting with transmissions on an induction loop system, the following year, the station was allowed to broadcast through a 50-milliwatt transmitter, but without advertising.

Gordon reports that between 1984 and 1991, the Home Office continued to grant, on average, 25 Special Event Licenses a year, with most of them event-led, especially sports. Afterwards, when the Radio Authority took over, there was an increase in licenses that covered ‘social events’ such as ethnic community festivals, carnivals, and religious events. Despite the relative high costs, Gordon argues, these stations have had ‘the ability to be innovative and experimental (...) question accepted wisdom and norms and redefine radio conventions’ (ibid., 9), and ‘encourage accessibility and access to the airwaves and provide a method for people to understand more about how the media works’ (ibid., 11). Moreover, ‘the RSL broadcaster and the RSL listener know that there can be alternatives to mainstream radio’ (ibid., 11).

As will be explored further in Chapters 6 and 7, the RSL experience provided an important ground to many stations that were granted a full-time Community Radio licence from 2005 onwards. In this context, it is important to underline how such licences permitted the community radio movement to articulate into practice their own vision of Community Radio and show that there were other ways to produce radio outside the duopoly, that could be locally relevant, experimental, reflect more accurately the diversity present in British society and provide media literacy skills and training to a large number of people in a short time.

#### 1.4. Missed opportunities for Community Radio in Britain

In January 1985, when Home Secretary Leon Brittan announced his intention to introduce Community Radio, there was a sense that the sector was on the way to obtaining official recognition from the Government and the IBA (Langham, 1986: 178).<sup>5</sup> Applications for two-year experimental licences were offered for 21 locations across the country, divided into two types, a ‘neighbourhood’ one for a 5 km radius and a ‘community of interest’ one for a 10 km radius. The response showed evidence of great interest: 266 applications were received and the level of radio piracy was momentarily reduced. An advisory panel had the task of assisting the Secretary of State to select the applications with, as Lewis and Booth report, ‘the minimum of regulation’ (1989: 108). The recommendations of the panel were then passed on to the new Home Secretary Douglas Hurd, in charge from October 1985.

This process also prompted a series of works by, and in collaboration with, the Greater London Council. As a result of two research surveys in the Greater London Area carried out by the Broadcasting Research Unit (BRU) in connection with the GLC’s Community Radio Development Project (CRDP), between January and April 1985, a report was published by the BRU later that year, titled *The Audience for Community Radio in London*. The findings illustrated the dilemmas emerging when using the word ‘community’ and the contradictions found in the localities, among various interest

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<sup>5</sup> She refers to Tony Stoller’s *Time for a New Rationale for ILR*, published in *Broadcast* on 11 January 1985, where he ‘suggests that community radio should be grouped under the banner of “alternative radio” outside the IBA framework and suggests a new licensing organisation to replace the franchise system.

groups when trying to identify a common set of values existing in their communities. Geographical, ethnic-based and interest-based communities were recognised and ideally supported by the respondents, and two attitudes towards ‘exclusive’ and ‘inclusive’ community radio emerged. The ‘exclusive’ attitude envisaged each interest group having its own station, where the second ‘inclusive’ attitude would have contributed to further integration and increase of the sense of belonging in each community. The GLC’s Community Radio Development Project also commissioned a study of an already successful example of community radio, in order to inform future development in London, such as Bevan Jones’ *Community Radio in A Capital City*, which takes Sydney as its example.

By the summer of 1986, the Conservative Government was getting increasingly concerned about the consequences of non-balanced broadcasting in an election period. A piece published on 29 June 1986 in *The Observer* predicted that plans for Community Radio would be shelved: ‘The reason for the cancellation was that the Cabinet feared that the licenses might go to inner city groups hostile to the Conservatives in the run-up to the General Election’ (in Langham 1986: xv). The day after, 30 June, Hurd (1986) indeed announced the cancellation of the experiment:

It had been hoped to start this two-year experiment several months ago. But various difficulties arose and anxieties were expressed about its exact form. There would have been no regulatory body, and yet the public would have expected certain minimum standards of objectivity and decency to be maintained. Even in an experiment in partial deregulation, some minimum would still be necessary (...) Home Office Ministers would in practice have been held directly responsible for the content of what was broadcast during the experiment. Their only method of control would have been to insert conditions in the licence, and their only sanction the withdrawal of the licence if the conditions had been breached – a sanction which might well have seemed arbitrary and open to challenge. (...) The Government have therefore decided to give up the idea of an immediate experiment in community radio, the exact form of which was still causing difficulty, and to look again at community radio among the matters to be covered in the forthcoming Green Paper on radio. As the timing has worked out, an

experiment in community radio would have delayed the time when the whole future of radio could be coherently considered. The Green Paper will undertake that consideration.

The absence of a specific regulatory authority and the risks of influencing the wider discussion on the future of radio broadcasting were claimed to be the reasons for cancelling the experiment, but the then CRA Director Steve Buckley argued that the cancellation was also due to lobbying by the commercial radio sector and because of the interventionist policy of the GLC that had given substantial funding (approximately £500,000) to five community radio stations in the city:

Some of the Tory MPs were saying ‘this stuff is being supported by Labour-controlled local authorities. We can’t let this go ahead. But the other more nasty part of the Tory discourse was the extent to which several of the applications for licences were from ethnic minority groups and there was clearly an undercurrent thought on ‘we can’t let these on the airwaves, they are going to cause riots in the cities and use the radio stations to foment public disorder’ and so on. This was stopped at the Cabinet level by interventions from Norman Tebbit and Margaret Thatcher, although the Home Secretary of the time, Douglas Hurd, would have gone ahead with it (Interview, 4 April 2007).

Coyer further explains,

The bulk of the backlash against community radio came from the Tory backbench, members who alleged that some of the stations were supported by what they felt to be left-wing controlled local authorities and by ethnic minority groups, neither of whom fared well under Home Office policy. It should be noted that Hurd advocated going forward with the plan but was blocked. The Tories went back to the drawing board to attempt to come up with an alternative plan but other serious events took precedence such as the Miner’s Strike, and community radio was pushed back to the consultative stage (2006: 91).

In 1988, the Home Office Green Paper, *Radio: Choices and Opportunities*, in a move towards the further deregulation of the sector, proposed the introduction of a large number of small-scale stations without making any substantial distinction between commercial and non-profit-oriented stations, even freeing them from public service obligations and from the 'L' for local in the sector's acronym that became simply 'IR' for Independent Radio. Hurd made clear the intentions of the Conservative Government with regards to radio policy: the marketplace was supposed to provide the balance, public money was to be aimed at projects 'intended to provide a specific benefit to the community' (1988, quoted in Lewis and Booth, 1989: 199), and the stations were not to be allowed to set up political platforms (ibid.).

However, the Green Paper also said that frequencies 'will be available for a new tier of community services, and the interest and demand for such services is evident'. These services would be 'capable of meeting a wide range of consumer tastes, including those of ethnic minorities' (Green Paper 1987: 39). The following White Paper, *Broadcasting in the 90s: Competition, choice and quality*, stated, 'The Government's proposals will create an environment in which community radio, based on a combination of local identity and cultural diversity, will be able to fulfil its potential' (1988: 38).

By 1989, 21 'incremental' stations went on air (as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3), favouring the emergence of 'a substantial number of ethnic community media organizations claiming to serve and represent their respective communities' (Tsagarousianou, 2002: 218). Buckley (2007) argues that within this framework, community broadcasters could apply for licences, but were then destined to failure, as in the case of Cardiff's CBC<sup>6</sup> (also discussed later in this chapter), or, surviving at a subsistence a bit longer, as in the case of Moray Firth.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the IBA franchising system gave little space for the solid development of community-based stations. This was because the system had been designed for commercial stations and, as Lewis and Booth argue, was exemplary of the 'difficulty that can arise from mixing commercial radio aims with community radio principles' (1989: 109). Moreover, such models gained little support from the IBA itself and had to count on a high level of

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed account, see Lewis and Booth (1990:108-114) and the practice section later in this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> An account of this experience is available in Prag (1983).

capitalisation and meet the strict technical specification required by the IBA engineers. The only relevant small concession in 1987 were the Special Event Licences, left up to 1-watt low power, and the possibility, given in 1988 by the Cable Authority, for local groups to 'broadcast over cable without the need to wait for Home Office licenses' (Mulgan and Worpole, 1989: 33).

Towards the end of the 1980s, there were signs of an increasing interest in the arts world in the creative possibilities of radio. Greater London Arts (GLA) commissioned a study by Simon Partridge (*Greater London Arts & Community Radio*, 1987) and then published another study in 1989, *Radio City*, illustrating the reasons for their intervention in radio policy issues. The GLA was already funding radio projects delivered by the CRA, such as *Local Radio Workshop* and *Women's Airwaves*, and had plans to support initiatives targeting Asian and Black communities, which had 'the greatest dissatisfaction with existing radio access and provision' and were 'high on the list of GLA's priority groups' (Mulgan and Worpole, 1989: 8).

Mulgan and Worpole recognised also that many of the community radio projects funded by the GLC, in anticipation of licenses being awarded in the mid-1980s, faced terminal crises, even though 'community radio training continues despite the lack of outlets' (ibid., 8). They criticised what was seen as an 'understandable over-emphasis on training': it kept groups and studios intact, but could bring 'the inevitable disillusion felt by people who work hard to learn a skill which they are then unable to use' (ibid., 49). A side-effect of the lack of licenses, pirate broadcasting appeared to be quite strong in London with a reported number of 64 stations operating in the Greater London area by the end of 1987, either music-based, or more commercially-oriented, or addressing the social needs of a community. Examples included Dread Broadcasting Corporation (DBC), targeting the Afro-Caribbean population, Arabic Community Radio, Turkish Community Radio, Spectrum and Irish radio groups (ibid., 10-12).

The 1990 Broadcasting Act introduced new short-term licenses, renamed Restricted Service Licenses (RSL), that permitted community groups to spread broadcasting skills to a large number of volunteers and raise awareness of a diversity of issues 'at a time when BBC and commercial stations have been cutting back training schemes' (Barnard, 2000: 78). In the long term, these licenses gave opportunities to local commercial

initiatives and community media projects, including hospital and student radios, offering an ultra-local alternative to public and commercial stations. During the discussion of the act at the committee stage in February 1990, the Conservative MP David Mellor anticipated what would have been a very substantial development at the local level:

The radio provisions have two aims. First, as we have discussed, they put on top of the pattern of independent local radio three national independent radio channels. Secondly, and perhaps more important, they give 200 or 300 additional local radio services (...) we are proposing a much more flexible local radio service which will go to town and community levels (...) a look at the pattern of local radio services shows that community radio is the new service that would broaden the range of programmes available (Hansard, 1990 in CRA 1994b: 7-8).

This announcement did seem to open the way to new opportunities and, among other initiatives, the CRA launched a project to assist the development of rural community radio in England. In September 1990, the Rural Development Commission agreed to support the project through the Rural Social Partnership Fund and the CRA was commissioned to research the feasibility and to promote the benefits of this medium in rural England. Using an Action Research approach to support rural community development, it explored the role of **community radio** as ‘an information and communication medium and its benefits to the elderly, disabled and housebound in rural areas’ and in promoting rural culture and rural enterprise (CRA 1993b: 3). At the policy level, the report concluded that, as with the urban stations, the licensing procedure was cumbersome and largely inappropriate for small-scale, rural radio. However, the report recognised that the Radio Authority had adopted ‘a responsive attitude to rural Community Radio with one of the case study groups [Wey Valley FM]<sup>8</sup> gaining a full licence and two others having licence opportunities within the next 12 months’ (ibid., 36).

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<sup>8</sup> See CRA (1993b): 13-16 for a detailed account of the history leading to the licence. The station merged with Delta FM in the late 1990s and now broadcasts to Southwest Surrey, East Hampshire and Northwest Sussex. Source: <http://www.deltaradio.co.uk/on-air/info.php?refnum=569> [accessed 14 January 2009]

With the prospect of new licences also being awarded in inner city areas, the CRA wanted to give further support to ethnic minority groups through training, networking and business advice and – with the support of the Home Office Voluntary Service Unit – in 1993, it launched the ‘Power FM’ development programme to connect those groups with mainstream organisations:

Many aspirant Community Radio groups lack the experience of partnership building with mainstream public, private and voluntary sector organisations. Yet they have a vital contribution to make to community development and urban renewal, and they carry considerable grassroots support within their respective communities (CRA, 1994: 3).

Fleming has pointed out how the 1990 Broadcasting Act’s promises of broadening the public’s choice ‘failed to materialise, in part because it did not provide legislative protection for community radio in a commercial radio market’ (Fleming, 2002: 174). A separate licensing regime for Community Radio was advocated by the sector’s representatives since, as they argued, the economy of the IBA bidding process would never fit the long-term sustainability of non-profit oriented stations. As Steve Buckley commented in the community media magazine *Airflash*,

This severely distorts the market since licences are acquired on merit but sold to the highest bidder. This economy is a deterrent to public and community investment in small scale services. Public agencies and charitable donors do not want to invest in local community projects if this is seen to be taken for private profit. A separate licensing category is therefore an essential underpinning of their economic viability (...) [Community Radio] provides a counterbalance to media and concentration and globalisation. It provides a route into new information and communication technologies based on creative work and content. It provides access to those most in danger of exclusion from this new economy (*Airflash*, issue 69: 21, quoted in Fleming, 2002: 34)

However, it is interesting to note that in a policy submission to the Radio Authority, the CRA did eventually describe community radio as ‘a small but growing sector of

Independent Radio’ and that the 1990 Act had ‘enabled a serious start to be made in Community Radio licensing’, counting five stations broadcasting in FM and two on cable. It also reported that hundreds of community groups were working towards licenses across the country (CRA, 1993a: 2) and that a number of projects had received support from the Department of Environment through programmes such as City Challenge, Development Corporations, Task Forces and the Urban Programme, and from the Welsh Office, Scottish Office and Regional Arts Boards (1993c: 2). Lobbying efforts also brought, on 19 April 1994, the presentation of an Early Day Motion on Community Radio, sponsored by the Tory MP Nicholas Winterton. Endorsed by 100 signatures, it acknowledged ‘the opportunity provided by community radio to bring people together to share common interests and concerns, develop a sense of belonging and express their local identity’ (United Kingdom Parliament, 1994). It also argued that ‘the forthcoming allocation by the Radio Authority of the FM spectrum may be the last viable opportunity this century for the expansion of community radio’ (ibid.), therefore welcomed a move by the Radio Authority ‘to provide sufficient FM spectrum for a tier of low power local radio stations serving neighbourhoods and communities of special interest’ (ibid.).

By the mid-1990s, a series of technological developments gradually changed the media context, embedding the potential new risks of ‘digital divides’, even though the growth of the Internet and community communication networks brought new people into the community media sector and created the possibility of Internet radio broadcasts and converged platforms, and television RSL’s. The CRA needed to rethink its action and among its members, there was the feeling of a growing need for a national body not only for radio, but also for video, film, television, and the Internet (Buckley, 2007). Strategically, the CRA changed its name to Community Media Association (CMA) in 1997.<sup>9</sup>

The 1996 Broadcasting Act did bring some good news for the community media sector, with the introduction of restricted service television licenses. There was no news for Community Radio, but commercial broadcasters did get some concessions in terms of

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<sup>9</sup> See also CRA (1996).

revised media ownership rules. Finally, at the political level, Buckley recalls that the sector was optimistic that the framework could be changing in a few years time:

In the 1996 Bill, we still had a Tory Government then and we were still lobbying to get community radio recognised but they wouldn't accept it at that stage. (...) the environment was bit more receptive, but it was not sufficiently supportive of what we wanted to do. At the end of the day, we couldn't deliver the numbers. We didn't have a majority in the House of Parliament (...) But what we did do was to generate a lot of support and interest among the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party. We were more concrete than we had ever been and had much more [of a] sense of common cause, let's say. This means that when Labour came to power in 1997, we were pretty confident that we would get a breakthrough. It wasn't in the manifesto, but there had been a number of Labour politicians who, with some authorisation, had been prepared to speak out strongly for a separate recognition in law, for Community Radio. (Interview, 4 April 2007)

The decade between 1986 and 1996, then, started with a big blow for the **community radio** movement, with the cancellation of an experiment that could have permitted its entry as a recognised and distinct sector. The alternative plan of the CRA was to pursue other avenues that showed demand for such licences, such as increasing the number of community-based RSLs. Studies conducted in London in the late 1980s also showed a high level of unmet demand, with local groups resorting to pirate broadcasting to target underserved audiences or explore new market niches. But where significant developments were lacking at home, the continental connections of the CRA had been permitted to succeed in networking experiences, to build the capacity of the sector and to obtain funding that helped to raise its awareness and profile.

### 1.5. European connections

In the context of the wider European community radio scene, it is worth pointing out that in 1993, the CRA was given the mandate to establish a European Secretariat by AMARC, with its Director Steve Buckley appointed to coordinate AMARC's Western European branch activities. This was arguably the culmination of international links

forged since the participation of CRA delegates in the AMARC assemblies in Canada 10 years earlier. The necessity of a European branch had been discussed since the 1988 AMARC conference in Managua, Nicaragua, and the 1990 Dublin conference had been preceded by a gathering of Europe-based members, with a mandate given to the Dutch community media association OLON that had not been developed further. The European Secretariat was established at the CRA headquarters in Sheffield, England – curiously, in a country that did not have a recognised community radio sector at that time. Buckley (2007) explains how this marked the start of a series of meetings across Europe, with the aim of articulating the different interests of AMARC’s European members in a coherent manner, at the continental level. Its objective was to bridge the peculiarities of Britain’s RSL broadcasting stations with, on the other hand, experiences like the Milan-based Radio Popolare, broadcasting to over 7 million people, as well as the very politicised French sector and very unpoliticised Dutch sector.

In Britain, the European experiences were used to support the argument that the sector was strong elsewhere in Europe (e.g., large funding schemes in France, and the recognition of a distinct community media sector in France, Ireland, and the Netherlands) and insert this into lobby and advocacy materials directed at the British Government. Buckley remarks that it was ‘good that the CRA role here was central as it did help to have knowledge on the situation elsewhere’ (Interview, 2007). The work towards a common approach to community radio policy at the continental level was concretised by an agreement on the Community Radio Charter for Europe, approved at the 1994 Pan-European meeting of AMARC in the Slovenian capital Ljubljana.

Although the main work was driven by its Irish members (for a detailed account of the Irish experience, see Day, 2009), Buckley recalls that important contributions were also made by other European members. In the UK, this document replaced the previous CRA charter, and the word ‘radio’ was replaced by ‘media’. In Ireland, things went even further, with the Charter becoming an integral part of the legislation and regulation, in the form of an Annex. AMARC Europe continued to operate well into the late 1990s, but the new century resulted in an organisational and financial crisis that led to its closure, leaving the continent without a lobbying body for some years. An embryonic form re-emerged in 2006, but its action and impact has been quite limited due to lack of funding.

However, Buckley argues that the most important contribution at the European level, for British Community Media, was funding, not policy and regulation:

The funding side of Europe was very important to the CRA in the Tory years because there was very little UK public funding. This was before the National Lottery and at a time when Government was reducing public expenditure. The first grant we got was from Euroform in 1992 (...). These were funds that would enable us to do national strategic work and were funded more or less directly from Brussels. We were able to succeed because we had strong European partners and these strong European partners came from AMARC and they were very credible counterparts in France, in the Netherlands and other European countries who wanted to work on a common cause. This was about training development, policy development, exploring new technologies and various different things. The fact that we had strong European partners helped us to unlock funds (...) We were able to get a lot of money from Europe, some millions over the years I suppose (...) You had to demonstrate to be innovative and transnational and we were pretty good at those. We got funding from Euroform, Integra, New Opportunities for Women and then Equal and something called Horizons, somewhere in between. (...) We became very good at these and did so from 1992 until 2005. (Interview, 4 April 2007)

The political landscape changed with the landslide victory of the Labour Party in 1997. Chapter 4 will show how the social, cultural, and media policies of the new Government made it possible for the community radio sector to achieve recognition in the Community Radio Order in 2004. The articulation of CMA's lobbying and campaigning actions, and the changing framework under a new leadership at the Radio Authority, will be explored in Part III. In this chapter, though, it is worth focusing on the experience of community radio experiments before 1997, and discussing what were the drawbacks, challenges and lessons, from which the sector learned.

## 1.6 Community Radio experiments before 1997

Given the dual nature of British broadcasting until the introduction of a third sector, examples of legal community radio broadcasting were limited to experiments via cable, operating non-profit stations under IBA franchises and Restricted Service Licenses until 2000. However, illegal stations with a community ethos had existed since the 1970s and continued to operate in areas where local community members had been feeling neglected by other existing broadcasters, with a strong presence in major urban areas such as London.

### *The cable experiments*

In order to address aspects of social reality that, it was argued, had not been addressed by the mainstream media, local sound broadcasting experiments via cable that involved community groups had been conducted in Britain since 1972 (Lewis and Booth, 1989: 105). Partridge also reports how some groups like Cambridge Community Broadcasting (CCB) proposed an ‘experiment in community broadcasting’ in 1971, when the White Paper introduced local commercial radio. He was also among the authors of a letter that in June of the same year was advocating the introduction of small-scale, non-commercial radio. Eventually, in early 1973, the CCB ‘was preparing a non-profit bid for an IBA franchise, but to be financed out of advertising revenue’ (1982: 11).

In 1976, a housing development corporation in Telford applied for a sound-only cable licence to use it as a community development tool and, following this, the Home Office granted seven experimental licences covering Basildon, Newton Aycliffe, Telford, Thamesmead, Greenwich, Milton Keynes and Swindon. Research conducted in Newton Aycliffe (McCron and Dungey, 1980) showed that the local community liked its programming, but the low level of involvement of the community, in its operations, was apparently because the station manager was more concerned about a ‘high technical standard’ and ‘professional presentation’ rather than its relevance for the target community (Gray and Lewis, 1992: 161).

Moreover, people in the area were not aware of the ‘unique purpose and features’ of Aycliffe Community Radio and, because of the high use of commercially recorded

music, did not perceive the significant distinctions from the existing local stations. A strong limitation of this experiment was also the use of cable instead of an FM frequency, restricting access to just the people connected to the cable system. The stations in Milton Keynes, Newton Aycliffe, Swindon and Telford closed after only a short time due to lack of funds, which had been provided by a mix of grants and advertising. Once the former had gradually been withdrawn, they failed to raise sufficient levels of the latter. Telford and Swindon had democratically elected bodies, whereas the others had boards that also had to be approved by the Home Office (Partridge, 1982: 31).

#### *Cable Community Radio: Radio Thamesmead*

Radio Thamesmead began operations in 1979 and in 1987 was the only one of its kind still broadcasting, when Peggy Gray conducted an organisational study and an audience survey (Gray 1988). Gray describes the area as characterised by low employment opportunities, a sense of isolation, ignorance about the services available to the community, and a consequent need for resources that would help them to overcome these problems: ‘an ideal role for community radio’ (ibid., 3). The brainchild of a local Vicar, the station started its operations in St. Paul’s Church in 1978, trying to alleviate the isolation felt by many coming to live in the high-rise blocks. Nine years later, it had ‘some one hundred workers, was training many people through the Manpower Services Voluntary Project Programme and had a Community Programme scheme which at one time had employed fifteen people’ (ibid., 4).

However, there was widespread confusion about its managing structure among its participants. The programmes had no clear line management and job descriptions, and there was no coherent recruitment or training policy. This resulted in a tense atmosphere and low morale at the station. The breakup of the GLC, a financial supporter of the station, led to further problems with the payment of its bills and for the draft of plans for the future. Gray also remarks that most of the volunteers went to the station ‘because they were interested in radio and wanted to make radio programmes, relatively few came because they wanted to work on a community project’ (ibid., 6). One successful project of the station was the *Thamesmead Talking Newspaper*, a service that gave blind

people the possibility of getting information about local elections, electoral candidates and their policies through recorded tapes.

The audience research, even if characterised by difficulties of getting a good sample in the area, revealed that the station was viewed as an important tool of local information, especially for the recently settled. However, the use of cable and the poor management of its infrastructure severely limited the communicative potential of Radio Thamesmead. The survey also included local organisations, which affirmed that it had great potential for the community but had reservations about the fact that it was available only on cable and did not reach the whole administrative area of Thamesmead (ibid., 21). Gray concluded that given that the station had managed to survive nine years, this was already a success story, involving hundreds of volunteers and having trained many people who subsequently found jobs in broadcasting. Indeed, the fact that it continued to exist, despite uncertain funding and broadcasting policies, and poor infrastructure and management, does make the station a remarkable example of the commitment of the volunteers over time.

Despite its technical and organisational limitations, Radio Thamesmead succeeded because it provided a useful service to the local residents who could receive it and especially because it could be of help to the newly settled to connect with the issues of the place to which they had moved. Moreover, its volunteers valued its overall aims and dedicated time to the project, in some cases using it as a gateway to employment to start a career in the media industry.

#### *Community Broadcasting under ILR: Cardiff Broadcasting*

Another relevant example of the difficulties in trying to succeed as a community radio station, but with an IBA licence, is documented extensively by Lewis and Booth in *The Invisible Medium: the case of the Cardiff Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and its IBA franchise, awarded in 1979* (1989: 108-114). They argue that CBC ‘illustrates the difficulty that can arise from mixing commercial aims with community radio principles’ and that its eventual failure was ‘to discredit community radio as a concept’. The bid was put together by ‘a coalition of community activists, arts administrators, broadcasters and journalists, and a paid full-time co-ordinator’ (ibid., 109) and had to

work out a concept ‘unprecedented in British broadcasting, in public and democratic consultation with a constituency which had to come to terms with itself as well as the novel subject matter of the project’ (ibid., 109-110).

The areas of programming, finance, administration, and publicity were discussed in public meetings and through working and sub-working groups, and a trust was elected. It was set up as a non-profit company with a management elected in equal parts by the community and the organisations in the coverage area. Welcomed with surprise in the city and in the industry, CBC acquired its licence in April 1979 and went on air a year later. The station organised a series of workshops involving the local community in access broadcasting, training them in broadcasting skills. A ‘Workshop Diary’ showed the participation of young people, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, as well as people interested in news, music, religion, and theatre. However, to repay expenses and loans, the trust had to try to make profits through advertising revenue and, even if it was committed to a speech-oriented format, this ended up being much more expensive than music.

Lewis and Booth report how these compromises pleased neither the audiences nor the funding bodies. Indeed, the necessary changes that followed took ‘the station further from its original community access principles’ (ibid., 111). Snow blizzards in January 1982 came to the CBC’s rescue as the station became an essential information point in the area, attracting a considerable number of listeners (an increase of 116%, according to JICRAR ratings four months later). Although the trust had a great degree of editorial freedom, and allowed access to the airwaves to community groups, the IBA franchise constraints stopped the station from becoming financially sustainable. The authority itself proved to be generally unsympathetic to stations like CBC, not offering specialist advice to non-profit franchises; the attitude of its members was described as ‘intimidating, acrimonious, distant or uninterested’ (ibid., 113). The Cardiff franchise provided the model for applicants across Britain, but failures occurred in Aberdeen, Bristol, Coventry, Gwent, Leeds, Peterborough, Swindon and Essex. Within the industry, this case was seen not as the fault of the IBA, but as a result of the choice that had favoured community access and a speech-oriented format. By 1985, CBC was taken over and merged with a neighbouring station that had ceased its activities.

Finally, in the early 1980s, a range of other activities also flourished, including groups working on the fringe of the BBC and commercial radio in social action broadcasting, such as Common Sound in Sheffield, the London-based Local Radio Workshop – Women’s Airwaves, Walworth Cable Radio, the Black Women’s Radio Group, and the Rest of the News (Lewis, 1984: 147). They produced programmes on issues ignored or misrepresented by the mainstream media, and circulated materials among interested groups, which were often rejected by the BBC and ILR stations on grounds of impartiality and technical quality. Partridge (1982: 24-30) has listed other cases: a trust exploring the possibilities of applying for an IBA franchise in Gwent, Wales (Gwent Broadcasting Trust); a feasibility study for a station in an area with a growing presence of ethnic minorities not catered to by the city-wide stations (Hounslow Community Radio – see also Partridge, 1980); and a radio workshop in inner London (Islington Radio Project).

#### *Deregulation, competition and the ethnic community broadcasters*

In the late 1980s, several ethnic-based stations of the pirate radio movement, stimulated by the deregulation of the broadcasting policy framework, submitted applications and succeeded in getting radio broadcasting licenses.

Sunrise FM started to broadcast first for West London’s South Asian communities, then across Greater London and the Midlands. London Greek Radio (LGR) got a licence for North London. On the AM dial, Spectrum International, a multicultural station formed by activists of different ethnic communities, acquired a licence in June 1990. Tsagarousianou discusses how these groups managed to feature prominently in the applications ‘inasmuch as their tradition of service was stressed in the application negotiations’ (2002: 219). Given that in substance, nothing had changed in terms of licensing policy, they had to operate in a framework in which ‘community radio projects had to assume a profit-making enterprise form in order to have a chance of being considered for a licence’ (ibid., 219). Importantly, she observes how their ‘community-based genealogy’ was used as an asset, but their commercial logic (and positioning in the IR sector) was dominant in their policies, given that their prospective audience was described as ‘eminently marketable’ in their applications to the Radio Authority. This demonstrates ‘how the idiom of community (...) can be used as a

vehicle for the success of commercial logic in the ethnic community media sector' (ibid., 220). Tsagarousianou traces similarities in other stations like LGR, also noting growing signals of discomfort among parts of their audiences that were detecting the development of 'gate-keeping' practices 'to exclude controversial and "unprofitable" opinions and activities' (ibid., 220).

The first wave of ethnic broadcasters was followed by further groups targeting the Afro-Caribbean community and by an AM licence in North London to London Turkish Radio. Her conclusion questions how commercial interests in those stations could help to realise citizenship that 'rests upon a culture of communication (which might include painful confrontation)' and a debate that should not be 'subjugated to commercial interests' (ibid., 228). Given that this article was written shortly before the introduction of the community radio sector in the UK, surely these concerns are worth exploring in future research on the long-term impact of the new, ethnic, non-profit based stations. Tsagarousianou's piece highlights again the recurring tensions that occurred from the late 1970s in trying to combine genuine community communications with broadcasting policy frameworks not fit for this purpose. As Price-Davies and Tacchi remark: 'There existed no legislative protection for such services in a commercial radio market. The terms of their licenses offered them no protection for their community focused objectives' (2001: 7).

### 1.7. Conclusions

The conceptualisation of Community Radio models has now been a presence in the British context for almost half a century. Inspired by models developed in the United States and Canada, and later Australia and Western Europe, British practitioners claimed the need for additional space for a new sector, and began organised lobbying after 1977, in the context of the Annan committee discussions. Mixing left-wing ideology, libertarianism, and deregulation demands, the sector included experiences claiming a 'third space' for broadcasting that would facilitate the right to communicate, freedom of expression, and new avenues for music genres and content that apparently were not admitted on the channels of first, the BBC first and later, of the ILR. The political context during the Conservative Governments that were in place in Britain between 1979 and 1997 enacted deregulation policies in broadcasting but, with the

exception of an aborted **community radio** ‘experiment’ in 1986, never really favoured the introduction of a third sector. In the end, the left-wing ideology of the **community radio** movement between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, did not find enough support in the Houses of Parliament to achieve a breakthrough to legislation and establish a separate licensing regime for **Community Radio**.

However, proving quite resilient to sentences of premature death, small-scale experiments continued throughout those years, through pirate and cable broadcasting, the development of community-based commercial stations, and the growth of the seeds of a new sector in the form of RSLs. Collectively, these experiments managed to prove that, despite everything, demand was still strong. But it also showed that by the end of the 1990s, it was not so ideologically charged. The European connections proved to be important in informing practice, developing policy and, most importantly, in guaranteeing sources of precious funding during the Thatcher years. Before continuing the exploration of the British context, it is important to examine further the conceptual contours of Community Radio and its constituent elements, which are the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### COMMUNITY RADIO: IDEOLOGY, MOVEMENTS, CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

#### 2.1. Introduction

The late arrival of a separately licensed **community radio** sector within Britain had a profound effect on the way that **Community Radio** was, and continues to be, conceptualised within the UK. In the vacuum created by the absence of a strong, native **community radio** sector, in the years leading up to 1997, and to a lesser extent since then, British conceptions of **Community Radio** have been influenced by international debates, both within the academic sector and within the community radio movement. There are, of course, national influences, not the least of which is the dominant position of a public-service radio provider in the shape of the BBC. It is possible to argue that these national influences have been the ones that, in the end, have proved more decisive. Chapter 3 and Chapter 7 explore the local radio broadcasting contexts, before and after 1997, respectively, showing how ‘community radio’ has been a contested term, appropriated not only by **community radio** advocates of a third sector, but also by public and commercial broadcasters.

The current chapter focuses on the international perspectives that have nevertheless been influential in setting the terms of debate. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the absence of a strong native sector, British practitioners took their inspiration from North American and Western European examples of the community radio sector, through publications, participation at international gatherings and growing network activities supported by European Union funding. The extent of these international perspectives can be seen in, for example, the career of one prominent **community radio** advocate (and academic), Peter Lewis. This British scholar was the station manager of the community cable television station Bristol Channel, then convenor of the lobbying group COMCOM and, by the end of the 1970s, a consultant for UNESCO on community media. In the 1980s, he closely followed the birth of the Community Radio Association (CRA), the related quarterly publication *Relay*, and the World Association

of Community Broadcasters (AMARC), publishing several reports for AMARC's European branch, based in Sheffield since 1994.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Lewis was also active in working towards the development of Radio Studies research networks in the UK and in Europe, such as the Radio Studies Network (RSN) and in its European incarnation, International Radio Research Network (IREN). Both the British and worldwide experiences of community radio stations were reflected later in *The Invisible Medium* (1989), co-authored with Jeremy Booth, the UNESCO publication *Alternative Media: Linking Global and Local* (1993), more recently, in a report for the Council of Europe on the role of community media in favouring social cohesion (2008a) and in a book co-edited with Susan Jones, *From the Margins to the Cutting Edge: Community Media and Empowerment*, in which Community Media are positioned as important tools to exercise a basic human right.

At stake is the right – of course to communicate to the full extent of those rights expressed in the Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – but, to put it negatively but realistically given global contemporary trends, to resist the ideology of the free market. (Lewis and Jones, 2006b: 230-1)

What we see here then, are two main 'flavours' in the conceptualisation of community media: in the first part, its international link to an important right affirmed in a United Nations historical document,<sup>10</sup> and in the second, a political activist tone that starts to draw the ideological contours of the concept.

In the following pages, I will try to establish, first, some of the definitional problems of 'community' and 'community radio', before attempting to tease out the 'core' elements of **Community Radio** that recur in both the academic and policy literature. I will start with a discussion on empirical and normative descriptions of community, moving then to Community Radio concepts arising from critiques of mainstream media, and practical working definitions as described by its practitioners. Concerns arising from academic

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<sup>10</sup> 'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.' Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. Source: <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

research – such as local identity, participatory media production processes, the use of local media for community development and the improvement of democratic practices – will be briefly explored, leading then to the analysis of three constitutive elements of Community Radio's ethos: democracy and the public sphere, access and participation, and identity and localism.

I will argue that Community Radio has been the site of a continuously redefined and contested concept, positioned within the critique of global flows of communications systems. Its function is a sign of the democratisation and decentralisation of communication systems and as a tool, to enact access and participation and to promote local identity. All these aspects are relevant in the British context, since practice has informed the development of theoretical and conceptual models, both native and foreign, as work by scholars like Peter Lewis has shown, connecting experiences in Canada, Western Europe and the global level, to discussions in the UK. To start, though, it is important to clarify some basic concepts in the discussion, starting from the rather fluid and widely discussed concept of 'community'.

## 2.2. Basic issues of definition in community and radio

In their introduction to *The Sociology of Community*, Bell and Newby express their desire for a clear and satisfactory definition of 'community':

Out of community studies, there has never developed a theory of community, nor even a satisfactory definition of what community is. The concept of community has been the concern of sociologists for more than two hundred years, but even a satisfactory definition of it in sociological terms appears as remote as ever.

This failure to define what is community is not due to any lack of interest. Indeed the problem is rather that there are, if anything, too many than too few attempts at defining the term. It is compounded by the place of 'community' in the social thought of Western industrialized culture since the beginning of the nineteenth century (...) The reason why community could unite the respect of virtually the whole political and philosophical spectrum was that it was itself so amorphous and so malleable. (...) The result has

been confusion between what community *is* (empirical description) and what the sociologist have felt it *should be* (normative prescription. (1974: xliii-xliv)

Thus, for example, we find community described by using criteria such as human ties and collective identity (Tönnies, 1963), or as a place with warm, cohesive and cooperative ways of living, with a strong sense of neighbourliness – as a neighbourhood itself, or a village, a rural area, a town, or even a city (Jankowski with Prehn, 2002). Where members of a community share political, cultural, and social interests but do not necessarily live in the same area, this constitutes what has been called a ‘community of interest’. The latter has found a new dimension with the development of computer-mediated communication, where people share interests and media content through web-based platforms, and geographical closeness becomes irrelevant. Cohen has proposed ‘a shift away from the *structure* of community towards a *symbolic* construction and, in order to do so, takes *culture*, rather than *structure* as the point of departure’ (1989: 70, cited in Carpentier et al., 2003: 54, emphasis added). This highlights the importance of an actively constructed ‘community identity’ instead of one imposed by some external body.

On the ground, a recent publication authored by British community radio practitioners, the *Community Radio Toolkit* (Fogg et al., 2005), defines community at its simplest as a group of people with an interest in common. It adds a further distinction between ‘inclusive’ stations (geographically-based) and ‘exclusive’ stations (interest-based), favouring the former because of the issue of spectrum scarcity, especially in large urban areas such as Greater London, where the FM dial is almost filled to capacity. The authors claim that ‘it would be a tragedy if it were to become another point of division, for instance through the creation of ‘communities within a community’ (ibid., 13). As for radio, in academic literature, ‘community’ generally has been limited to the definition of geographically situated audiences (Carpentier et al., 2003; Jankowski, 2003) and in prioritising the communicative needs of local communities over regional, national and transnational systems. This has happened arguably because of the larger number of geographical-based stations and also because web radio (often used to target boundless communities of interest) is a relatively recent phenomenon.

There is obviously space for overlaps, and a clear separation between these two categories – place and interest – is at times impossible. However, in the interests of clarity, I will attempt some distinction here. Thus, where the previous chapter focused more on surveying the published ‘empirical’ discussions of **community radio** – that is, studies of specific stations and how they have functioned – the rest of this chapter will focus more on ‘normative’ discussions of **community radio** – that is, how it has been conceived ideologically as a *project*.

An historical analysis of the changing meanings of ‘community’ through time and place is beyond the scope of this work, but it is important to point out that the boundaries of this term have not been clearly defined even in the wider field of the social sciences, let alone the narrower field of media studies. This has led to ‘the difficulties associated with adequately defining the term “community” (that) have confounded the study of community media’ (Howley, 2005: 5). However, as with defining art, or quality, while defining exactly what community radio *is* can be elusive, many writers have focused more easily on what community radio *is not*. John Downing, for example, points out that the term community media is stronger in what it excludes – mainstream media – than in what it signifies (2001: 40). Specifically referring to radio, Lewis places **community radio** firmly in the ‘oppositional’ or ‘contrasting’ position and argues that,

Whatever sociological baggage ‘community’ brings in its train, its meaning when associated as a prefix with media or radio is determined by a set of political and bureaucratic definitions that place the resultant medium in an oppositional or at least contrasting position in relation to mainstream media. This guarantees it a position in the margins where life is hard, funding is precarious and keeping the station on air and supplied with programming is the over-riding concern. (2002:52)

However, language – the rhetoric of community radio, shall we say – is usually telling. Stations that fall into the category described by Lewis are described linguistically in different ways, highlighting a particular characteristic that is seen as relevant in their context. In the case of Western Europe, in Italy and France, the emphasis has been placed on ‘*libere*’ and ‘*libre*’ (free) and later on ‘*associatif*’ (associative); in Spain, on ‘*comunitarias*’ or ‘*municipales*’ (municipal); in the Netherlands on ‘*lokale omroep*’

(local broadcasting); in the Scandinavian countries on '*naer*' (neighbourhood). In Latin America, community radio is called 'popular' and 'educational'; in Africa 'rural' and also 'bush' radio. With regards to its position towards regulation, it is also defined as 'illegal' or 'pirate' and finally, with regards to particular social groups, student, university, campus, hospital, diasporic or ethnic radio (see AMARC 2005, online; Girard, 1992; Jankowski with Prehn, 2002; Lewis and Booth, 1989).

Is this just a matter of language? I would suggest this is not necessarily the case. Prehn states that 'the different terms are not only due to linguistic differences, but are also based on ideological and conceptual distinctions' (1992: 256); and Lewis, drawing on similar lines, that 'in each region of the world the history and context of political struggle and cultural marginalization has determined the particular emphasis and terminology' (2005: 3). This recognition of regional difference has manifested itself through a bewildering array of definitions among the community radio movement itself. It is reflected, for example, in the statements of the World Association of Community Broadcasters (known by its French acronym, AMARC), which confirm the wide variety of approaches to the medium by its members. On its website (AMARC, 2005, online), the association presents declarations of principle, which are 'advocated and promoted' in various charters (Carta de las Radios Comunitarias y Ciudadanas, 1988; People's Communication Charter, 1999; Community Radio Charter for Europe, 1994, cited in AMARC, 2005) and Declarations (Kathmandu Declaration, 2003; Milan Declaration, 1998; Declaration of the Latin American and Caribbean Festival of Radioempathic and Televisionaries, 1996, cited in AMARC, 2005). Some of the listed documents have been discussed and approved in regional meetings, highlighting particular issues and concerns of those areas, others have been agreed at global meetings and consequently, have a higher level of abstraction than the previous ones.

In the context of this thesis, it is useful to further explore the Community Radio Charter for Europe (AMARC Europe, 2000), adopted at the association's first pan-European meeting in 1994. It helps to link some features of this charter with the debates on community radio in the UK. Among other things, the charter says that community radio should try to promote the right to communicate and provide access to training, production and distribution facilities that would lead to programmes for the benefit, entertainment, education and development of its listeners. The stations should be

established as organisations run not for profit and ensure their independence by being financed from a variety of sources, and managed by a body representative of the local geographical communities or of the communities of interest. Finally, in determining their programme policy, they should be editorially independent of government, commercial, or religious institutions and political parties, and provide the right of access to minorities and marginalised groups, therefore promoting and protecting cultural and linguistic diversity.

The obvious resonance with New Labour social policies will be seen, as I hope to show more fully in Chapter 4. However, the description, based as it is on emerging practices of community broadcasters across Europe, is certainly flavoured by its attempt to distinguish community radio as *different* from mainstream broadcasting. It recalls the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, specifically, sets communication as a fundamental human right: it asserts not only the ‘access’ or the right to reply present in public and commercial broadcasting, but the possibility of having one’s own tool to exercise this right, independent from state institutions and commercial interests, run not for profit and owned, managed, and produced by a group that is representative of a community of place or of interest. The charter also emphasises the use of media training for the development of its listeners/producers, including groups marginalised and neglected by mainstream media, including ethnic minorities.

Bruce Girard, a community media scholar and an important contributor in the campaigns that have promoted the idea of communication as a fundamental human right, compiled the anthology of community radio initiatives, *A Passion for Radio*. He argues that community radio is,

(...) a type of radio made to serve people; radio that encourages expression and participation and that values local culture. Its purpose is to give a voice to those without voices, the marginalized groups and to communities far from large urban centres, where the population is too small to attract commercial or large-scale state radio. (Girard, 1992: ix)

The dual role of the community as listener/producer is also emphasised by Frances Berrigan, a community media consultant for UNESCO who had edited several reports

by the end of the 1970s, including one of the first comparative research studies in the field (Berrigan, 1977). In researching the use of community media for development, *Community Communications*, she describes this sector as:

(...) intended to be based on more than assumed audience needs and interests. Community media are adaptations of media for use by the community, for whatever the community decides. (...) They are media in which the community participates, as planners, producers, performers. They are the means of expression *of* the community, rather than *for* the community. (1979: 8, emphasis added)

What is it that emerges from these definitions – that is, other than a general and admirable commitment to letting a thousand voices thrive? Perhaps most clearly, it is a concern about the role of the targeted community in the radio production process, in its dual role as listener/producer, in order to have editorial control over the broadcast content. Thus, the organisational structure of a community radio station has to allow its listeners significant influence over the station's policies and administration. Advertising is permitted, as long as it contributes only to covering the running costs, without being envisaged as a source of pure profit. As for the transmission footprint of the station, this can be variable, depending on local specifications. They share the concern of providing representation to social groups that are under-served, marginalised, neglected, or misrepresented by mainstream media, from the local up to the international level.

These, then, are the definitions that have emerged from within the movement itself. But community media, with its critique of mainstream media, have attracted the attention of academics, who have themselves been concerned over the lack of diversity in established broadcasters' output, as well issues of localism and ownership of the media.

The following section will explore the relevant policy debates and relevant academic literature emerging from them, as well as a variety of perspectives.

### 2.3 Academic perspectives on community media

In the 1970s, the alleged gaps and fallacies of mainstream media were widely discussed by those interested in developmental studies and in UNESCO's forums. They addressed the imbalances present at the global level in the flows of communication between so-called developed and developing countries. During these discussions, representatives of developing countries were critical of the fact that a few Transnational Communication Corporations (TNCCs), located in the United States, Western Europe and Japan, controlled most of the media traffic around the world. The main concern for policy makers, as for scholars (Berrigan, 1977; Mattelart, 1979; Hamelink, 1983; Schiller, 1976; Tunstall, 1977), were the potential effects of the consumption of foreign cultural products on local cultures and identities. Those issues and wider ones concerning the democratisation of communication were exposed in the MacBride Report (UNESCO, 1980), which proposed the reform of national communication policies, 'South to South' information and communication channels, and a code of ethics for the mass media, with the ultimate aim of fostering a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Moreover, the importance of participatory and locally originated content in the developmental process was seen as a tool for activating participation in democratic processes and fostering cultural identity.

The following decade was characterised by issues of deregulation, privatisation, commercialisation, and the internationalisation of broadcasting media, as governments in the US and much of Western Europe embraced the principles of market capitalism in the name of choice. The aim was to break state monopolies and benefit 'consumers' through increasing the range of channels and stations. Advocates of the free market wanted to open public broadcasting to competition, make it more responsive to 'what the audience wants' and, possibly, with smaller public funding, allowing for further licensing for commercial stations.

At the other end, media activists campaigned for more open, accessible and wide-ranging public service, as well as claiming the right to open their own radio outlets. Legally or illegally, there is no doubt that the total number of radio stations grew exponentially both in the US and in Europe, where, in countries like Italy and France their number went well over the thousands (see, for example, Dark, 2009; Downing et

al., 2001; Lefebvre, 2008; Lewis and Booth, 1989; Lewis, 2006; Opel, 2004). In the case of Italy, though, the absence of a proper regulatory framework for community radio resulted, in the longer term, in a decline in the number of stations, mainly due to issues of funding and long-term sustainability, with their frequencies bought by local and regional commercial broadcasters. However, Downing has remarked that despite the commercialisation of the radio sector that has followed the rise of ‘free radios’ in Italy and France, they at least have had the merit of covering topics outside the limits of dominant discourses, demonstrating that many citizens wanted access to the media directly or through the activists involved in them, so that they could be ‘tuned to be public’s wavelengths rather than the parties’ or the state’s or the churches’ (2001: 188).

Even so, much of the academic literature produced at the end of the 1990s and in the early 2000s (Bagdikian, 1996, 1997; Crisell, 2002; Hilliard and Keith, 2005; Howley, 2005; McChesney, 1997, 2000) described how local broadcasting was becoming less local, more homogenous, and commercialised, and had increased the use of format clustering. Indeed as Hendy, in his *Radio in the Global Age*, describes this period,

The mainstream of radio – commercial *and* public service – is deeply commercialized. It will tend towards maximizing audiences and minimizing costs. And much of its output – though marketed as an array of different and unique brands – will be a familiar blend of popular music and speech, claiming a local identity but often representing a more distant production process and a global appeal. (2000: 68)

In other words, as Chignell has argued, commercial radio was ‘subject to the forces of commercialism, that is to say the relentless drive to cut costs and increase profits, which in the current era of capitalist media usually means the creation of huge media conglomerates and the reduction of costs through automation’ (2009: 114).

Despairing over the trends in mainstream broadcasting, scholars have explored new ways of conceptualising community radio, focusing, for example, on identity and citizenship. In this sense, an important role was played by what the Colombian scholar Clemencia Rodriguez conceptualised as ‘citizen media’. Following an exploration of theoretical definitions of the concept of citizenship, which, she suggests, ‘is not a status

granted on the basis of some *essential* characteristic' (2001: 19) and has to be enacted 'on a day-to-day basis' (ibid., 19) through participation in everyday political practices, Rodriguez maintains that 'citizen media' implies that a 'collectivity is *enacting* its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape' (2001: 20). Two other implications in this model are, first, that 'these media are contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalised social relations' and second, that 'these communication practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformations and changes are possible' (ibid., 33-34). Moreover, Rodriguez re-conceptualises how these media can impact on the participants' sense of themselves:

It implies having the opportunity to create one's own images of self and environment; it implies being able to re-codify one's identity with the signs and codes that one chooses, thereby disrupting the traditional acceptance of those imposed by outside sources; it implies becoming one's own storyteller (...); it implies reconstructing the self-portrait of one's own community and one's own culture (...); it implies taking one's own languages out of their usual hiding place and throwing them out there, into the public sphere and seeing how they do, how they defeat other languages, or how they are defeated by other languages. (cited in Downing, 2001)

In other words, the homogenisation of culture on a global scale, as a result of the action of the private global media corporations, can be balanced by community media that support local, cultural production, local heritage and improve social and political participation in those communities, in their own language and on their own terms.<sup>11</sup> Although this could be realised with any kind of media, radio has some comparative advantages among other solutions: it is cheap, it is pertinent in terms of language and content, and it reaches those who are illiterate. It is also relevant to local practices, traditions and culture, and has a better outreach in terms of geographic coverage in a local area (Gumucio Dagron, 2001: 19).

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<sup>11</sup> Is interesting to note here, in the context of decentralisation in a post-modern world, the parallel cultural history concepts of micro-narratives and micro-histories, as shown in the works of Peter Burke (1992 and 2004). In this sense, community media could be seen as a microscope that is 'an attractive alternative to the telescope, allowing concrete individual and local experience to re-enter history' (2004: 45).

But despite all the virtues described by its advocates, academics have drawn attention to the ways that community media in general have to continuously challenge the views of mainstream broadcasters and policymakers who see community radio as parish pumpery, and believe that media production should be limited to professionals in order to achieve the highest quality. This, they argue, has resulted in non-dominant groups being prevented from participating in the process and from circulating their views through the airwaves, for a long time.

An early example of this critique comes from Raymond Williams, who describes the structural characteristics of mass media institutions acting as barriers to wider social participation in media practices. These structural characteristics were defined as professionalisation, capitalisation and institutionalisation (1980: 54). More recently, echoing Williams, James Hamilton argues that media should also be ‘available to ordinary people without the necessity of professional training, without excessive capital outlay and they must take place in settings other than media institutions or similar systems’ (2001, quoted in Atton, 2002: 25). These issues have been further conceptualised by McQuail in his *democratic participant media theory*, where he argues that ‘communication is too important to be left to professionals’ (1987: 121). He goes on to argue that groups, organisations and local communities should all have their own media (ibid., 121-123).

In this view, small-scale, interactive and participative media should exist primarily for their audiences, who would in this way exercise their rights of access to media in order to communicate, and their content should not be subject to centralised political or state bureaucratic control. McQuail envisages the democratic participant as someone who searches for his or her way of social and political action outside the traditional channels of participation, such as a political party, and he points out the failures of the mass media system in engaging with the communicative needs of citizens, especially in minority groups. He thus suggests locally originated media that use horizontal structures of production: communication should not be left only in the hands of professionals.

In an elaboration of this argument, van Vuuren (2002) states that, instead of focusing on the broadcast quality of the content, community radio stations should be considered for

their community development functions: 'these include the quality and the management of volunteers, the sector's training capacity and the nature of various networks of which community broadcasting is a part' (in van Vuuren, 2006: 390).

McQuail's theory, and the AMARC Charter discussed earlier, even if developed from two different starting points, share many concerns about the use of a communication ecology consisting only of state-influenced or commercially-driven, large-scale media. They show how discussion in the practitioners' arenas have been echoed in contemporary debates in media theory and in the wider field of media and communication studies. In this sense, the British media historian James Curran argues that a truly democratic media system should also 'empower people by enabling them to explore where their interest lies' (2005: 144), 'support sectional group identities and assist the functioning of organizations necessary for the effective representations of group interests', and 'provide a source of protection and redress for weak and unorganized interests' (ibid., 145).

Indeed, the concept of democracy applied to communication is another area of research on which communication scholars have focused their attention. For example, Williams also considered the articulation of alternative forms of communication, like the radical press and other cultural products originating from the working classes, as different from the ones produced by mass media: democratic communication should therefore be 'genuinely multiple...[where] all the sources have common channels [and where those involved are able] to communicate, to achieve...active reception and living response' (1963: 304, in Atton, 2001: 9). Furthermore, Jakubowicz conceptualised a model of 'representative communicative democracy' by which members of a community, who do not want or cannot access mass media productions means, could circulate their 'views, ideas, culture and world outlook' (1993, 44) and become what Mattelart and Piemme describe as 'direct instruments for active groups or movements to produce their cultural identity' (1980: 336).

So far, then, we can say that conceptualising community radio does not merely involve a consideration of the process of allowing audiences to participate in the production for access, as described by Williams, for their own sake. The access of community groups to the media is seen as important because these small-scale stations, with their local

outreach, can be tools that allow these communities to speak for themselves and shape their own identities and discuss issues relevant to them through their own channel of communication. The introduction of local, public and commercial stations is not seen as a solution to these groups' communicative needs: they are described as paternalistic and monolithic, as well as professional and institutionalised. Lewis and Booth argue explicitly that 'community radio is an open or implied criticism of mainstream radio in either of its two models' (1989: 9), that 'within its own practice [it] tries to offer listeners the power to control their own definition of themselves, of what counts as news and what is enjoyable or significant about their own culture', charging mainstream broadcasters with 'distortion, omission and marginalisation of the points of view of certain [minority] social groups' (ibid., 9). In short, community media are conceptualised as aiming to provide access on the community's own terms, meaning that they could 'make their own news, whether by appearing in it as significant actors or creating news relevant to their situation' (Atton, 2002: 11), correcting imbalances in mainstream media, where 'powerful groups and individuals have privileged and routine entry into the news itself and to the manner and the means of production' (Glasgow University Media Group, 1980: 114).

What we see, then, in the academic literature, is a shift from purely political-economic objections to mainstream media (i.e., the need to create a more diverse public sphere in the face of a homogenised culture) to more emergent *identity*-based ideas about what community radio might be able to achieve through the act of participation. Or, to put it another way, there has been a shift in the normative emphasis from a concern with *product* to one with *process*.

What, then, are the implications for these 'normative' definitions of community radio? Academic research has been concerned with the fact that communication outlets are mostly in the hand of a few powerful institutions. For millions of people around the world, they are the main source of news, entertainment and education and they contribute to shaping views and political opinions, and influence our public spheres and democratic practices. By deduction, it therefore matters if local issues, which people feel are relevant to discuss, have less or no space in the schedule of the stations available on the local dial. And it matters, again, if commercial media are concentrated in fewer, and bigger groups, for whom audiences are a commodity to be maximised, in

order to appeal to advertisers, and the public broadcasters are under-resourced or non-existent at the local level. Therefore, community radio's constitutive concepts of democracy, access and participation, localism and identity all need to be analysed further to unravel the meaning behind these concepts and their application in the context of community media. This involves moving on from the description of the broad arguments in favour of community radio, to an evaluation of the critiques that have been applied to them.

#### 2.4. Democracy and the Public Sphere

The first cluster of critical arguments and problems surrounding community radio, then, is concerned broadly with issues of democracy, both in relation to society and in terms of internal structure. Hendy suggests that *all* radio adopts the language of democracy, employing the rhetoric of two 'apparently different' democratic functions: either to 'mediate' the views of the listeners, on their behalf, or in alternative radio, to represent, or give voice – through direct participation – to 'those incapable of expression through other media or public forums' (2000: 196). It is generally assumed that community radio attempts to pursue the second course, not least because it appears more appropriate the further away the station happens to be from the centre of power and administration. As Nigg and Wade put it, among community radio practitioners, there is 'a conviction that the means of communication and expression should be placed in the hands of those people who clearly need to exercise greater control over their immediate environment (...) Once this happens, a process of internal dialogue in the community can take place' (1980: 7).

The notion of dialogue is crucial here. Community radio activists claim that their media practices are consistently different from those of the mainstream media because they are facilitating participation and access to the local community and, in this way, democratising the local 'public sphere'<sup>12</sup>; they enact what Hartley (2000) has named 'radiocracy'. In practice, the commitment to democracy should be guaranteed by

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<sup>12</sup> I refer to the concept of 'Public Sphere' as in Habermas (1989). The German philosopher did not write specifically on community radio but he has been cited by scholars in this area of research, such as Hollander and Stappers (1992), Jankowski (2002a and b), Lewis (2002), and van Vuuren (2006). More useful for the purposes of this chapter is the critique of the Habermasian model written by Nancy Fraser (1992) on which I will draw more extensively in the following pages.

organisational structures that reflect this ideal, being in themselves accessible and accountable to the local community, and also because ‘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’ (Fairchild, 2001: 93). The role of the community radio staff would therefore be to *facilitate* community members’ communication, ensuring that there is support and participation and the provision of programming generated from the local area.

The crucial question, here, of course, is exactly how the size and shape of a given ‘public sphere’ is determined so as to ensure that a radio station’s coverage area usefully resonates with public sensibilities, rather than having to create it from scratch. In this respect, several problems are seen to arise. In discussing the role played by community media in a local public sphere, Hollander and Stappers, for example, have warned that,

More correct than to suppose that community media will create such a sphere would be to investigate first whether and at what level in the social system – within the city or village – a community of interest exists. It might be the case that at the level of the municipality, no correspondent ‘community’ or ‘Öffentlichkeit’ exists, while at another level – neighbourhood or district – a public sphere is present where residents share a concern for specific topics, thus forming, the basis for local communication. (1992: 23)

A preliminary condition towards an enhancement of a local public sphere would, then, be an analysis of the local ‘communication ecology’ and the way in which community radio, through favouring the involvement of the members of the community, could achieve that goal. The social and political conditions, like cohesion, stable political institutions, and the variety and plurality of voices allowed in media available at a local level will determine if the ground on which community media is founded, could potentially provide a significant contribution to the discussion of local issues, or improve them.

On different levels, two scholars in particular, warn of the risk connected with the creation of a *subaltern* public sphere and the regulation of access in the community

public sphere. Nancy Fraser, in her critique of the Habermasian model of public sphere, suggests that ‘the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy, and that a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics’ (1992: 117). She argues that ‘the bourgeois conception of the public sphere as described by Habermas is not adequate for the critique of the limits of actually existing democracy in late-capitalist societies’, and distinguishes between *strong* and *weak* publics, where the latter one is a public ‘whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and does not encompass decision making’ (ibid., 134). Moreover, this has created publics that are ‘differentially empowered or segmented’ and leads to ‘the weak character of some public spheres in late capitalist societies [which] denudes “public opinion” of practical force’ (ibid., 137).

Fraser argues that minority groups ‘have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics or *subaltern counterpublics* engaging in ‘parallel discursive arenas’ in order ‘to invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs’ (ibid., 123).

Fraser is concerned with the function of these counter-publics, the formation and expression of social and cultural identity inside them, and the discursive opinion they form, directing their activities at a wider public. Putting to one side, for the moment, the influence of those counter-publics on decision-making processes, another question that arises is: Who decides what exactly is legitimate to debate? How are people admitted to membership of *subaltern counter-publics*? Hendy also points to an important issue: ‘What *quantity* and what *quality* of political debate or action does it [participatory, community, clandestine radio] foster? Is it a marginal phenomenon, or does it have real cultural impact?’ (2000: 201). Furthermore, do community radio listeners also discuss those matters outside the station? Does radio produce social change inside the community? In other words, as Lewis argues, the conceptual question at stake is this: How can community radio ‘answer to the needs of groups at present marginalised or ignored by mainstream radio *while at the same time* avoiding the ghettoization that separate channels might create?’ (1984: 148).

Drawing on Fraser's lines, van Vuuren has explored the issue of the 'enclosure' of the public sphere in community broadcasting. She argues that there is a process of exclusion in community radio stations and consequently, in the community public sphere, precisely because it is 'subject to hegemonic processes and it is the management of these hegemonic processes that determines whether access and participation are fairly distributed' (2006: 382). The struggle in the production of knowledge, representation of the community and in this context, the contribution to the community public sphere, also occurs *inside* a community radio station itself, which in the case of homogeneous communities, could also lead to potential conflict, reflecting structures of power present in them. Thus, a Community Radio licence is representative of, and managed by, its community but it is also

Far from being an open-access sphere (...) a community public sphere is a more or less bounded domain, since open access to this sphere can undermine its value (...) In community broadcasting property rights are not determined by the share market or by the state, but by cultural orientations, norms and values.' (ibid., 389)

Community radio activists have remarked in their campaigns on the absence of local platforms that could facilitate communication within their own communities. On the other hand, academic research has been concerned with the existence of 'local public spheres' in a local media ecology, where concerns relevant to a community could find space to be discussed and resort only to limited space given by large, distant or different broadcasters. Scholars such as Fraser, though, have warned about the creation of counter-publics, which would isolate such 'sphericules' further and risk ghettoisation and marginalisation. Finally, van Vuuren, in the specific context of community radio, shines the light on organisational and managerial processes, the characteristics of which can determine the quality of access and participation and in the end, the democratic credentials of a station. It is these last two concepts – access and participation – that the discussion will turn to, in the next section.

## 2.5. Access and Participation

Even if community stations highlight their democratic characteristics, they then need a kind of structure on which their participants can agree and in which they can believe in, for such ‘democracy’ to work. Fairchild argues that ‘democracy in communication is the most amorphous yet omnipresent ideal that defines community radio’ and that a radio station can be considered more or less democratic only if it facilitates participation and is reasonably accessible to the local population (2001: 93). Moreover,

The politics of specifying practical working definitions of these concepts depend entirely upon achieving some measure of equity in the distribution of power between numerous entities including the state, broadcast regulators, dominant media institutions, community media organizations themselves, and various community groups competing for representation and some measure of control. (ibid., 93)

The kind of model envisaged here can be seen, for example, in the stated policy of ALL FM in Manchester,<sup>13</sup> a station that was set up to contribute to the social regeneration of south-eastern Manchester’s neighbourhoods:

All of the programme ideas at ALL FM are generated by the local residents and groups within the community who make up our volunteer base. The staff supports the volunteers to generate and produce their ideas. We engage in outreach work with various community organisations and networks and offer the opportunity through this for individuals or groups to get involved and make programmes for their community. We train groups to produce their own radio programmes and generate their own content (...) (ALL FM, 2004: 25)

Once again, the element of *process* is stressed, as opposed to *product*. Duncombe, for example, argues that it is the ‘position of the work with respect to the relations of production that gives it its power’ (1997, cited in Atton, 2002: 18) and it is this that

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<sup>13</sup> Chapter 8 offers the case study of the station.

might enable social change at a local level. It is also important to remember that radio production is less technically complex than other media and that creates the possibility of relatively ‘inexperienced’ individuals producing whole programmes by themselves.<sup>14</sup>

The key internal characteristic of community radio, then, is assumed to be some form of an equitable distribution of power, and beyond that, an equitable distribution of activity, in which it becomes possible for anyone to engage with any level of production or management. However, again, as with broader issues of creating a more democratic public sphere *outside* the station, the creation of a democratic culture *within* the station has been seen as fraught with conceptual, as well as practical, difficulties. Fundamentally, the degree of participation can vary from total ownership to a merely marginal engagement in programming. As Gumucio Dagron reports, there are in fact very few examples of radio stations that have ‘been conceived, set up, managed, technically run, financed and maintained by the community’ (2001: 16). One relatively isolated example cited is a miners’ station in Bolivia in the late 1940s (analysed in detail in O’Connor, 2004). Furthermore, even if a community radio station has the most inclusive policy on access and participation, there are several concerns that arise in the everyday management of its operations. Hochheimer for instance, identifies some central concerns on the organisation of the democratic structures of community media management. In practice, where some of them are (or can be) more active, others remain marginalised and at times, there can be emotional, economic and cultural issues that affect collective action. These are time-consuming and can potentially create conflicts inside the station. Moreover,

Community radio stations differ from traditional, mainstream stations not only in their world-view, broadcast policies and content. They also differ in their structure. (...) Alternative media which fashion themselves as ‘democratic media organizations’ bear little resemblance to their more formally structured siblings. Yet they need some structure to maintain themselves. (1993: 478-9)

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<sup>14</sup> The mix of cheap equipment and voluntary labour permits community radio stations to have lower operation costs and partly increases the chances of their financial sustainability (Forde *et al.*, 2002).

Who gets to speak, hear, and mediate are very important issues to be dealt with or, as Fairchild puts it, what is meant by community radio in a particular community is ‘the result of the arduous task of political organisation and the endless task of forging alliances within a particular set of social circumstances’ (2001: 98). Nevertheless, Lewis argues, the effort is worth it: ‘Though the workings of such stations are never easy, the structure does offer the possibility of accountability to the audience/user in a way state and commercial stations do not’ (1984: 141).

In his study, Hochheimer also refers to stations in very mixed areas. Again, ALL FM offers a good example of this as it broadcasts to an ethnically mixed area in the south-eastern Manchester boroughs of Ardwick, Longsight and Levenshulme. This is what the station stated in its application for a full-time license with regards to its accountability towards the served community:

Any member of the local community can apply to become a volunteer at ALL FM and can choose what roles they wish to undertake. We publicize this regularly on air using a recruitment trailer. Some volunteers choose to work as production staff and some as broadcasting staff. We also have volunteers who help with the general running of the station, such as administration (...) The Steering Group has been constituted to be representative of the local community by following the demographic (Census Information) of the local community in its recruitment policy. (...) The main way ALL FM intends to make its service accountable to the community is through the work of the Steering Group which will recruit and maintain a representative body of people to discuss and guide programming policy. (...) We hold regular Open Days where the Public can come into the station, meet the presenters and staff and let us know what they think of the service we provide. (ALL FM, 2004: 36-7)

At least in its intention, ALL FM claims to put in place a structure that can potentially accommodate the communicative needs of a (possibly changing) community, where different actors could ask for access. As van Vuuren points out,

In this scenario, the primary function of a community radio management might be an equitable allocation of airtime, subject to the particular needs and extent of support for the groups in question, as well as some basic principles to which the groups are required to adhere. (2006: 383)

As a community radio station should be accountable much more to the community it serves than mainstream broadcasters, careful consideration of its access and participation policies must be made. Due to social and cultural differences, some groups may have problems in coming forward and asking for a slot in the schedule. In this sense, a thorough knowledge of the demographics and social dynamics of the community, eventually supported by a full-time community outreach developer, would be likely to help in involving the more marginalised groups. The schedule should try to reflect the composition of the targeted community, balancing the voices and allocation and as van Vuuren suggests, an equitable allocation of airtime.

There remains, however, tension between Hochheimer's concerns and van Vuuren's findings of the 'enclosure of the public sphere' in the application of the ideals of democracy in a community radio station's everyday practice. In other words, while in principle, a station might have the mission to be inclusive, participatory and out-reaching, putting these concepts into practice might be difficult, work-intensive and require robust governance structures. For a radio station, a claim to speak for any particular community of place, of interest or ethnic group is a strong assertion and accountability here is key for both the targeted community and relations with media regulators.

## 2.6. Identity and Localism

Chignell has argued that the term 'localism' is 'increasingly used to describe positive, but often declining, features of local radio' (2009: 132) and indeed, an affinity with the life of its local area is a pre-requisite of almost any radio service – whether the 'local' area is as large as a country, or as small as a particular suburb. With academic discourses on community radio, however, there is a particular emphasis on the tangible editorial benefits of extraordinary vicinity, and the way that this can transform the relationship between producer and listener. Atton, for example, points out that in an

idealised community radio arrangement, ‘Local people would not only become primary sources and major interviewees in stories, they could also become news-gatherers. Reporters would build up networks of local people (...) and encourage them to supply leads for stories’ (2002: 116). A community radio station that is built up with the aim of satisfying local communicative needs, locally controlled, is seen by its practitioners as offering a distinctive service from the mainstream media.

Lewis argues that the prefix ‘community’ has the function of asserting an emphasis on the ‘priorities of local systems, populations, groupings over (...) the larger units of nation, region or transnational corporation’ (1984: 140). Thus, for example, the activities of a borough, district or metropolitan council, or neighbourhood community forum – activities which might fall below the editorial ‘radar’ of even a BBC local station – would gain due attention. Indeed, it is not just that local activities are given more attention. It is that they actually become the *central* concern of community radio. In sharing decisions on programming policies through participatory structures, they aim to place the community as the central subject of their activity. The Bolivian scholar Gumucio Dagron argues that ‘It reinforces the social tissue through the strengthening of local and indigenous forms of organisation’, installing cultural pride and self-esteem (2001: 34). Space given to local issues and to community groups is seen as relevant for enacting a dialogue on local issues and therefore contributing to the enhancement of democratic processes, as will be discussed in the context of New Labour’s policies and the measures aimed to revive ‘neighbourhood politics’ in Britain in Chapter 4.

Localism in broadcasting is seen as a counterbalance to invasive global media: ‘Today we are invaded by so much macro-information that people know more about what’s going on in the Gulf than whether or not their street is being paved and this is absurd’ (Pere Iborra, cited in Rodriguez, 2001: 88). These concerns were highlighted earlier in describing UNESCO’s activities and the effects of digitalisation and mergers on the content of broadcast media. Couldry asks whether we get the types of information that we need if we want to be ‘active citizens’ (2001: 16-7) and what kind of information flows reach us in a media environment, offering even more channels through internet-based and other digital platforms. As in the 1970s, Community Radio today is seen as ‘one of several efforts to reverse the societal trends towards still larger units and

concentrations of power’ and an ‘awareness of the locality or community as a potential basis for social renewal’ (Prehn, 1992: 259).

In other words, as opposed to mainstream media, community radio could strengthen local identity and interest in local affairs through the production of programmes that sound more ‘authentic’ (or from another point of view, ‘non-professional’) to its listeners. An ‘informed citizen’ would therefore be one who has not just a higher awareness of politics per se, but of politics locally: someone who is, as it were, in touch with their grassroots. It is assumed that this generates *a virtuous cycle of change*: an increase in social and political awareness and *more motivation to participate in local politics and community organisations*. In other words, community radio could be seen as an agent of change and regeneration in itself and not just as a static response to it. Arguably, this is why, as we will see in Chapter 4 and in Part III, community radio has also been closely associated with regeneration and community development functions.

## 2.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, the constituents of Community Radio were explored, drawing mostly on perspectives that originated where Community Radio itself blossomed, especially from the 1970s onwards. A variety of different approaches, both at the theoretical and at the empirical level, have contributed to different articulations of Community Radio. They share at least some basic features. First, they are not run for profit; second, they provide an outreach limited to a local area; and, third, they usually have a high degree of participation of the targeted community in their management, programming, and ownership.

Local, political and cultural differences, as well as Community Radio’s emergence at different moments in the history of each country, have created quite different community radio sectors across Europe. This has caused difficulties in Community Radio achieving distinctiveness among the public and the policymakers alike, when compared with public and commercial broadcasters. Where academic literature started with claiming the necessity of a distinct third sector of broadcasting – based on political and economic objections to mainstream media, through the years, other concerns have emerged, adding new elements to the discussion. Concepts such as identity, localism

and empowerment have shifted the emphasis from the *content* of community media to the *process* through which the content itself is produced.

Among scholars and practitioners, there are shared concerns about the concentration of media power in a small number of national and transnational broadcasters, affecting the public debate on social and political issues and therefore, democratic processes and political participation. Deregulation and commercialisation, especially at the local level, have resulted in a concentration of ownership that has pushed further economies of scale (affecting news-making and music play-listing) and in maximising audiences. Pressures on local media to be more open and accessible have had only temporary effects and after a period of involvement of local communities in radio production – mainly by public broadcasters, financial pressures and a concern for professionalism in their broadcast output, these initiatives became rarer by the end of the 1980s. Besides democracy, access and participation, the ‘need’ for a distinct third sector has been claimed, in order to ensure a media outlet for a local community, to create a tool that puts at the centre of its mission the aim of promoting and preserving local identity and local cultures, and act as a forum to discuss local issues in a two-way mode of communication.

Although the perspectives outlined above are global, rather than specifically British, they have informed British thinking about community radio. Steve Buckley, Director of the CRA from 1991 to 1997 (later, of the CMA, from 1997 to 2004), has been involved closely in its lobbying processes and outlines such influences here:

Initially we didn't really know much about what else was going on elsewhere; it was quite local and very spontaneous. It was only through these standing conferences that we began to realise that there were other people out there (...) At the conferences we began to meet people from other countries that were brought in to these events, people from Radio Popolare in Milan, BRB in Ireland, a great station south of Dublin, people from some of the French free radios as well. There were some people who had the knowledge of the situation in Canada and Australia. That was our background. (...) Some people of this country had been to Australia and that became a fairly repetitive theme in the work of the CRA. Someone from here

would spend two months in Australia and come back with a report. I think that there were three or four cases like that. That definitely informed our work. (Interview, 4 April 2007)

Having explored the main elements constituting community media, it will be more clear how they fit in the political and social goals of New Labour and specifically, to see how some of these elements fit into the policies of the Labour governments after 1997, as will be explored in Chapter 4.

As argued throughout this chapter, the concepts of democracy, localism and identity, and access and participation, when applied to community radio, bring with them a number of problems and tensions, making the 'fit' to the British media system awkward due to the specificities that were outlined in Chapter 1 and that will be explored in the wider context of British broadcasting in the next chapter. Organising democratic models of community media, as Hochheimer and van Vuuren demonstrate, can be problematic when dealing with claims of being representative, and speaking on behalf of a whole community of place or of interest. This generates tensions that, if badly managed, can result in catastrophic failures, with consequences for a station or, even worse, for a whole sector. In terms of a local public sphere, there has been a worry over the creation of smaller sphericules. The dilemma is between reacting to exclusion from mainstream media discourses and avoiding the risk of the ghettoisation of a particular community through its own radio station. Finally, localism and identity have become more important concepts in the face of the development of global media and concentration in media ownership. Historically, they have also had a strong appeal for the local outlets of national broadcasters and commercial media groups. Groups excluded from mainstream media, such as those who have resorted to pirate broadcasting, have also claimed these concepts. It will be these groups and the BBC and Independent Local Radio (ILR) in the British context, that we will focus on in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT IN BRITAIN: NO ROOM FOR A ‘THIRD TIER’?

#### 3.1 Introduction

After having explored, in the previous chapter, the historical development of community radio practice and lobbying before 1997 and then the central concepts in Community Radio as a social movement and a field of study, this chapter will focus on the peculiarities of the British broadcasting context in order to demonstrate the highly specific context within which New Labour social policy and community radio became *de facto* partners. New Labour policy itself will be further discussed in the next chapter.

The BBC has long claimed – with some justification – to already provide local radio services through a network of stations. Programmes like current affairs, news bulletins and phone-ins give a local perspective and discuss issues and matters relevant to the people living in those areas. Throughout its history, the BBC has claimed to have put in practice participatory processes of radio production, and several key figures in the corporation have tried, with varying degrees of success, to actively involve local communities in media practice and to deliver media literacy skills.

Furthermore, this has to be contextualised in the wider social and political context of Western Europe, where social reform movements, which originated in the late 1960s, were promoting community activism from the grassroots, pressing national governments for the decentralisation of the state control of policies in the arts, culture and indeed, broadcasting systems (also see Curran, 2002: 4-8, on radio as a contributor in broadening and deepening democracy in the context of the ‘liberal narrative’). In this period, an increasing number of social groups became aware of the potential created by access to mainstream media (Lewis and Booth, 1989; Prehn, 1992; Jankowski with Prehn, 2002). Alongside the BBC, the first local commercial radio stations were granted licenses also on the basis that they would provide, at least partly, a local public service. These would provide an alternative to the BBC, and in some cases, constitute the only

local service in areas as yet uncovered by the public broadcaster. Indeed, the populist narratives of the media see the introduction of local commercial stations as a rescue from elite cultural control, forging a closer connection with its audience (Curran, 2002: 22).

Financial concerns, technical matters and mergers following the deregulation of the commercial sector throughout the 1980s and 1990s have severely limited the potential and the local appeal of most of the stations, even if there are few cases reported of local commercial radio stations having provided a truly *public* or *alternative* service to their audiences. Nevertheless, the public service obligations already charged to the BBC and the ILR stations are arguably a primary concern for the late introduction of full-time licensing for community radio stations in Britain. As will be discussed throughout the chapter, both sectors have long claimed to be community broadcasters. And, at different points in time, both have had experiments and/or stations that would have fitted a normative definition of community radio. In other words, both the BBC and the commercial sector can claim, with some legitimacy, to have adopted some form of ‘community radio’, leaving less ‘space’ within broadcasting for what **community radio** advocates would have regarded as a ‘true’ version. This claim has also been used to legitimise the established broadcasters’ position when the government of the time, or the regulator, considered the introduction of a distinct community broadcasting sector.

In this chapter, the community broadcasting elements present in BBC Local Radio and ILR stations will be discussed, showing how these have often been used as a claim to legitimise their own ‘community-ness’ and maintain, or gain, public (audiences) or institutional (policymakers) support. In the case of pirate stations, this claim was instead used to highlight the failures of the current broadcasters at the time and remark on the need for changes in radio policies to allow new and diverse voices on air.

### 3.2 Community, Radio and the BBC

Although historically, the BBC has betrayed strong centripetal forces in its structure and programming, the academic literature on the corporation’s history has identified strong countervailing, centrifugal forces of regionalism and localism. Among the ‘centripetal forces’ is the Reithian belief that ‘the Best of Everything’ was likely to be metropolitan

– a reliance on ‘experts’ and an aversion to ‘parish-pumpery’ creeping into the air (Hendy, 2007: 128). Scannell and Cardiff have also shown how ‘the BBC was transformed during its era of ‘uplift’ (1922-1934) from a national network of local stations, some with local popular roots, into a cultural missionary organization led from the top’ (1991, in Curran 2002: 18).

In envisaging BBC broadcasting, Reith puts in place a firmly ‘one-way’ model of communication as the public were to be offered programmes ‘slightly better than it likes’ (ibid., 18) and the heart of the corporation’s production activities were the London studios (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991; Curran and Seaton, 2003).

On the other hand, centrifugal forces, such as issues of ‘access’ programming, of the demoticisation of speech,<sup>15</sup> more attention to ‘grassroots’ concerns, the use of phone-ins – have all been seen as central concerns of the BBC, especially since the 1960s, but also dating back as early as the 1930s (Scannell, 1980), when unemployed workers described their personal experiences and difficulties in accessing welfare. The issues of centralisation and decentralisation were debated between the headquarters in London and the regional ones, often claiming more financial resources from the centre to be devoted to the periphery. As Briggs emphasises, in the 1960s ‘regional cultures were making their way into fiction and film’ (1995: 624) across England and the nations of the British Isles.

On Radio Four, grassroots involvement through phone-ins appeared with programmes like *It’s Your Line* (October 1970), *Whatever You Think* (December 1971), *Tuesday Call* and *Friday Call* (June 1973) and *Voice of the People* (September 1974). As Hendy notes, the main interest of Tony Whitby, then Controller of Radio Four, was not to promote participatory democracy, or to gauge public opinion on a particular issue. These programmes were to give a different ‘texture’ to the schedule, one where ‘voices and experiences rarely heard elsewhere on the network would find their moment in the sun’ (2007: 72). Moreover, the views of people in the street were also given more prominence in programmes like *The World at One* (Chignell, 2011: 87). By the mid-1970s, a group of producers and editors at the BBC, especially in the Current Affairs

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<sup>15</sup> See also Cardiff, D. (1980), for more on demoticisation in 1930s and 1940s.

Department, were arguing that the voices of ordinary people should be centre-stage. There were also reporters such as Ray Gosling who made it their task to portray British life by concentrating on communities dealing with the consequences of local decline, by 'getting people untrained in broadcasting to speak to him in remarkable unguarded ways' (Hendy, 2007: 224-5). In the case of *Analysis*, extensively discussed in Chignell's recent book on 'public issue radio', the introduction of 'vox-pops' signalled a highly unusual move and a break from previous, less demotic norms (2011: 115).

Between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, the BBC's style of broadcasting did indeed change towards a less elitist, more *demotic* style. In fact, 'if ordinary people's *opinions* were still treated warily, their *experiences* and their *feelings* were now central to the broadcasting mission' (Hendy, 2007: 245) and broadcasters started to talk more conversationally, adopting 'inclusive' styles of delivery (e.g. using 'you' instead of 'one'). Chignell has remarked the demotic approach of programmes like *File on Four*. One of its producers, Gerry Northam, said, 'I think it's important that the voices of the people who are relatively powerless continue to be dominant in our programmes' (in Chignell, 2011: 158). This approach, Chignell argues, seems to be related to the programme's location at the BBC's offices in Manchester, which was 'a large industrial city suffering from the decline of the British industry but with strong cultural roots and working-class traditions as well as an emerging ethnic population' (ibid., 158). By reporting how the implementation of policies affected people's lives, *File on Four* developed a reputation for presenting points of view previously ignored' (ibid., 161). Not surprisingly then, the Annan Report (1977), defined by media historian James Curran as a 'transitional' document, described public service broadcasting as 'a negotiated settlement between elite and popular culture values' (Curran, 2002: 196-7):

Some programmes should be made for the most exciting intellectual and aesthetic mountaineers who have scaled cultural heights (...) But the bulk of programmes should be provided for the majority of people who will never reach these pinnacles. As a group they have paid the most towards the broadcasting services. (Annan, 1977: 331, cited in Curran 2002: 197)

Finally, the broadcast of local radio programming on the national networks seemed an option when, after the Conservative victory in the General Elections in May 1979, the

Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, made it clear that the BBC should be downsized. Between mid-1979 and mid-1980, the corporation even discussed some radical solutions to address its financial concerns: one of the national networks, Radio Two or Four, could combine its programming with the local stations, strengthening their schedules with a sustaining service, with the 'new' channel renamed 'Town and Country Radio' or the 'Local Home Service' (Hendy, 2007: 256).

This could be seen as the structural response to the wider aesthetic desire to offer a more demotic feel in programmes. In both cases, the desire was to extend the opportunities for local people to discuss local issues, throwing up 'questions which had been overlooked and voices which it was good to hear', un-mannered and non-metropolitan in feel, moderated by a presenter who interviewed experts speaking from local studios (Hendy 2007: 127-8). Nevertheless, there were some problems arising from discussing local matters on national networks just because there was a fashion with 'non-metropolitan' items. Whitby went on to say: 'If the duty/worthy items have been getting in because of exaggerated respect for topicality and for non-metropolitan happenings, then to hell with topicality and the provinces' (ibid., 128). There were, then, firm limits on the extent of 'localism' on a national network that aimed to achieve national cultural goals.

The case of Radio Four, discussed in this section, seems to suggest that, for a variety of reasons, 'access' programming, involvement of the grassroots in the local debate and a closer connection with local communities represented a general desire that proved difficult to achieve in a national context. The aim was better fitted for stations with a smaller footprint, and physically located close to those communities. The next section will therefore focus on local public broadcasting.

### 3.3 BBC Local Radio

Where very local broadcasting has been present in the BBC since in its early days, through local stations in London (2LO), Manchester (2ZY), Sheffield (with a low power transmitter since 16 November 1923), and elsewhere, it was only in the 1960s that the

corporation decided to go ahead with plans for the provision of local radio services.<sup>16</sup> The main advocate of this activity was Frank Gillard, who in 1955, when he was still Head of Programmes in the West Region based in Bristol, had written a memorandum titled 'An Extension of Regional Broadcasting' (Gillard, 1955). In the wider context of British culture, he foresaw the role of regional broadcasting as 'one of the greatest instruments of our day for the nourishment of culture', and therefore it 'must accept some responsibility from the roots up' (Gillard, 1955, quoted in Briggs 1995: 624). Moreover, his policy in Bristol had been 'to get away from the artificial atmosphere of the studio (...) and take the microphone among the people' (Gillard, 1955, quoted in Hendy 2007: 38). For the BBC and for Gillard, the most concrete way to do this, and provide airtime for the debate of local issues, was the introduction of a local radio system, a scheme partly inspired by his sabbatical in the USA in 1954. In Britain, Gillard argued, these stations 'would not be mere amplified juke-boxes, as in many places in North America (...) concerned primarily with show-biz, or with pouring out large quantities of entertainment', but they 'would confine themselves to programmes which would reflect the affairs, activities, interest, issues, cares and pleasures of the centres in which they operated' (Briggs, 1995: 634).

Significantly, Gillard eventually envisaged a 'footprint' much smaller than the existing regions, which had divided the country into five areas and in any case had not served the diversity within these areas very well. In broadcasting terms, local areas were far from being homogeneous entities: the English regions had been fixed in terms of engineering practicalities, rather than geographical or cultural peculiarities and affinities. Since the 1930s, Gorham argues, this had 'destroyed the local basis of early broadcasting, which had drawn on local talent and catered to local needs' (Gorham, 1952: 78, quoted in Crisell, 2002: 31).<sup>17</sup> Gillard wanted to tackle this:

If British radio is to provide real community service [a bigger role than that of supplying information, although a role that was related to it], ways have to be found of concentrating certain broadcasts on localities smaller than the present regional areas. (...) We are emerging from the long, dark tunnel of

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<sup>16</sup> For a comprehensive account on the development of BBC local radio in the period 1960-1980, see Linfoot (2011).

<sup>17</sup> On regional programming, see also: Scannell, P. and Cardiff, D. (1982).

wavelength restriction. (...) The presence of a local transmitter in each town and city (...) would vitalize the community. (Gillard 1955, quoted in Briggs, 1995: 626)

On the grounds of cost, this was not proposed as a local radio system, but as a 'fragmentation of an existing Region into an appropriate number (perhaps three or four) of smaller areas, each equipped with a transmitter serving a limited number of communities' (Briggs, 1995: 626). Such stations would broadcast for two to three hours a day and 'work with the local community who would have representatives on a local advisory council' (Linfoot, 2011: 84).

In 1963, Gillard became the BBC's Director of Sound Broadcasting, continuing to champion the cause for local radio from his new position and, to the critics who complained about the eventual high costs of this operation, he asked whether 'the communities of Britain' could 'afford to remain without this valuable new instrument, available at such a modest cost' (Gillard, 1964, quoted in Briggs 1995: 632-3). Briggs acknowledged Gillard's influence on the planning of local radio, which put great stress on topicality and on community involvement, and on the decision of the then Director-General of the BBC, Sir Hugh Greene, to write to the Post Office and express the wish to open six local stations in April 1961 and a further 18 in April 1964.

By the time this intent reached the Pilkington Committee, the number of planned stations had reached 80 to 90 units. The BBC's memorandum on local broadcasting stated that they would study each area in a way that 'local broadcasting would grow out of the life of the community' (in Briggs, 1995: 285). The stations had to operate in VHF, have a transmission power that would fit the community they served, 'would not be expected to go for large audiences for their own sake' (ibid., 285), and broadcast mainly news and information. In practical terms, this would require the 'deliberate siting of transmitters to serve localities [having a] clearly recognisable sense of community', the range of which might be no more than five or six miles in urban areas, with the option of a wider range for a 'rural district possessing a strong community sense' (ibid., 635).

These elements clearly demonstrate that the BBC intended to build up a broadcasting network that would include also ultra-local outputs, taking care to position the transmitters on the basis of the communities' locations, rather than doing it the other way around. Gillard, though, had to fight hard to convince the BBC's Board of Governors and the Pilkington Committee about the necessity of a local radio system and, after his hearings, he believed that it was not going to happen.

In order to convince the committee members, he asked Sir Hugh Greene for funding to stage a practical demonstration: a local radio experiment. This was agreed and Gillard conducted 16 of these experiments, edited them into a one-hour tape, and played them at a special session of the committee. The proposal was accepted and the BBC managed to start local radio broadcasting before the commercial sector. This gave some competitive advantage in what Gillard envisaged as a strategic area of growth for the future (Hendy, 2007: 40). However, as Linfoot has argued, the 'closed-circuit experiments had produced many different programme ideas, but interaction with the audience did not exist, so it became more of a production exercise. Nor was there a definite projection of what "community" really meant and how the local service would identify with it, to allow genuine access' (2011: 136). To test this out, the BBC had to then wait until the time that the station would be allowed to go on air, especially considering that – as Linfoot reveals – 'there is no evidence that the BBC really managed to do any research about specific groups or associations or communities that could contribute to make one of the experimental stations a success' (ibid., 152).

Before the government's authorization for the start of local radio, the BBC published a statement in 1966 through its *Local Radio in the Public Interest: the BBC's Plan*, the biggest claim of which – for Briggs – was that 'local radio would necessarily further extend democratic debate' (1995: 634). The BBC believed 'that what broadcasting has done for the national community over the years, it could also do for the local community, given the chance' (ibid., 634). Low turn-out at elections, a 'flabby and undeveloped (...) community life in many places', due to 'the lack of a fully effective system of communication' could be revamped through the BBC local radio stations, which also would promote 'the urge to democracy' and serve communities 'without becoming ensnared in parochialism' (ibid., 635). Moreover,

(...) the active cooperation of each community would have to be enlisted to an extent not previously experienced in Britain. The opportunity to speak on the air would come to great numbers of people who had never broadcast before because the stations' staff would be continually seeking out new citizens with something to contribute. (BBC, 1966: 13)

In their programmes, the stations would focus on everything of real concern in community life, give space to educational initiatives, including 'programmes designed to help immigrant groups to becoming fully integrated and happy components of local society', and widening the access to the microphone for people who had hitherto not had any broadcasting experience. The plan envisaged the new local radio station managers as having a considerable degree of autonomy from London or any other 'external' production centre, not obliged to carry programmes produced elsewhere. As for the relationship with their local audiences, it was said that they:

- should ensure that the public had to regard the station as their own, instead of being the BBC station in their town;
- would be 'free to provide programmes which in their judgement best met the need of their communities';
- would be 'encouraged to enlist the utmost possible support for their station in their community'; and
- would have to be 'courageous in making airtime available to appropriate local interests.' (BBC, 1966)

The first local station (broadcasting in VHF wavelength, a technology that facilitated its introduction and expansion) was opened in Leicester on 8 November 1967, with financial support from the Leicester Corporation.<sup>18</sup> On the opening day, the city's Lord Mayor, Alderman Sir Mark Henig, described the station as 'a means to strengthening interest and participation in the life of the local community at a time when this is becoming increasingly difficult due to the pace and pattern of living' (quoted in Briggs, 1995: 640-1). Later, on the same day, Henig criticised the government for the lack of support towards an increase of the licence fee, aimed at supporting local broadcasting,

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<sup>18</sup> See Barton (1976).

which meant that the city had to find sources of funding in ‘difficult financial circumstances’. In fact, the first stations were chosen because they managed to get financial support from their local councils: another 70 community bids were not considered, because of the lack of financial support from councils. Moreover, other important factors were local enthusiasm, a definable community and their geographical location (Linfoot, 2011: 141).

After Leicester, the other seven stations were opened between November 1967 and July 1968 in Sheffield, Liverpool, Nottingham, Brighton, Stoke-on-Trent, Leeds and Durham. The Nottingham station allegedly broadcasted the first phone-in, enabling ‘the ordinary listener to become a broadcaster’ (Crisell, 2002: 147) by initiating ‘the broadcast from her own private environment’. Crisell claims also that this could have been the first *interactive* form of communication ‘used to best effect at the local level’ (ibid., 147) in the UK. Linfoot has also illustrated the example of Radio Leeds, where

(...) there was a wide range of participation from all parts of the community, including amateur musicians, sports clubs and so on. Much of it was championed by the Education Producer, with the help of Leeds University and the Workers’ Educational Association. Sidey said he coined the phrase ‘Walk-in-and-talk radio’, to describe the notion of open access. There were doubtless countless similar examples from other local stations across the country and over the ensuing years. (2011: 48)

This, in fact, also shows how the leadership of visionary station managers like BBC local radio’s Phil Sidey had, at least in its early years, a number of elements in common with the concept of community radio and the latter’s emphasis on access and participation. By creating stations ‘that had a degree of autonomy, whose airtime was devoted to responding to the immediate needs, concerns and interests of the local audience, the BBC could be said to be breaking free from any residual elite paternalism, to create so-called “access media”’ (ibid., 55). Radio Leicester’s Owen Bentley is, Linfoot argues, another example of the value given by local BBC staff to the work within their community: ‘One thing we all believed in was that we were the facilitators for that particular community. We were not there to be top presenters ourselves. We were there to get local people on air’ (ibid., 176).

After the positive findings of a BBC audience research interim study in 1968 and a further confidential audience research report in the following year, on 14 August 1969, the BBC announced in a press conference the opening of another 12 stations. In that period, it became clear that local radio could not develop if they had to rely only on the funding of the local authorities and the BBC asked for, and obtained, an increase of the licence fee. This did not necessarily mean that more money would be channelled towards local radio development. In London, the expansion in radio production activities was stretching the limits of Broadcasting House's resources and since 1968, there were 'desperate pleas for more studios and equipment, more staff, and more money' with expenditure on local radio being 'bitterly resented by many producers' for whom it meant 'a smaller slice of the financial cake' (Hendy, 2007: 51). Bridson (1971), a producer who spoke for many traditionalists, was even more explicit, saying that 'there was no popular demand for it; there were no resources to pay for it; and once committed to the policy, there could be no turning back from it' (Hendy, 2007: 51).

What started to emerge were some limitations and critiques that BBC Local Radio would face as a form of 'community radio': a) funding; b) professionalism; and c) the political context. Such limitations and critiques would re-emerge – separately or in conjunction – later, in the development of local radio by the BBC, with some being stronger than others. The influence of political contexts, for example, the use and size of the licence fee, in turn, helped to contribute to 'expansionist' or 'reductionist' approaches to local radio. Related to this, funding was and continued to be, a major factor that influenced the quantity and quality of the content proposal and locally produced material, that was broadcast by stations in each local media environment. Finally, professionalism was a factor that had been key, especially *inside* the BBC, with producers and engineers concerned about the aesthetic of radio production, which, in their view, should be limited only to highly skilled and trained professionals. I shall come back to such themes in Chapter 7 and review them in the context of current BBC local radio practices.

Meanwhile, on 18 June 1970, the political landscape changed: the Labour Party, led by Harold Wilson, lost the General Election and the victory of the Conservative Party, led by Edward Heath, resulted – among other things – in the announcement of the

introduction of local commercial radio. A new White Paper set the plans for the introduction of 60 local commercial stations and a new regulator, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which would replace the Independent Television Authority (ITA).

Linfoot has argued that, at this point, in order to make the BBC local radio proposal more unique when compared to a potential, local, commercial radio sector, Ian Trethowan, then BBC's Managing Director of Network Radio, started to use the term 'community radio' explicitly: 'community radio describes our wider purpose: to use radio flexibility and relative cheapness to provide more broadcasting for smaller communities' (cited in Linfoot, 2011: 202). As will be seen throughout this thesis, in the following years, this would be a source of confusion, with community radio activists struggling to convey to the general public that what they proposed was different from the BBC.

The development of the BBC's network of local radio stations was stopped in its tracks when Labour returned to power in 1974. The political climate was more promising but by then, the resources were lacking – and in any case, Annan was looking to slim down the BBC. Inside the corporation, there was a concern, especially in London, that the financial resources channelled into regional broadcasting were negatively affecting the work of the four networks. These problems became more acute by the end of 1974 because the rising inflation was not reflected in a proportional increase of the licence fee. The BBC therefore had no other option than to limit its spending and among the proposals, Trethowan invited Controllers and department heads to discuss the possibility of the 'merging of one network with local radio' (ibid., 132). From this point on, plans for a full network of town-based stations started to change shape, moving towards the possibility of county-based stations, each of which had to share programmes regionally at various times of the day.

This was significant for two reasons. In practical terms, from the 1970s and 1980s, the real possibilities for local communities to be actively part of the production process, as well as the local appeal of some stations, were limited not only by concerns about the corporation's 'professionalism' and the desire to ensure that anything done in the BBC's name fitted with its own notions of standards, but also by the rationalisation of

local schemes for reasons of politics and money. Indeed, Linfoot argues that by the mid-1970s, the BBC – apart from not having a ‘settled view of what “community” meant to local radio – still had the dilemma of how to achieve full coverage of England and identify ‘a model for local radio that was technically viable and still remained true to the principles of serving local communities’ (2011: 222).

Underlining the presence of ‘centripetal forces’ in the corporation, the BBC’s 1966 plan had stated that the Station Managers could be assisted by a local radio council made up by volunteers – but here is the key – provided they were ‘willing to recognize and respect the professionalism of the staff (...) otherwise good staff would quit, and the quality of the programmes would suffer’ (Briggs, 1995: 637), lowering BBC standards. In this sense, the ‘cult of professionalisation’ present among the BBC staff (Burns, 1977) can be seen as the element that discouraged further the development of ‘access’ and ‘social action broadcasting’ programmes that were broadcast by local BBC stations in the following two decades: they were more concerned with peer approval of the quality of their production, rather than community groups’ input.

Booth noted that local stations were careful to limit their responsibilities in social action broadcasting (programmes that encourage ‘listeners to act’), because they were concerned that ‘such output might upset the professionalism of their station by producing bad radio, placing an intolerable burden of work on them or somehow threatening their reputation for impartiality’ (Booth, 1980, in Lewis and Booth, 1989: 103-4). In effect, notions of professionalism, parallel with the everyday practice in national networks, had ‘the same effect of distancing the public from the broadcasting process’ (ibid., 104). In a short time, the role of volunteers in the local stations became marginal and the interaction with the audience shifted back to a passive mode: its role was to ensure a supply of information, contribution to phone-ins, music requests and members for local advisory bodies. Professional and amateur values did not easily coexist and in some cases, there were complaints about the misrepresentation caused by the editorial process and the unattractive slots made available (Gray and Lewis, 1992: 160).

There were, then, severe limitations on the ‘community radio’ element of the BBC local radio stations. It was a measure of the BBC’s own recognition of this that they

continued to be anxious about experiments to reach further down into the community. Concerned about the scarce audience share of its London local station, in 1978, the BBC commissioned an internal study ‘to investigate community radio possibilities in the capital’ (Lewis and Booth, 1989: 97). The report recommended an experiment using a mobile unit<sup>19</sup> to prepare short periods of broadcasting from different locations across London and another city-wide station for black and Asian communities. Moreover, it declared that it should ‘give encouragement to independent, non-profit making community radio stations in the form of provision of sustaining service, training, engineering advice and secondment of BBC staff’ (ibid., 97). This report, though, did not have any practical application, although – when speaking to the audience of the Edinburgh International Radio Festival in August 1979 – the then BBC Managing Director of Radio, Aubrey Singer (ibid., 97), referred to what the report advocated, namely:

An infinite number of community stations serving 5,000-150,000 people – 3-4 hours a day (...) Advice on setting up and financing the stations available from the BBC. Money to be raised by the operating community through local sources and stations to be operated co-operatively under licence.’ (in Partridge, 1982: 15)

I agree with Linfoot, who argues that ‘the term community radio was an example of confused thinking by the BBC (...) perhaps aimed at stealing the clothes of the emerging, external lobby campaigning for non-BBC community radio’ (2011: 228). Indeed, using the terms ‘local radio’ and ‘community radio’ interchangeably blurred the distinctions (ibid., 228).

As will be seen throughout this thesis, this arguably delayed the emergence and recognition of a third sector and moreover, such claims were constantly reaffirmed over the following three decades, with an eagerness to demonstrate its ‘community’ credentials. This can be seen in the survey on UK Radio Research compiled by Josephine Langham (1986). Referring to the BBC Broadcasting Research Department, this includes:

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<sup>19</sup> This had been experimented with success by the Irish public broadcaster Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ).

- “Radio West Cumbria: an experiment in Community Radio”, February 1977 (ref: LR/77/73, in *ibid.*, 10)
- “Radio Furness: A Pre-Broadcast Study of Community Radio”, May 1982 (ref: LR/82/116, in *ibid.*, 45)
- “Radio Manchester Experiment in Neighbourhood Radio”, January 1985 (ref: SP/85/9, in *ibid.*, 73).

As will be seen in Chapter 7, which discusses local radio broadcasting in the period 1997-2007, in particular the project ‘Voices’ and the actions of BBC English Regions, the BBC appears to have a track-record of conducting its own experiments, exactly at the time – apparently coincidentally – when local broadcasting changes are discussed (1977, 1985, early 2000s).

With the landslide victory of the Tories and the change of the national political landscape in May 1979, local public radio stations faced quite an ‘unfriendly’ environment; this was a time when the marketplace was seen as the tool to provide balance in broadcasting and the consumers ‘were the best judges of their own cultural needs’ (Crisell, 2002: 234-5). Across the 1980s, unstable financial conditions led to BBC local stations suffering from competition with the commercial sector and the priorities of the corporation shifted more towards network television. Access to BBC studios vanished as a consequence of the cuts in funding and also because, as discussed above, the BBC’s ideology was unsympathetic to the notion of relinquishing editorial responsibility, requiring the mediation of local social reality through professionals (Lewis, 1984: 146). Also, as Crisell has remarked, dissatisfaction with local radio was not only limited to its content but additionally to the fact that the BBC (and the ILR stations) had not widened access to their local communities.

Both were largely a professionals’ closed shop: even the much-vaunted phone-ins were mediated by professional presenters (...) Whether as members of an ethnic group, devotees of particular interest, or even as part of one of the more close-knit geographical communities, many people felt that their needs as listeners and potential broadcasters were not being met by local radio as it was presently constituted. (Crisell, 2002: 224)

Linfoot has also argued how the tensions inherent in attempting to serve a community ‘with the best of broadcasting’ showed the limits of the BBC to fully engage with the principles of community access broadcasting: ‘The BBC’s mechanism for exerting final editorial control seemed to be in conflict with its desire to allow access. This was exacerbated by the lack of any clear policy or programme guidelines to facilitate genuine audience-made programmes’ (2011: 284). These tensions were also reflected in ethnic minority programming, where ‘There were undoubtedly pockets of excellence but again, the lack of resources and criticisms about the quality of the output further inhibited a concerted approach’ (ibid., 292).

Despite opening new stations in the early 1980s, BBC local radio remained ‘chronically underfunded’ and offered ‘a thin diet’ of news, information, light music and a reliance on Radio 2’s programming, when the local stations were short of their own programmes (Crisell 2002: 223-4). Across this decade, arguably, the only forms of social activism present in the local stations were social action broadcasting programmes (Reid, 1987).

Throughout the 1990s, local radio was also affected by the further centralisation of the corporation and its re-organisation, based on the market-centred principles of the Director General John Birt (1992-2000), in line with the ethos of the decade. Some of them were to be merged and become county-based stations, reducing their ‘localness’ further. This theme will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

For the context of this chapter, I would like to conclude by referring again to James Curran’s claim. He argues that, overall, despite the limits and the challenges, liberal histories of broadcasting tend to agree that public service broadcasting has ‘enhanced the function of democracy by encouraging constructive and reciprocal communication between different groups in society’ (2002: 7). Whereas principles were initially envisaged to be similar in the commercial radio sector, the history turned out to be quite different, as will be seen in the next section.

### 3.4 Independent Local Radio

We will permit local private enterprise radio under the general supervision of an independent broadcasting authority. Local institutions, particularly local

newspapers, will have the opportunity of a stake in local radio, which we want to see clearly associated with the local community. (Conservative Party manifesto '*A better tomorrow*', 1970, quoted in Marr, 2008: 308)

For more than two decades, the main 'legal' alternative to the BBC local radio stations was represented by the Independent Local Radio (ILR) stations, introduced as a consequence of the 1972 Sound Broadcasting Act. In a document outlining the requirements and expectations of the IBA for the new stations,<sup>20</sup> it was stated that programming would need to provide popularity, local awareness, and community involvement with a particular relevance to the needs and opportunities of local life, as well as specialist content (Stoller 2010a: 43). This created what has been called the 'BBC/IBA duopoly' at the local level which, despite criticism since the late 1970s by reports from the Annan Committee, persisted as such until the late 1990s, even if an increasing number of stations proliferated mostly in urban areas. As populist histories of broadcasting have argued, though, the introduction of commercial radio 'rescued' this broadcasting sector from elite cultural control (Curran, 2002: 22). In other words, 'the arrival of ILR marked a moment when what ordinary people wanted triumphed over what their masters thought they ought to be allowed to have' (Stoller, 2010a: 24). Indeed, in their 'pioneer years', ILR stations were 'friendly and local, demotic in tone and accessible in practice' (ibid., 69)<sup>21</sup> and ownership requirements, including a broad and local base, made it possible for local businesses and individuals to have a stake in the stations. In cases like Radio Clyde's in Glasgow, which served an urban area uncovered by the BBC, ILR introduced local radio for the first time and gave listeners the possibility to appreciate content closer to where they lived. In those days, the ILR stations 'seemed to have a much greater claim to be genuinely local than the BBC alternative (...) BBC local radio was altogether more formal, reaching an older audience and of course associated with the BBC itself' (Chignell, 2011: 138).

The case for local commercial radio had been supported strongly by the Conservatives since the 1950s for ideological reasons and the concept became even more fashionable with the phenomenon of pirate radio. Crisell reports that many of the ILR stations, such as Radio Essex and Radio Kent, promoted local events and answered a demand that the

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<sup>20</sup> *Notes on Independent Radio*, IBA, 12 July 1972 (in Stoller 2010a: 42).

<sup>21</sup> See also Street, S. (2002: 121).

BBC had ignored until then, even though they did not offer any access to the public (2002: 146). Piracy converged with local politics, as ‘among politicians there was a desire to stimulate local democracy and make the mass media not only more responsive to public opinion but a more efficient conduit for it’ (ibid., 147).<sup>22</sup> The victory of the Conservatives in the General Election of 1970 favoured the introduction of local commercial radio on the basis that it would increase the audience’s choices, without asking for a fee, as well as present an opportunity for businesses to start running stations and provide a new distribution channel for advertisers.<sup>23</sup>

The 1972 Act also introduced the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) to regulate both radio and television, replacing the ITA. Most of the new stations were introduced in VHF to allow a larger number of stations, offering better reception and smaller coverage areas, in line with the political fashion for localism, competing in some areas with the new BBC local stations. The first two stations, Capital Radio and LBC, opened in London in October 1973. Others spread across the country quite rapidly: 19 stations on air by 1977, rising to 43 six years later (Stoller 2010a: Annex B). The Sound Broadcasting Act required franchised stations to deliver balanced programming, including news bulletins; they also needed to be of cross-community appeal, inclusive of ethnic minorities.

While this attracted a wide variety of listeners, it failed to satisfy the need of the stations’ advertisers. The public service material was ‘sprinkled’ within their music and entertainment formats but the degrees of success were not satisfactory (ibid., 197). This was caused, Barnard argues, by the terms of the IBA franchises that ‘precluded the ILR stations from targeting those groups most sought by advertisers’ (Barnard, 1989: 80, quoted in Crisell, 2002: 197). As radio historian Seán Street writes, ‘independent’ radio was conceived as a public service similarly to ITV, and did develop a new tier of radio that had ‘a responsibility to answer to listeners, rather than to shareholders in the first instance’ (2006: 18). However, in its first form, commercial radio was regulated and conditioned by the uncertain political and economic environment in Britain in the early

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<sup>22</sup> On this period see also Smith, A. (1974), Crisell (1994), Street (2002 and 2006), Carter (2004) and Stoller (2010a).

<sup>23</sup> The White Paper on Broadcasting ‘An Alternative Service for Broadcasting’ was published on 29 March 1971 (Great Britain Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, 1971). Note the use of ‘free’ and ‘independent’ by the then radio associations and that hospital and student radio association are already present at this time, preceding the establishment of community broadcasting associations.

seventies. IBA requirements of 'balanced output' lead to 'a certain blandness and curiously Reithian approach to broadcasting and the audience' (ibid., 18).

The comeback of the Labour Government in 1974 resulted in even tougher regulations that reinforced the priorities of public service over the making of profits (Crisell, 2002: 197). Nevertheless, some stations in Liverpool, Manchester, as well as Radio Clyde, Radio Forth and Swansea Sound, succeeded in emphasising their local identity and heightened the suspicion that the BBC 'was still too London-orientated' (Hendy, 2007: 139-40). In the case of the Bradford ILR, the language was also telling, in that, the bid for a licence was submitted by a group that called itself the 'Bradford Community Radio Trust'. Once it successfully received a licence, the station was named Pennine Radio and started broadcasting to West Yorkshire on 16 September 1975 (Baron, 1975: 147).

The initial schedule, though, was pretty much a commercial radio format, with mainstream music in drive-time shows and a closing programme (22:00-01:00), with specialist music shows broadcast between 20:45 and 22:00. Even so, it included a 15-minute *Asian Magazine* (ibid., 148). Guy Paine, the Managing Director of the Portsmouth ILR, Radio Victory, which started broadcasting on 14 October 1975, stated that the station could give to the city a greater sense of community feeling as 'there wasn't a great community spirit in the city' (ibid., 148). Interestingly, Baron reports that the opening of the station saw a small demonstration staged by local people, on the basis that few of the station's staff were actually from Portsmouth and 'did not represent the community as such' (ibid., 148). The station had also planned to be accountable to the local community by holding periodically, every three or four months, a 'volunteer listeners forum' where listeners could state their views on the station's output (ibid., 149).

Finally, the ILR for Reading and parts of West London, Radio Kennet, aimed to go one step further and invite the public to subscribe to its shares, with a preference for residents of the area. Its Chief Executive, Neil French-Blake, proudly stated that he wanted 'to run the only station in the country owned by the audience' (ibid., 154). The people and the businesses of Reading were presumably unconvinced, as the company had to return the money when the share issue was under-subscribed. Renamed Thames

Valley Broadcasting, later plans considered a middle-of-the-road format, with a heavy accent on access programming.

Overall, despite evident exceptions, and much more rhetoric, the connection of ILR stations with their local communities – in terms of access and participation – has been described as very limited during most of the 1980s. As in BBC stations, some of the ILR ones included social action broadcasting programmes, arising from a partnership between them and organisations like the Community Service Volunteers (CSV). But, as Lewis notes, ‘a station may successfully recruit volunteers to help in social services while doing nothing in news and current affairs coverage to help listeners understand and question the political context’ (1984: 147).

An exception, among the stations licensed in 1979, was the Cardiff-based station CBC, which included a community trust in its management. But neither CBC nor the other community radio station licensed in that round, Coventry’s Midlands Community Radio, survived for a long time in their original shape (Crisell, 2002: 197). As discussed in the previous chapter, the form of the governance and IBA requirements turned out to be an uncomfortable fit for these attempts. It is, however, worth noting the trend of the IBA in using the word ‘community’. A pamphlet published in December 1977, *Independent Local Radio: serving the Community*, provided examples of how ILR stations were contributing to community concerns (IBA, 1977). This is part of a trend that continued until the 2000s when commercial radio stations, and the sector’s lobbying associations, were eager to stress the stations’ community credentials.

Looking at ILR’s public service obligations, though, Crisell (2002: 223) concludes that by 1984, the 48 ILR stations were mostly broadcasting pop music, to appeal to the largest possible number of listeners; ILR might have been ‘populist’, but it was not radical. There was little local content in their programming and very limited space for the sub-genres of mainstream music as well as for ethnic minorities. Media activists exposed their dissatisfaction in publications like ‘*Nothing local about it*’ (Local Radio Workshop, 1983), a criticism of London’s local stations’ output. Another sign of dissatisfaction in London was the growing number of pirate stations. Among those, many of the ones that eventually became financially successful went all the way to become legal and licensed commercial radio stations.

It was not only the public who were dissatisfied. The industry was frustrated with what it believed was an excessive regulatory burden and by February 1983, two-thirds of the ILR stations were losing money. Furthermore, as a consequence of the Annan Report, the introduction of morning television impacted the audiences: radio listening fell by 10 per cent in 1983/4 (Street, 2006: 19-20). The ILR stations also gradually reduced – and often removed – current affairs, drama and general entertainment. As in the BBC local radio stations, the commercial sector was accessed by local communities, minorities or groups with particular interests only with difficulty. The issue of professionalism was also a concern for ILR stations, where the phone-ins, either for editorial or legal reasons, were mediated by presenters or other full-time staff before being given the opportunity to go on air.

By the mid-1980s, the commercial radio sector started to be concerned particularly by the dramatic rise of pirate stations, with a large number of them having purely commercial interests and managing to grab substantial slices of advertising, free from any regulation and public service obligation. The IBA responded to this situation by lightening these obligations and loosening the regulation, permitting a more commercial-oriented programming, a mix of short news bulletins and Top40 music and the development of clusters of ownership. Many of these pirate stations, as well as a group of community-oriented stations, were licensed by the IBA by 1989 and called ‘incremental’ stations as they were to be located in areas already covered by licensed stations. Among others, there were now Spectrum Radio, Jazz FM and Melody FM in London and others targeting ethnic groups or specialist music interests, such as Wear FM in Sunderland, broadcasting to a small, geographical area. However, a fall in radio advertising across the commercial sector, and low audience figures, cut short access-based and community programming. In the following year, more than half of the 21 licensed stations had changed management and became part of bigger ILR groups ‘transmitting the predictable diet of chart-based pop’ (Crisell, 2002: 225).

With all of the above in mind, the 1990 Broadcasting Act was still based on the principle that further deregulation could stimulate competition, and therefore provide a wider choice for listeners. The act introduced a new ‘light touch’ regulator, the Radio Authority, which reduced the remaining public service obligations and gave the green

light to a new round of licensing at a local, regional and importantly, a new national level: Classic FM, TalkRadio UK and Virgin 1215 began broadcasting across the UK between 1992 and 1995. With most of the stations being owned by three groups (EMAP, GWR and Capital) and the possibility to enlarge their coverage areas, the degree of ‘localness’ of these stations across the 1990s became increasingly questionable. Concentration of ownership among local commercial stations in fewer, bigger media groups and consequent economies of scale helped to spread the costs across a larger number of stations, sharing expensive programmes as news, getting more revenues through national advertisement slots and programming popular music.

This shift has been portrayed as the passage from media’s paternalism to consumerism, especially by those who have developed populist narratives of broadcasting that view the media ‘primarily as a source of consumer pleasure’ (see Curran, 2002: 14-23). As Chignell has said, the Broadcasting Acts in 1990 and 1996 ‘radically reduced regulatory control over radio, which made commercial pressures on production even greater and had serious consequences for the quality and diversity of radio’ (2009: 116).

While *independent* radio started with the intention of being more locally rooted, more open to its own community, and also offering greater access and participation in programme production, it actually evolved in such a way as to leave many communities of place and of interest without a radio station that would address their issues and their concerns, or celebrate their cultures and their music. With no Community Radio licence to apply for, or because of the absence of opportunities in commercial radio licensing, or simply because some of them just did not want to apply for a licence at all, a considerable number of groups resorted, from the 1960s, to unlicensed broadcasting, otherwise known as *pirate radio*.

### 3.5 Pirate radio

With a secure place in radio broadcasting mythology, Radio Caroline is arguably the most famous pirate UK pirate broadcaster, widely discussed in the academic as well as popular culture literature (see Venmore-Rowland, 1967). It has been defined as ‘the most romantic moment in British radio history’ (Crisell, 2002: 150). It started broadcasting from a ship moored in international waters, five miles off Harwich, on 29

March 1964. The style was radically different from the output of the BBC: ‘a deficiency in its [the BBC’s] policies had been identified, and it was once again found out of step with its audience’ (Street, 2006: 16). Radio Caroline proved to be inspiration to a number of other stations that started broadcasting, all making use of a loophole in British law. Those stations became very popular, but the response of Harold Wilson’s Labour Government was firm and on 13 June 1967, it approved the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act. This became effective on 15 August 1967, with the result that all of the pirates, except Radio Caroline, were driven off air. The BBC reacted then to this popular demand by hiring a number of presenters for its new station, Radio 1, aimed at a young public longing for a breath of musical fresh air (for more on this period, see Harris, 1970; Paulu, 1981; Henry and von Joel, 1984; Chapman, 1992; Barnard, 1989; and Skues, 1994). It has been argued that it was the pirates that further stimulated the BBC’s interest in pursuing local radio (Smith, 1974) and its greater responsiveness to its listeners.

A second wave of pirate broadcasting spread in the early 1980s. This second wave, however, had purposes other than broadcasting pop. It was, at times, much more about ethnic identity, community-originated programming, politics, access and participation. Technological developments had made radio broadcasting more accessible than before, thanks to the decreasing costs of playout and transmission equipment. Starting broadcasts in 1970, the London-based Radio Invicta, became the first soul pirate station, starting a venture that survived until at least the summer of 1984, when a new Telecommunications Bill was introduced. However, this was a station that did not have an ideological position about community. It was simply fuelled by a passion for transmitting a neglected genre. As its founder, Tony Johns, remarked in an interview to the authors of a precious account of pirate radio history, Hind and Mosco’s *Rebel Radio*: ‘We at Invicta were never interested in free radio as such. We just loved soul music’ (1985: 21). Indeed, the station closed without bringing any profit to its members. Johns, who was among those interested in the possible community radio experiment discussed in Chapter 1, commented, ‘The best thing that could happen now is to move into community radio, if it were legalized’ (ibid., 31).

Another station active in London, London Weekend Radio (LWR), was important for the development of the rap and hip-hop scenes which, among other things, contributed

to bringing together over 30,000 people in a display of dance, rap, graffiti and music mixing at a festival funded by the Greater London Council (GLC). LWR's Tim Westwood claimed that there was no other 'contemporary black music form which could pull that big crowd, and legal radio still doesn't cater for it' (ibid., 27). Other London stations, such as JFM and Horizon, focused on soul music but favoured a more commercial and 'professional' approach than the previous two.

From 1981, what the stations above did for soul, another London station, Dread Broadcasting Corporation (DBC), did for reggae. In this case, the US example of Community Radio was also an inspiration to practitioners in Britain. As DJ Lepke recalled:

My desire to start a station had come about after visiting my mother in New York and seeing just how much radio – black radio and community radio – they have there. I thought London should have the same. New York has 70 stations (...) Our aim is to free up the airwaves with more community radio, because we think freedom of choice on the airwaves should be possible. (ibid., 33-35)

Lepke was also quite outspoken about the soul pirate stations in London and the use of black music, described as the 'south London waffle that those guys come out it with. It's crap (...) They are promoting themselves and their characters rather than the music' (ibid., 37). Similarly to the ILR licensing process, the members of a particular community resented their own culture or those that they identified with, being misused by groups other than themselves.

Apart from music pirate radio, the early years of the 1980s also included a number of 'political' pirates. Hind and Mosco collected the stories of four among them: Radio Arthur, Our Radio, Sheffield Peace Radio and Radio Enoch. The first one was a temporary occupation of the frequencies of a licensed ILR station in Nottingham Radio Trent (ibid., 39-44). In July 1984, listeners who were expecting a news bulletin were asked to join the ongoing coal strike and to reflect on the mining dispute that was being discussed across Britain. The staff at Radio Trent were very concerned about their own business and the fact that the pirates were intervening only for a few minutes at a time.

Members of Radio Arthur (the name was an obvious reference to the leader of the miners' strike, Arthur Scargill) suggested that their viewpoints were being ignored by the stations of the duopoly and made their point by using a technique that assured them maximum exposure and minimised, in theory, the risk of getting caught.

This experience was, however, an exception among the pirates and London's Our Radio was a more traditional 'regular radical pirate' broadcast between 1982 and 1983 on Wednesday evenings. Starting broadcasts in February 1982, its members stated that this was 'an open access community radio station' (ibid., 46). It called for donations in the form of tapes loaded with content for programming, or programme ideas and it appealed to groups that wanted to contribute. This resulted in a very eclectic and quite political schedule that included programmes in Polish connected with the ongoing social movement in Poland, *Solidarnosc*; feminist, anarchist and gay groups, alternative journalism programmes focusing on facts ignored by mainstream media; and art/experimental radio. Discussed topics included international solidarity campaigns with leftist movements in El Salvador, reports about the Greenham Common campaign, interviews with *Sinn Fein* members, discussions on abortion, reports on squatting issues, and international radical radio examples such as the Italian Radio Alice. Arguably, the listenership for this station though was not great, as its member Richard Barbrook confirmed: 'We broadcast for a year and got almost no response whatsoever – about ten letters! And no police response' (ibid., 47). The main problem did not seem to be the police though, at least until an interview with *Sinn Fein*'s Danny Morrison was broadcast, but the stealing of their transmitter by other pirate groups. The coalition of such different groups, unified under the banner of the station, did not manage to last long and the continuous raids of the police led to a fracturing of the organisation.

Barbrook himself was also self-critical when evaluating his experience and the way the content had been proposed. 'I think what Radio Zodiac (a mixed-format pirate station) did was far more effective and listenable – putting good music with political snippets in between. Far better than us, I must admit' (ibid., 49). The failure of this experiment appears to have been that it did not try hard enough to establish a stronger connection with its listening community. As Barbrook summarised,

The lesson of Our Radio is that it had no roots beyond its membership. It was comprised by people with a particular political line who were politically naive, un-pragmatic and with no contacts outside the group. We didn't have any roots in the community and weren't plugged in[to] any existing organisation (...) in other countries, successful pirates operate on the back of ant-nuclear movements and strikes. (ibid., 49)

Our Radio, then, was just what a limited interpretation of the 'our' element would suggest, a station that broadcast elements of interest to its members only, without attempting to involve a wider constituency of people in its political action. Radio as a tool for identity and for alternative views, in this case, did not have a wider impact and, as the comparison with Radio Zodiac suggests, it even implied that a more 'professional approach' to content and scheduling was required, to be more effective to a larger group of listeners.

Another example of a political pirate station was one that emerged in support of the anti-nuclear movement in Britain, united under the auspices of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), which had its own radio station covering the CND National Conference, held in Sheffield during 1983. The aim of this station was to 'present the issues of the peace movement and related campaigns in a sympathetic light, free from the inherent bias of the BBC or IBA. (...) We also hope to show people in the movement that pirate radio, as a form of direction, is both simple and effective' (ibid., 54-55). Implicit here, apart from the usual criticism of the duopoly, is a comment on other experiences that had used pirate radio as a tool for political action and it could be argued, had been less effective. The Labour MP Tony Benn supported the station and 'the right to be heard, and free speech' and attacked the duopoly, describing it as the 'voice of the establishment'. In an interview with the magazine *Broadcast*, published on 16 December 1983, a spokesperson for the station said that it was 'obviously very unfair when the only way that the peace movement can get a hearing is on a pirate station, in view of the opposition to CND in every newspaper, and often in broadcasting as well' (ibid., 56). As one of its founding members, Guy Hollingsworth, explained,

We felt that Sheffield needed a station that reflected the active campaigning side of the city. We wanted to give people the chance to put forward their

views on air, people who didn't normally get the chance or were treated dismissively. Above all, we felt that the duopoly of the IBA and BBC was effectively a form of censorship, and that supposed political objectivity of radio and TV was at best an impossible dream, at worst a dangerous deception. (...) we also tried to break down other broadcasting conventions – that you need DJ personalities, that “professionalism” is all-important, that radio is too expensive and complicated for ordinary people. (ibid., 56-7)

The station continued to broadcast until a raid ordered by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) officials, closed it down on 21 May 1984. What is different from the two other examples previously discussed is that this was planned as a constant presence on the airwaves, on its own frequency and with the will to connect with a wider national and international movement as well as with groups in the city of Sheffield. It enlarged its brief to cover the miners' strike, animal rights and cannabis legalisation campaigns, and reportedly 'never found a shortage of individuals and groups wanting to publicize their causes' (ibid., 56). It arguably demonstrated how to use radio for political action, for a wide range of causes that were sympathetic to leftist political movements at the time.

Political rightwing groups used the tool of radio to bring forward their campaigns, as the Midlands-based station (Coventry and Warwickshire) Radio Enoch, reflected views from the rightwing British politician Enoch Powell. Some of its members had been involved in a previous pirate station in the area, Two Spires Radio. Their aim was to provide an alternative, especially to the British mainstream broadcasting media that they believed were either 'very liberal' or 'outright socialist' and which gave no space, in the case of the BBC, to the defence of apartheid policies in South Africa. The operators, united under the banner of 'People against Marxism', hoped that 'in the event of a threat to the right by left-wingers, Radio Enoch would be able to provide a right-wing voice for Britain' (ibid., 51). Claiming to have more than 200 supporters, and among them prominent people, it nevertheless was allegedly a one-man band operation, with five people taking care of the organisation. A typical broadcast would include snatches of Winston Churchill's speeches, popular and military-style music, criticism of 'left-wing social services' in Coventry, and rants against homosexuals, trade unions and ethnic minorities.

What the discussion of these stations shows are very different ways in which social groups made use of radio broadcasting to advance their political platforms, enjoying different degrees of success, organisational structures and controversy. Some of them would have had a difficult time as licensed stations. But in all these stories, we see consistently a number of groups requesting and forcing access to airwaves to complement what was on offer on the duopoly stations, or to present a larger pool of opinions not present nor allowed in BBC and ILR coverage.

A significant presence on their airwaves were the ethnic community stations, with a particularly lively mushrooming of broadcasts in London with Turkish, Arabic, Asian and Greek-speaking stations such as Radio Venus, Voice of the Immigrants (VOI), Radio Ryka, People's Radio and London Greek Radio (LGR). The latter grew to employ 20 people and establish an office in Tottenham (*ibid.*, 68), broadcasting for 17 hours a day and including cultural and educational programmes, programmes for children and women, church services and phone links with Cyprus. It was clearly appreciated by the public: reportedly 12,000 people turned up to attend a protest against the 1984 Telecommunications Bill and over 40,000 signatures were collected to support an application for a licence. Zannetos Tofallis, educational adviser for LGR, highlighted the social function of the station, which helped to connect older people with members of their national community, living across London: 'She's on her own all day and can't speak English, but she has the radio to keep her company. Like thousands of others, she's unable to walk to church, so now she can hear a service on the radio' (*ibid.*, 69). VOI was keen for its presenters to maintain a professional approach to broadcasting: 'We only use good presenters who can speak the language well. You can't just pick a London Greek and say 'come in and say something on the radio. We give them at least three weeks of training before they go on air'. The station also claimed to be a kind of community centre: 'People come for coffee and bring us records. Everyone's invited, [it] is an open door. If they have anything to offer [to] the station, whether it's programmes or ideas then they are made welcome' (*ibid.*, 71).

A number of these experiments (like LGR or Sunrise Radio) would have gradually found their way into licensed broadcasting in the form of ILR, and later as RSL and community radio stations, especially in the case of Black music and the larger ethnic

groups. However, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, even the introduction of a full-time community radio sector has left many communities out of local stations, and piracy is still a major phenomenon in major urban areas like London. In this context, it shows that other forms of radio – apart from the duopoly – were possible, and that there was, in some cases, a very strong demand for either more local or more specialist ILR licensing and perhaps, for the introduction of a non-profit, community radio sector.

### 3.6 Conclusions

Liberal and populist narratives of the media suggest that, overall, ‘things have got better’ with the localisation of BBC services and the introduction of a commercial radio sector independent from public funding and the BBC. Mainstream broadcasters, renamed also the ‘duopoly’ in the British case, have incorporated social ideas of community, albeit imperfectly. They have nevertheless been judged to be ‘good enough’ by policymakers and regulators, to justify repeatedly rejecting the idea of introducing a new sector. However, critics of the duopoly, such as Lewis, have dismissed such claims by arguing that,

(...) community has nostalgic and respectable connotations, reproducing at the local level the same claim for a consensus as does ‘nation’ on a larger scale and conveniently assuming an equation between community and the geographical coverage area of broadcast transmission. This is the ‘public relations version of community’ against which Raymond Williams [1974] warned, in which community stations are ‘mere fronts for irresponsible networks whose real centres of power lies elsewhere’. (1984: 139-140)

This prompted local activists to contest both the de-regulatory, though not pluralistic, approach of socially authoritarian governments, like that of Margaret Thatcher and the increasingly ‘centralist’ and editorially uniform attitude of the BBC, under the changes led by John Birt. They tried to reclaim other spaces, to express their concerns, discuss issues relevant to their lives and celebrate their culture, by resorting to pirate broadcasting and proposing alternative views to the BBC and ILR stations.

Overall though, the British context was also characterised by a situation where the development of local radio at the BBC was guided from the top and not prompted by grassroots movements and civil society. This top-down approach did not satisfy the demands of Community Radio. With some exceptions, BBC Local Radio turned increasingly countywide rather than being very local as envisaged in the early years, with stations embracing major urban centres and conurbations (Greater London, Greater Manchester, Solent, etc.). Although Britain did not start with pure commercial radio, since stations were loaded with public service obligations, the stations became increasingly 'mainstream' in output. Arguably, these were both factors that, together with an ideologically loaded approach to Community Radio during the Conservative years, delayed the introduction of Community Radio until a moment when the sector itself changed visibly with experiences gained through the RSLs. Most of all, however, there was the need for a political climate more favourable, in principle, to community media and their use for regeneration and social inclusion. This came with the success of the Labour Party at the General Election of 1997.

## CHAPTER 4

### NEW LABOUR, COMMUNITIES AND REGENERATION

New Labour is the political arm of none other than the British people as a whole. Our values are the same: the equal worth of all, with no one cast aside; fairness and justice within strong communities. (...) We do not believe programmes should be imposed from the top down, but on the contrary wish to encourage a broad range of voluntary initiatives devised and developed by people within their own communities. (Labour Party, Manifesto, 1997)

#### 4.1 Introduction

The introduction of Community Radio in Britain cannot be understood fully unless it is placed in the context of New Labour social policies. This chapter therefore explores a significant backdrop to my later analysis, in Part III, of the British community radio sector development between 1997 and 2007. Briefly, it identifies and discusses areas of government social, urban, cultural and media policy which arguably shaped community media lobbying and legislation and specifically, its conception within the framework of a particular view of community life and its regeneration.

Starting with a discussion of the intellectual foundations of New Labour, the first section will focus on notions of communitarianism as articulated by Etzioni and third way political ideas as developed by Giddens and Blair, their inclusion in policy documents and manifestos in the run up to the 1997 General Election and their implementation in policies as part of a series of New Deals. The regeneration of urban areas remained high on Labour's agenda, with the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), introduced by the Conservatives, being continued, but also through the establishment of new bodies to provide solutions to acute problems in the social infrastructure of communities, such as the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU).

In cultural policy, the arts were envisaged as a tool for promoting a stronger sense of community and plans to attract new audiences and ‘widen participation’ among those who had hitherto been neglected, were envisaged. Finally, in media policy, both commercial and public service were positioned at the core of strategies aimed to promote ‘a diverse and innovative industry’ (Smith, 1998) able to provide a competitive climate both within Britain, and between Britain and overseas. With the increasing relaxation of the regulation regime governing the commercial radio sector, combined with the increasing relevance of community media projects in the wider context of New Labour social policy and importantly, changes at the top of the Radio Authority, the surrounding environment finally became more favourable for the introduction of a third tier of full-time licensed radio in Britain.

#### 4.2 Social Policy and New Labour

Communitarians call to restore civic virtues, for people to live up to their responsibilities and not merely focus on their entitlements, and to shore up the moral foundations of society. (Etzioni, 1995: ix)

The American sociologist Amitai Etzioni and the British political theorist Anthony Giddens are recognised as two of the most prominent thinkers who influenced Labour Party social policy formulations throughout the 1990s and I would like to argue here, informed social policy in ways that directly shaped government thinking on Community Radio.

Etzioni was a major figure across the Atlantic where, apart from being a professor at George Washington University, he was a major contributor to US policies and was once a senior adviser to President Carter. The ideas contained in *The Spirit of Community*, published in the USA in 1993 and in the UK two years later, were endorsed by leading political figures such as US President Bill Clinton, the European Commission President Jacques Delors and in Britain, by the then newly elected leader of the Labour Party, Tony Blair.

In the preface to the British edition, Etzioni argued that the contemporary United Kingdom had to be ‘concerned with the development of strong communities’ because of

the ‘increases in rates of violent crime, illegitimacy, drug abuse’ and ‘children who kill and show no remorse’ and therefore ‘the best time to reinforce moral and social institutions is not after they have collapsed but when they are cracking’ (ibid., x-xi). He argued that in a society, to take and not to give is amoral, hence ‘*those most concerned about rights ought to be the first ones to argue for the resumption of responsibilities*’ (ibid., 10). Further, he argued that ‘communities need more people who dedicate more of their time and energy and resources – more of themselves – to the commons’ (ibid., 133).

In this sense, community institutions might help to rebuild broken communities by allowing people to deploy their civic commitment so that ‘the moral and the social order will be carried by the community rather than the state’ (ibid., 160); indeed if, in a community, ‘responsibilities are largely enforced by the power of the state, it can be regarded as being in deep moral crisis’ (ibid., 266). In line with Etzioni’s thought, in a *Spectator* lecture given in 1995 (quoted in Driver and Martell, 2002: 77), Tony Blair stated that a third way should promote the value of community ‘by supporting the structures and institutions of civil society – such as family and voluntary organisations – which promote individual opportunity’ (ibid., 78). In his ‘Vision of a Young Country’, Blair also remarked:

Successful communities are about what people give as much as what they take, and any attempt to rebuild community for a modern age must assert that personal and social responsibility are not optional extras but core principles of a society thriving today. (...) The key is to recognise that we owe duty to more than self. (1996: 306)

Driver and Martell suggest that here there was a move from the ‘Old Labour’ social democratic ideas of greater equality and universal experience of public services to a framework that emphasised the responsibilities of a citizen towards his or her community. Ellison and Pierson (2003: 7) make clear that another substantial move from ‘Old’ Labour and trends emerging in the 1990s, was the change from ‘tax and spend’ economic and social policies to alternative approaches to welfare: a) economic

and social policies had to be concerned with ‘what works’<sup>24</sup> and not with debates over ‘socialism vs. capitalism’ or ‘state vs. market’; b) strong communities, as seen above, were important and in order to build them, Labour in power would develop ‘a range of initiatives ostensibly designed to enhance the opportunities of individual citizens’ (ibid., 7).

It was in this context that, in 1994, Anthony Giddens urged a new ‘settlement’ on welfare that would empower disadvantaged members of society, rather than just dispensing it to them, suggesting the notion of ‘positive welfare’. In this perspective, there would be a ‘much greater emphasis upon the mobilising of life-political measures, aimed once more at connecting autonomy with personal and collective responsibilities’ (1994: 35). Four years later, in his elaboration on ‘the renewal of social democracy’ and the need to pursue a ‘Third Way’, he affirmed that there should be ‘no rights without responsibilities’ (1998: 65). Rights should not be treated as ‘unconditional claims’; welfare carried an obligation to actively search for work. In the proposed ‘new mixed economy’, the government should act in partnership with civil society and ‘foster community renewal and development’ (ibid., 69) and ‘play a major part in renewing civic culture’ by ‘furthering the social and material refurbishment of neighbourhoods, towns and local areas’ (ibid., 79). Local initiatives could include investment in ‘non-profit organizations that provide skills training and other community resources’ (84-5).

In discussing the nature of communitarianism in the third way, Driver and Martell point out that ‘voluntaristic’ communitarianism, as promoted by New Labour, envisages governments ‘taking the lead in fostering community in society, even if they are also open to some forms of community action from below in New Deal for Community programmes’ (2002: 94). The third way, though, British sociologist Ruth Levitas warns, depends heavily on the third sector as a generator of voluntary work in communities (1998: 125) and to generate stronger communities. As the Labour Party stated in its 1997 manifesto, ‘an independent and creative voluntary sector, committed to voluntary activity as an expression of citizenship, is central to our vision of a stakeholder society’ (1997: 27). Levitas continues to state that the trouble with this formulation is that if ‘volunteering is a key element of citizenship’, then ‘volunteering begins to appear not at

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<sup>24</sup> ‘New Labour is a party of ideas and ideals, but not of outdated ideology. What counts is what works. The objectives are radical. The means will be modern.’ (Labour Party, 1997: 1)

all voluntary' (1998: 126) and citizenship, more than a right in itself, becomes a matter of responsibilities, in line with Etzioni's concept of community, one that Levitas criticises at length (ibid., 90-97).

#### 4.3 Labour in Government

The millennium should harness the imagination of all those people who have so much to offer for the benefit of the community. (Labour Party, 1997)

On 1 May 1997, the Labour Party won the general election and, at the age of 43, Tony Blair became the youngest Prime Minister of the century. The success of New Labour, as Driver and Martell argue, 'consolidated a process of reform that had been under way for a decade', with work, and not welfare, becoming the centre of the party's social policies (2002: 7, 36). Once in government, one of the most important interventions of Labour in social policy was the 'New Deal' on welfare. Since 1995, one of the first priorities of the then Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown had been the extension of opportunities to the long-term unemployed and he also pledged the introduction of a 'New Deal for Britain's Under-25s' (Labour Party, 1995b).

As argued by Finn, 'the extension of "opportunity" through employment was the core of New Labour's approach to welfare state reform, instead of applying the Old Labour principle of 'more spending, less injustice' (2003: 115). In the words of Tony Blair, New Labour aimed to increase 'the employability of our people through education and skills and an active employment service' (1997, in Finn, 2003: 116). The New Deal for Young Persons (NDYP) started in April 1998 and other deals targeting the long-term unemployed, lone parents, people on disability benefits, partners of the unemployed and over 50s followed between June 1998 and April 2000 (for a detailed overview and related figures, see ibid., 117, in Ellison and Pierson, 2003). Finn remarks that, significantly, the New Deal programmes implemented a 'rights and responsibilities' framework along the lines of Etzioni's proposals outlined above.

Aiming to combat social exclusion through the promotion of paid work, the programmes offered support to make the 'socially excluded' more employable 'by

investing in skills rather than reacting to insufficiencies of the market through subsidy' (Rennie, 2006: 38).

Our long-term objective is high and stable levels of employment. This is the true meaning of a stakeholder economy – where everyone has a stake in society and owes responsibilities to it. (Labour Party, Manifesto, 1997)

A mix of pragmatism and communitarianism, then, heavily influenced social policymaking (as seen in Etzioni, 1995). As Ellison and Pierson argue, this was interpreted by New Labour in three ways: a) a move from 'public good, private bad', resulting in the alteration of spending patterns by 'spending in core policy areas, ring fencing certain services while opening others to the rigours of the market'; b) developing new methods of organising welfare where 'public, private and voluntary sectors are encouraged to work in partnership with service users to build strong, inclusive communities'; and c) stressing notions of 'community' that might treat differently those who adopt different styles of behaviour (e.g. New Deal) (2003: 7-8).

For its critics though, this meant that partnerships would become the only way of doing community work and stressed the top-down vision of communitarians, which would 'not permit or make room for proper involvement of those lives it purports to represent' because 'its solutions are always guaranteed in advance' (Blackshaw, 2010: 135). Indeed, in *The Third Way: New Politics for a New Century*, Blair also remarked that 'strong communities depend on the shared values and a recognition of the rights and duties of citizenship' (1998b, in Chadwick and Heffernan, 2003: 131), and that 'the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe' (ibid., 30). Therefore, one of the broad policy objectives to be achieved was 'a strong civil society enshrining rights and responsibilities, where the government is a partner to strong communities' (ibid., 33). Linking the promotion of civil society to governmental actions aimed to reduce social exclusion, therefore putting this issue at the core of social policy objectives. The physical and social regeneration of local communities, and related projects, became even more of a priority, expanding what had been started by the previous Conservative Government under John Major.

#### 4.4 The Single Regeneration Budget and urban policy

The need to regenerate urban areas – their physical infrastructure as buildings and facilities, as well as their social infrastructure – was one of the main social policy objectives of the Labour government from 1997 onwards. Nevertheless, an attempt to join forces for a more effective regeneration process through the use of public-private partnerships, and through using the voluntary sector, had started with the previous government. In 1993, the Conservatives had introduced the Single Regeneration Budget with the aim of bringing together a fragmented set of programmes, coordinating more closely the work of different departments and involving the private and community sector at the local level. While in opposition, Labour had pledged to retain the Single Regeneration Budget but aimed to address the problems affecting urban areas more coherently and with a stronger focus on combating social exclusion (Atkinson, 2003: 163). In government, Labour promoted consultation on the future of regeneration policy (DETR, 1997) and set up the Social Exclusion Unit, which published in 1998 a consultation called *Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal* (SEU, 1998), and established 18 Policy Action Teams.

In 1999, Regional Development Agencies were established in eight English regions and the New Deal for Communities was introduced as a long-term programme designed to reinvigorate urban areas that had suffered from serious decline. It included 17 areas in 2000 and a further 22 in 2001. In 2000, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund was created, as a result of the same year's Comprehensive Spending Review with the aim of funding projects in the 88 most deprived local authorities. In August of the same year, the *Indices of Deprivation* (DETR, 2000) were published, with the aim of spending four-fifths of the Single Regeneration Budget resources in the most deprived areas by March 2002 (Toynbee and Walker, 2001: 38). By November 2000, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR, 2000) published the White Paper *Our Towns and Cities: The Future. Delivering an Urban Renaissance*. In this context, Local Strategic Partnerships were meant to bring together civil servants, police, councils and voluntary organisations, and the University for Industry (Ufi), to offer grants for courses targeting the unemployed. In its 2001 manifesto, the Labour Party pledged to spend a further £900 million in neighbourhood renewal led 'by local people' in partnership with public, private and community organisations (Labour Party, 2001: 29).

There was, then, a plethora of initiatives in the area of urban regeneration. As Atkinson (2003) suggests, one underlying theme was the decision to give local communities a bigger voice in the debate. Richardson and Mumford (2002) show how the awareness of a sense of community as a useful social infrastructure is just one component of a larger picture that includes a wide range of socio-economic issues. Some of them, for example, are often beyond the control of the local area, such as changes in global economy and the state of local/regional infrastructures. Therefore, acknowledging the importance of the work that community groups can do to ‘enhance social organization through their existence’, and ‘the confidence they build to challenge harmful behaviour and strengthen shared norms and values’ (ibid., 225), was an important step in recognising the contribution to community activity by local agencies and to justify policies that would increase their contribution, in line with the vision illustrated by Etzioni and New Labour Social Policy plans. Within the wider context of regeneration, a special interest in partnerships between local authorities, the community and the voluntary sector was perceived as offering benefits to all parties: an ‘easy route’ that would bridge the gap between local government and the experiences of local communities, including its disadvantaged members. It would moreover provide a valuable source of funding for voluntary organisations. More than in previous governmental programmes, however, there was an emphasis on the possibility of having a *voice* in their design and delivery (Osborne and Ross, 2001: 82-83).

Among other regeneration policies<sup>25</sup> including interaction with voluntary and community organisations at the local level, promoted in New Labour’s first term in power, it is worth recalling the Active Communities Unit at the Home Office, a body responsible for the achievement of the government's target of increasing voluntary and community sector activity, developing partnerships and encouraging best practice. In practice, the Active Communities Unit attracted widespread criticism for not being able

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<sup>25</sup> *Best Value* framework in local government: this is the statutory basis on which councils plan, review, and manage their performance in order to meet the needs and expectations of their citizens who use their services; *Sure Start*, a government programme aimed to achieve better outcomes for children, parents and communities by increasing the availability of childcare, provide support for young children and support their parent’s aspirations towards employment; *Community Safety*, aimed to resolve local problems identified by local people by adopting local solutions; *Action Zones* for Employment, Education and Health: local partnerships designed to boost standards in challenging areas; and other initiatives included in the target funding areas of the *European Social Fund* (ESF).

to fulfil this mission and, according to a report published by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations in October 2001, for failing to carry out proper consultations when launching projects and failing to connect to other government departments (Plowden, 2001). More generally, there is widespread criticism, in policy and academic literature, of the fact that any given regeneration project was ‘something which is done *to* communities, rather than *with* and *for* them’ (Blackshaw, 2010: 182), a criticism that will be addressed, in the context of cultural policies discussed in the next section.

#### 4.5 Cultural Policy

In England, however, public policy has not favoured the view that art should be spread through the community. (Carey, 2005: 155)

John Carey, in posing the question ‘What good are the arts?’ recalls how public policy in the arts and cultural sector historically has privileged the view of artistic production as a professional activity since the institution of the predecessor of the Arts Council in 1940, the Council for the Encouragement of the Music and the Arts. As an example of this approach, he cites the 1956 Report of the Council in which the then Secretary General, W. E. Williams stated that the council believed ‘the first claim upon its attention and assistance is that of maintaining in London and the larger cities effective powerhouses of opera, music and drama; unless the quality of these institutions can be maintained, the arts are bound to decline into mediocrity’ (ibid., 156).

As Carey points out, a detailed history of cultural policy has been provided by Robert Hewison’s *Culture and Consensus*. Here, the Arts Council is described as an ‘unaccountable’ institution, one of the reasons why public culture has become ‘bloodless and rootless’. It also destroyed ‘the culture of community’ during the eighties because of its ‘lack of connection with reality’ (1995: 304-6). At the time of writing, Hewison was deeply concerned about the state of culture in the United Kingdom and its detachment from people’s lives. If culture is regulated only by the marketplace and by its economic value, he argues, it expresses nothing that is true in an imaginative or emotional sense, it has lost touch with what makes culture not consumption, but creativity. In his opinion, the introduction of a Department of National Heritage in 1992 did not achieve anything substantial to reverse this trend, citing the ‘trivial’ D-Day

celebrations of 1994 (ibid, 306-8). Implicit in both Hewison's and Carey's critiques is a call to devolve and democratise the arts. And it is against this background that Labour's arts policy was expressed.

As the 1997 Manifesto put it, 'The arts, culture and sport are central to the task of recreating the sense of community, identity and civic pride that should define our country. Yet we consistently undervalue the role of the arts and culture in helping to create a civic society – from amateur theatre to our art galleries' (Labour Manifesto, 1997: 26). A new Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), headed by Chris Smith, replaced the Department of National Heritage in 1997. Toynbee and Walker (2001: 65) recall that Smith took 'an unusual step' of writing a book – *Creative Britain* (1998) – that would illustrate his approach to the work in the department. Among the four key themes for the work of the department, he included access, namely to ensure that 'the greatest number of people have the opportunity to experience work of quality' (ibid., 2). Moreover, 'The individual citizen, no matter how high or low their station, [should have] the chance to share the cultural experience of the best, either as a creator or as participant. This is a profoundly democratic agenda, seeing cultural access as one of the egalitarian building blocks of society' (ibid., 3).

He also claimed that there were five ways in which creative and cultural activity helped to develop civil society: personal fulfilment; identity as a person and as part of a community; social inclusion, by enabling people to share emotions and overcome isolation and rejection; posing challenges, to motivate political and social change; and unifying the concepts of use and beauty (ibid., 23-4).

The book also contained a speech given at a Fabian Society conference on 19 September 1997, where Smith underlined the importance of cultural activity for social regeneration and the fact that cultural provision could be 'the most effective way of providing a spur to the wider regeneration of a neighbourhood or an estate', helping to 'generate a sense of purpose and of self-worth' (ibid., 39-40). In other words, culture was placed centrally in this policy design to stimulate the regeneration of social tissues in areas characterised by social exclusion and deprivation. Finally, one of the speeches in this collection, given at the University of Hertfordshire on 14 January 1998, focused specifically on culture, creativity and social regeneration and Smith listed three ways of

using creative practice for regeneration: a) by helping people to wake up to their situation; b) by fulfilling the development of individuals, resulting in a positive impact on the wider society; and c) by regenerating specific local areas (ibid., 134). The Secretary of State then quoted a Comedia Report (Matarasso, 1997),<sup>26</sup> which concluded that participation in the arts brought personal growth, enhanced confidence, and built skills that improved employability. It also contributed to social cohesion and built local capacity for organisation. In Smith's words, '(...) sometimes unexpected abilities and talents can emerge. Ordinary people can end up doing extraordinary things' (ibid., 136).

By 1998, museum charges for children and pensioners were dropped, with other categories such as disabled, benefit claimants, and the general public following three years later, bringing a consistently higher number of people into the national collections. Devolution was introduced in the Arts Council by giving more power to its regional branches, as well as increases in the amount of spending money available. Lottery money was also diverted to the arts and a National Endowment for the Science and Arts was created (Toynbee and Walker, 2001: 65-68). Among the Policy Action Teams (PAT) cited in the previous section as a result of the publication of *Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*, one (PAT 10) was chaired by the DCMS and had the aim of exploring good practice in using arts, sport and leisure to engage people in poor neighbourhoods, as well as identifying means of maximising the impact of government spending in the same areas.

PAT 10 had the view that 'Arts and sport are not just an "add-on" to regeneration work. They are fundamental to community involvement and ownership of any regeneration initiative, when they offer means of positive engagement in tune with local interests' (DCMS, 1999: 6). As a result of its work, PAT 10 made a series of recommendations addressed to all the bodies involved in the use of arts and sport in regeneration activities, as well as governmental departments such as Education and Employment, Social Security, Health, Home Office, Trade and Industry, Transport, Environment and the Regions, the DCMS itself and other bodies such as Local Authorities, the National Lottery and Arts Council England. PAT 10 listed the programmes aimed at regenerating local areas and combating social exclusion, and asked the involved parties to work more

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<sup>26</sup> The report included projects based in Bolton, Nottingham, Hounslow, Portsmouth, and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

closely together and ‘avoid imposing solutions on the communities they are intended to serve’ (ibid., 52). With reference to the Arts Council England the report recommended that it

(...) should explicitly recognise that sustaining cultural diversity and using the arts to combat social exclusion and promote community development are among its basic policy aims (...) seek to devote resources specifically to community development objectives (...) ensure that its funded clients and Regional Arts Boards also contribute in their work to such objectives. (ibid., 59)

Responding to PAT 10, Arts Council England published a report that identified five tasks to be included in its work towards social inclusion: profile raising, the work of regularly funding organisations, evaluation, multi-agency working and targeting resources (Arts Council, 1999). Through the *New Audiences* Programme, ACE also commissioned reviews (see Jermyn, 2001), research projects and evaluation of arts projects tackling social exclusion, with the aim of filling one of the gaps in evidence, for the impact of arts in regeneration, one of the issues raised by the PAT 10 report (Johnson et al., 2004).

One of the outputs, Jermyn’s report for Arts Council England, *The Art of Inclusion* (2004), failed to prove the ‘hard’ impact of work in this area, but found out that participation in arts projects did increase levels of self-esteem and confidence, enhanced a feeling of self-determination and self-control, gave pleasure and developed creative skills (ibid., 63). At the same time, it recognised the lack of ‘community-led’ projects among those assessed in this evaluation, which mostly dealt with projects initiated by local artists, artist administrators or Regional Arts Boards. As for the *New Audiences* programme itself, it was promoted by Arts Council England through funding allocated by the DCMS, which ran between 1998 and 2003 with a 20-million pound budget. This, in turn, funded 14 strands of audience development, including social inclusion, aimed ‘to encourage as many people as possible to participate in and benefit from the arts in England’ and in detail, to

- tackle barriers which stop people engaging with the arts;
- increase the range and number of people participating;
- create opportunities for people to become involved in the arts in different spaces and places; and
- allow learning and sharing of experiences between organisations to improve audience development. (Johnson et al., 2004: 1)

The report concluded that the programme was successful at ‘increasing audiences from diverse, disabled and excluded communities’, ‘achieving a qualitative difference in the make-up of audiences’ (ibid., 15) and in training and involving consultants, researchers, and facilitators from Black and ethnic minority communities.<sup>27</sup> Finally, Arts Council England also published a briefing paper on the role of the arts in neighbourhood renewal (Shaw, 2003), listing a series of case studies where projects helped to improve communication within communities in the areas of personal development, strengthening communities, employment and skills, crime, and health: ‘The arts do not offer a magic potion, but they can question beliefs and ambitions and help individuals and communities take a new direction. No other field can do this’ (ibid., 1).

Before moving to media policy, it is worth returning to John Carey and his critique of the British arts establishment for paying ‘almost no attention to how active participation in art alters people’ (2005: 158). The only exception, in his opinion, are those who have taken arts into prisons, and he cites the experiences illustrated in *Including the Arts: the Route to Basic and Key Skills in Prisons* (2001). The document provides evidence of how artistic production changed people’s lives, giving them the skills to express themselves and renounce violence, the changes of behaviour in inmates involved in theatrical activities and more generally, the boost in self-confidence and self-esteem. In other words, in opposition to W. E. Williams’ quote cited earlier, ‘It is not what you paint on a piece of canvas that counts, but what a piece of canvas can do to you.’ Carey recognises that there is also, here, the merit of ‘being treated as a human being’ by ‘cultured people’ (2005: 161). If, as Carey suggests, anything can be art, if we think it is, he concludes that substantial funding should be extended to community initiatives in schools and neighbourhoods. Consequently, the aim of research in arts should switch

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<sup>27</sup> The legacy of the programme was made available to the wider public through the website: [www.artscouncil.org.uk/newaudiences](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/newaudiences)

from critiques of artwork, to how art has changed people's lives as 'the history of audiences and readerships is largely a blank' (ibid., 167).

As can be seen from the policy trends discussed above, between 1997 and the early 2000s, a 'space' emerged in the policy discourse of New Labour that allowed the community radio sector to enter, given its credentials of involving communities 'from below' in their double role as listeners/producers. Chapter 6 will discuss in detail how this translated into action but here, it is important to note how the community media sector was positioned to enter discourses about using creativity, culture and voluntary organisations that were at the top of New Labour's cultural policy agenda, and which were therefore given substantial amounts of funding. In short, it could capitalise on this when requesting a change in media policy and in campaigning for the introduction of Community Radio as the third pillar of British radio broadcasting policy.

#### 4.6 New Labour's emerging community media policies

Labour aims for a thriving, diverse media industry, combining commercial success and public service. We will ensure that the BBC continues to be a flagship for British creativity and public service broadcasting, but we believe that the combination of public and private sectors in competition is a key spur to innovation and high standards. (Labour Party, Manifesto, 1997: 27)

The Broadcasting Acts of 1990 and 1996 reflected a decisively market-oriented media policy that deregulated the sector: '(...) the clear implication was that the gap between press and broadcasting should diminish, and the market should be allowed to reign' (Curran and Seaton, 2010: 357). In community radio policy, however, there had been no separate licensing regime from commercial radio. The only exception had been the introduction of Restricted Service Licenses (RSLs), which allowed an unprecedented number of community initiatives to go on air for a short period (Gordon, 2000). Arguably, the most important development in media policy under New Labour was the move from separate regulators for television, radio and telecommunications to a new, converged, 'super-regulator', the Office for Communications (Ofcom), an enactment of the 2003 Communications Act with the aim of regulating an increasingly converging

media world. As seen earlier, when the Department of National Heritage was renamed as DCMS, the media had been nominally conferred a departmental rank.

In the 1998 Green Paper, the government highlighted the importance of taking account not only of the domestic, but also of global competition for the following policy round. The 2000 White Paper (DTI/DCMS, 2000) therefore emphasised the objective of making Britain ‘the most dynamic and competitive communications and media market in the world’, while ensuring ‘universal access to a choice of diverse services of the highest quality’ and seeking to ensure that ‘citizens and consumers are safeguarded’ (ibid., 4). The first DCMS Secretary, Chris Smith, was convinced of the central role of the public service broadcaster in the British cultural landscape. Despite the increased choices in a multimedia environment, retaining the high quality of programmes and the availability of a diversity of viewpoints was seen as important: ‘The BBC is more than a broadcaster, it is a cultural institution’ (1998: 95-6).

Nevertheless, there is some agreement among media scholars that the performance of New Labour in this area did not deliver what was promised. In the words of the media historians James Curran and Jean Seaton, ‘[By 2003,] New Labour had still failed to fulfil its promise of ‘coherent regulation in a converging environment (...) the Blair government merely added another layer of piecemeal reform’, adding more confusion at the heart of British media policy (2003: 380). They criticise the approach in media policy, perceiving in it an inconsistency with regards to maintaining convergence and coherence, in line with previous governments; they claim that New Labour have ‘yet to initiate a full-blown enquiry into the communications industry which critically scrutinizes divergent media policy and proposes a coherent alternative’ (ibid., 389).

In their opinion, there have been at least three reasons that have brought this about. First, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has been, in effect, a ‘second media ministry’ (in fact, the 2000 White Paper was both authored and published by the DTI). Second, promoting competition in the global media context has clashed with promoting media quality, diversity, and domestic access. Last, although there was a new focus on telecommunications, broadcasting and print, the film industry was sidelined (ibid., 390). The inconsistent approach between reviews of public service broadcasting and a free press, is highlighted as the most striking example of the New Labour incoherence of an

‘integrated communications policy’ (ibid., 369). This concern is shared by Toynbee and Walker (2001: 68-71) and Hesmondhalgh, who also remarks that ‘in line with neo-liberal principles, an increasing emphasis on general competition law, rather than on special media regulation, has been an important theme in Labour media policy since they took office in 1997’ (2005: 101). Another sign of interest in neo-liberalist policies and large media businesses is, he argues, the appointments made at the top of Ofcom by New Labour, with the first chairman being Lord Currie, a professor of Business Economics at the London Business School, and Stephen Carter as first Chief Executive, a former Managing Director of cable company NTL.

On the other hand, there is recognition that under New Labour, Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) was financially supported (referring to the Licence Fee settlement in 2000), and that following the 2003 Communications Act, there are signs of commitment to expansive notions of public service and the public interest. This, despite the fact that the increasing dominance of the thinking of economists in Ofcom and more generally in media policymaking, seems to suggest continuities with the Thatcherite past, in the argument that the primary justification of public service broadcasting was market failure (ibid., 102-3). If this is the case, and the BBC was just ‘a residual filler of programming gaps’, there was the prospect of PSB obligations being relaxed for the other television terrestrial channels, so that more of them were concentrated on the public service broadcaster.

There were, then, several elements that brought a climate more favourable to the introduction of Community Radio in Britain. Apart from the commitment to strong public service elements in broadcasting at the local level, governmental policies emphasised the role that community and voluntary organisations could have in helping local and regional agencies to regenerate urban areas and combat social exclusion, as well as through cultural activities originating from below. With space to manoeuvre relatively limited for the BBC, which already was receiving licence fee money and had to take into account different decision-making processes, the community media sector could step in and create space for itself, through a media policy agenda. In this respect, it was counting on the fact that commercial radio operators were aiming to loosen further ownership restrictions and any remaining public service obligations. Social, cultural and media policy were, then, converging on the creation of a much more

‘friendly environment’ in which community radio advocates could talk to government MPs and the Radio Authority.

However, the way to the introduction of Community Radio in Britain presented some tensions and contradictions. These would include the decision to emphasise the participation of projects with specific social policies and the risk of attaching community radio activity to the reach of regional, national and international policy objectives. Nevertheless, the sector’s approach ended up being a pragmatic one and aimed to get the best of the funding opportunities at the time and to work to further open up the ‘space’ for Community Radio.

#### 4.7 Conclusions

The Australian media scholar Ellie Rennie has discussed how, in the ‘third way’ models, community has been given a central place in a context where there is less central government support, and when ‘a simultaneous emphasis on skills creation and responsibility means a stronger role for civil society organisations in partnership with local governments’ (2006: 39). She goes on to say that the Community Media Association (CMA) ‘has been making the most of the Blair government’s community rhetoric’ (ibid., 151), and includes a quotation of the Director of the CMA (up to 2004) Steve Buckley, which deserves to be cited here:

The government has majored on social inclusion, reform of life-long learning, community access to communication information technologies, local democracy, e-government, etc. All these things tie in with new agendas within the community media sector. And we’ve been able to argue fairly successfully that community media reaches lots of themes and topics that the governments want to reach. (ibid., 151)

The problem with the context described above is that the community media sector is caught between the possibility of helping to improve social fabric, communications, and local public spheres on the one hand, and the risk of becoming too attached to national, regional and local governmental objectives on the other. However, this is not a challenge restricted to community media organisations. As Harris et al. state in their

review of social policies affecting the work of community and voluntary organisations, the higher level of professionalism required by partnerships with local governmental bodies,

(...) diminishes the attention given to the messy and muddled yet vibrant sorts of voluntarism that often spring up as collective expressions of opposition to the state and private sector policies and practices. Examples include direct action to protect jobs or to prevent degradation of the environment: the sorts of activities captured by the term ‘social movements.’ (2001: 13)

Harris warns that governmental agencies are demanding about the level of accountability and the setting of targets to be achieved in return for their funding. Although it is important for community and voluntary organisations to also be active in consultation, planning and policy development, this risks stretching their human resources to a breaking point (2001: 214) and ‘requires not only time but also knowledge about the way governmental institutions work as well as sophisticated lobbying and negotiating skills’ (ibid., 220). Moreover, ‘government funding is often uncertain and confined to specific projects, leaving voluntary agencies with problems about maintaining core funding, developing long-term plans and retaining their central mission’ (ibid., 216). The balance between receiving governmental funding and preserving some autonomy is a difficult one, as it could inhibit such agents ‘from expressing viewpoints different from those of their funders’ and the risk that ‘short-term organisation growth may be achieved at the expense of long-term survival as an independent third sector organisation’ (ibid., 218-9).

Atkinson (2003: 170) highlighted issues that urban regeneration initiatives have posed – for example, assuming that communities are coherent bodies with a single set of interests, that they might be able to engage successfully in partnerships with more powerful players. Eventually, community representatives may have problems in serving on partnership boards that try to balance contrasting objectives. While he recognises that there are projects that have developed and empowered communities and improved their chances of democratic participation, he feels that in many cases, ‘community involvement has rarely risen above the level of consultation’ (ibid., 171), a concern

shared by other researchers (Alcock and Scott, 2002: 115-117). Atkinson also discusses how not all the spaces affected by social exclusion share the same features: In some areas, people live in an area because it is the only one they can afford to live in, with this being the only connection that ties them together, whereas other areas (described as traditional working-class areas with high levels of long-term unemployment) have 'relatively stable populations who have a distinct sense of community' (ibid., 173).

So, a question that emerges here is how community media outlets, while fundraising for their survival and concentrating on national and local government targets and needs, can manage to retain a focus on the needs of the communities they serve? How can they put this into practice in a context of scarce financial resources and unreliable streams of income? As we have seen in the outline of social and cultural policy developments under New Labour, there was 'space' for the community media sector to apply for funding programmes aimed at imparting skills to communities, helping them to participate in the knowledge economy and regenerate areas that suffered extensively from the changes in Britain's economy between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s.

However, between 1997 and 2003, the specific profile of community radio lagged behind the opportunities presented by government policies. For example, community radio as a tool to combat social exclusion was not mentioned in the 1999 DCMS/PAT 10 report, given that the sector at this time did not have a high enough profile in the department and given that most of the stations were broadcasting either with Restricted Service Licences (RSLs), up to 28 days for two times a year or, in a few cases, using a commercial licence with a community ethos. The use of media to combat social exclusion was cited only once with reference to the Multicultural Media Centre for the Millennium Award Scheme, which 'aimed at providing employed or unemployed individuals and groups in the ethnic minority communities throughout the UK with skills and knowledge of journalist and multi-media applications including observation placements' (DCMS, 1999: 71) in mainstream media outlets such as the BBC and ITN, funded by a three-year £940,000 grant from the Millennium Commission. The purpose of the awards was to fund activities that permitted, among other things, to help 'ethnic minorities to make their voices heard in the mainstream print, audio and visual media' and 'combat prejudice and stereotyping and greater participation of ethnic minority communities in all aspects of public life' (ibid., 171). In this view, community radio

station projects were still seen just as a one-off cultural event, where training sessions aimed at ethnic minorities would help them learn mainstream media production techniques and help them maximise the possibilities of raising their voices in public or in the commercial media.

Despite everything, then, full-time community radio stations – managed by and accountable to their own communities – were still off the policy radar, and established mainstream groups such as the BBC and ITN did not miss the opportunity to find their way through, in the link between the government's community development targets and the use of broadcasting tools.

It is perhaps useless to speculate further about what could have happened, in terms of funding, if the community radio sector had been part of the government's policy, right from 1997. However, considering the tensions and contradictions that surrounded New Labour's approach to the concept of community, and the management of schemes that were supposed, in theory, to encourage bottom-up approaches to achieve social and cultural policy objectives, the question that emerges here is the risks attached to the development of community radio policy and practice, given the clear social policy objectives of the New Labour Government. This required a change in approach for a sector that had historically developed the concept of Community Radio in ways that were more clearly detached from government policies of the time. It became apparent that the kind of space being opened up was likely to be complicated for a sector that claimed, historically, to be set apart from the mainstream. Chapters 6 and 7 will discuss how this unfolded, in policy and practice, but first, the next chapter will draw on the contexts discussed in Part I to clarify the methodologies used during fieldwork.

## PART II: METHODOLOGY

## CHAPTER 5

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 5.1 Introduction

The first part of the thesis showed the contexts that influenced the origins and development of Community Radio in Britain before 1997, by discussing how this concept was articulated by its own advocates, by the public and commercial broadcasters, and by academic researchers. The call for more local and community-based broadcasting by its advocates originated from experiences that had been developing outside Britain by the end of the 1970s. Influences from North American, Western European and Australian Community Radio all contributed to articulate and freshly define a concept that had, until then, also been claimed by both the BBC and the ILR.

It has been shown that despite its best intentions and the commitment of a number of its local radio staff members, the BBC failed to accommodate access policies and participative structures within the larger framework of the corporation, constantly dealing with pressures related to the sense, the purpose and the funding of local radio. In the longer term, the ideals of professionalism – namely, that it should privilege ‘the best in broadcasting’ – did not allow direct community input in programming to survive for long. Moreover, the use of the term ‘community radio’, especially in the context of the Annan Report and the emergence of the lobbying for a distinct third radio sector, arguably delayed the recognition and the legitimacy of the demands of community radio advocates at that time.

ILR stations were welcomed in the early 1970s as a breath of fresh air against the monopoly of the BBC in radio broadcasting. They also claimed to be doing ‘community radio’, because of their demotic approach, their closeness to a number of localities not served by the BBC and, in some cases, participative and truly interactive relations with the communities they served. They maintained, at the very least, to be the most responsive to UK local communities’ communicative needs.

However, as community media research contributions showed, there were several shortcomings in the mainstream media which, in the long-term, prevented the emergence – or the survival – of community broadcasting in those structures. The centres of power lay elsewhere and inevitably, decisions in London heavily influenced the operations across the UK for the BBC. ILR stations instead became increasingly more commercialised, losing their localness, their musical diversity and with station networks, their power for local decision-making – which shifted to the boardrooms in London, or elsewhere in the country.

Most importantly, the political context of Britain after 1979, coupled with an ideologically charged community radio movement, made it impossible to reconcile significantly conflicting requests. Its advocates therefore had to wait for a more ‘friendly’ political environment to successfully advance their claim for a distinct, third sector of radio broadcasting. New Labour, and its articulation of social and cultural policies, provided an ideal terrain for an increasingly less ideological community radio sector, to engage in lobbying and influence policymaking after 1997.

Before moving on to further discuss the development in media policy under New Labour after 1997, this chapter will provide the methodological background for the work carried out for this study.

## 5.2 Community media research

Media coverage, being the main forum for public debate plays a large part in setting political and academic agendas. Its failure to notice community radio and the failure of governments (generally) to support community radio have affected the direction of community radio research, driving it towards a European plane. (Lewis, 2002: 54)

In a review of the links between radio theory and community radio, one of the leading scholars in the field states how mainstream media have given little space to the visibility of community radio in mainstream discussions. Indeed, it is remarkable to see how relatively little space has been given in the mainstream press and broadcasting media,

including television, to this new sector. It is worth noting that New Labour leaders such as Tony Blair and Gordon Brown never officially commented on its introduction. It was chiefly a matter limited to intervention by Secretaries of State who had the remit for media, such as DCMS officials. The start of a recognised third sector favoured the emergence of new research on community media in the UK and abroad, as confirmed by the number of scholarly and industry-based articles that are discussed throughout this thesis. I would have never started my own study if I had not been inspired by my work as Deputy Station Manager at Siena's University Radio Station Facolta' di Frequenza, to find out what was going on in the UK in 2003. I was inspired in particular by reading the Everitt reports (2003a, 2003b).

Nevertheless, alongside the mainstream media and political attention, it is still true that community radio research is affected by this lack of attention or recognition at the level of government and major research councils. I have been part of (or aware of) large bids to bodies such as the ESRC, AHRC, as well as EU Framework Programmes schemes (FP6/7) that have been unsuccessful. The undisputable fact is that no large-scale community media academic research has as yet been completed in the UK. Although included in the early plans of the Access Radio Pilot Project, which preceded the introduction of Community Radio, large-scale audience research was judged to be too expensive for the Radio Authority budgets at that time (Everitt, 2003a), and has therefore been pursued at local levels only by a handful of stations with low-budget quantitative methods.

As Lewis remarks, 'the low budgets sustaining community radio stations rarely stretch to audience surveys, let alone studies of the way the audience actually uses community radio programming' (2002: 56). Moreover, the UK sector still lacks a historical overview of the sector in a single book, which, I believe, is a major gap in the area of British media history,<sup>28</sup> hence the use of 'grey literature' and oral history methods in this work. In fact, community broadcasting is absent in major historical works such as the various editions of Curran and Seaton's *Power without Responsibility* (2010), edited collections on media history (Bailey, 2009), historiographies of media history

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<sup>28</sup> For example, there has been no such study at the level of, for example, Day's study of the Irish sector (2009). For the pre-1990s period, Lewis and Booth (1989) and Gray and Lewis (1992) are excellent reference studies. A limited, and personal, view on these events is present in Tony Stoller's historical study in his capacity as Chief Executive of the Radio Authority (2010).

(O'Malley, 2002) and theorisations of alternative media scholarship (Hamilton and Atton, 2001).

Encouragingly, though, a recent Ph.D. thesis has made an interesting contribution in the area of community media research by exploring the uses of recorded speech, oral history and also vernacular culture, in local and community radio broadcasting (Franklin, 2009). A number of doctoral studies are ongoing at the universities of Leeds, Birmingham City, and Westminster and these are all potential signs of the development of scholarship in this area.

The omissions outlined above are present not only in the area of media and communication studies, but also in scholarship related to British social and cultural policies, as well as community development studies, with no attention paid to this matter, in reviews of the legacy of New Labour policies in those areas. Outside media studies, the case of the Manchester stations Wythenshawe FM and ALL FM (the latter is one of the selected case studies for this thesis) have been the focus of organisational studies from a sociological point of view (Skeggs, 2003; Hewson, 2006), exploring the issue of learning through engagement (Manchester, 2008) and ethnographic studies in community media education (Sobers, 2010).

However, recent and ongoing work still has the limitation of not using an historical approach to trace the contours of the sector, its adaption during the New Labour years, and an expansive overview of the social, cultural and political context in which Community Radio originated and then developed in the New Labour decade.

### 5.3 Community media environments

With many possible areas of research waiting to be explored, there has been no scarcity of topics for doctoral research. While reviewing the academic literature, and observing the sector gradually taking shape, I became increasingly interested in analysing the environment in which the lobbying efforts successfully took place and where full-time community radio practice was starting to emerge. By 'environment', I refer here to Dutch scholar Nicholas Jankowski's argument that 'awareness of the context or environment within which community media operate is critical for gaining an overall

appreciation of these media' (2002: 368-9). This includes media policy and legal frameworks impinging on community media, but also other governmental levels that contribute to policy (in the British case, especially social policy). The environment includes also 'the media landscape within which community media are situated and the forms of conflict and competition, co-operation, and convergence that may develop between media and other groups and organizations' (ibid., 369).

Thus, in terms of methodological principles, this study reflects a common approach to the study of community media by having been designed with a multitude of methods. In my case, this means relying on qualitative methods that will be explained further below, a number of case studies, and a comparative analysis that is 'performed on findings from the individual cases' (ibid., 370). Elsewhere, the Australian scholar Kitty van Vuuren has stated that a multidimensional approach to the study of community radio does favour a methodology based on case studies and qualitative techniques (2008: 86). The research strategy was designed to include frequent contacts with practitioners and scholars in the field.<sup>29</sup> With their feedback, I was able – directly and indirectly – to shape a relatively vague idea into a more focused research project. I also put in place what Jankowski calls mutually beneficial alliances between researchers and others involved with, or concerned about, community media, where each part 'can contribute to [the] work of the other' (ibid., 371).

In practice, this meant attending, as much as possible, academic events in England that had community media among their topic of discussions, as well as regional CMA events in London, and all the national conferences between 2005 and 2009. However, prior to that, it was the attendance at the first Community FM conference organized by Radio Regen in Manchester on 1 February 2004<sup>30</sup> that presented a reason for my first visit to the United Kingdom (which consequently led me to consider embarking on a research project) and was the event where I made my first contacts among practitioners, policymakers and researchers. Those events, and visits to the CMA headquarters in Sheffield, helped to keep me informed with the debates within the sector and – directly or indirectly – also informed this study.

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<sup>29</sup> In the very early stages (October 2004/December 2004) these included Janey Gordon, Peter Lewis, Matthew Linfoot and Eryl Price-Davies, all of whom helped to sharpen my focus.

<sup>30</sup> See <http://www.communityfm.net/communityfm/archive2003.htm>

The comparative analysis, with respect to community radio policies and practices in Europe, apart from academic literature, was informed by attendance at European gatherings of practitioners and academics in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Spain, and the Netherlands. This helped, through both formal and informal interviews, to give me a broader perspective of, and appreciate the similarities and differences between, the UK model and the rest of Europe. Apart from findings emerging from published literature, this helped me to appreciate how other countries in Europe, as for example France, Italy, Germany and Austria, have a stronger activist, alternative and radical tone.

#### 5.4 Source material

Given that the thesis aims to address community radio policy and practice in the context of New Labour's social and cultural policies, and deals with a gap in academic literature in reviewing grey literature, the most appropriate way to tackle the challenge was believed to be a mix of qualitative methods. This included informal gathering of information, archival work, a review of grey literature held by participant bodies, oral history methods, semi-structured interviews and observation during the field research. In this way, I follow the methodological approach of a 'multitude of methods' that Jankowski suggests as appropriate for this sector.

##### *Informal data-gathering*

As remarked earlier, my constant presence at community media events and my subscription to a number of relevant discussion lists were useful tools in gathering information about ongoing debates in the sector, in the United Kingdom, across Europe and worldwide. At this point, I should add that it was also useful to be an elected officer in two bodies, the UK-based Radio Studies Network, where I served briefly as Deputy Chair, and the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE), where I have been serving as Secretary since 2007. Discussing issues relevant to this research in an informal setting, with young and experienced academics and practitioners, gaining knowledge of the UK and European community radio environments, was invaluable. In addition, attendance at academic conferences, the constant review of literature, and ongoing discussions with

colleagues critical of the shape that community radio was gradually taking in the UK, helped to maintain an analytical stance, when necessary, to reflect on the development of community radio concept and practice.

### *Grey literature reviews*

“(…) it’s all grey – until you find it.” (Giustini, 2010a)

Grey literature is defined by the International Conferences on Grey Literature as, ‘Information produced on all levels of government, academics, business, and industry in electronic and print formats not controlled by commercial publishing, i.e., where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body’<sup>31</sup> (GLISC, online, 2011). The use of this kind of literature, not indexed by major databases, has been an object of debate among scholars and in the librarian community. The work of the Grey Literature International Steering Committee (GLISC) is aimed at enhancing the quality and the standardisation in the production of such literature. The documents included in this category include, among others, pre-prints, preliminary progress and advanced reports, technical reports, memoranda, state-of-the art reports, market research reports, theses, conference proceedings, and official documents not published commercially (Alberani et al., 1990). More recently, e-mails, fax messages, blog postings, wikis, RSS feeds and podcasts have been considered as part of this category.

Grey literature is helpful for a number of reasons:

While some greylit may be of questionable quality, it can nonetheless have an impact on research, teaching and learning. Greylit may sometimes be the only source for specific research questions. (...) Since greylit is often not subject to peer review, it must therefore be scrutinized accordingly. (Giustini, 2010b, online)

The body of ‘grey literature’ that is reviewed in this thesis includes:

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<sup>31</sup> ICGL Luxembourg definition, 1997 – Expanded in New York, 2004.

- Electronic and hard copy archives of the Community Radio/Community Media Association (policy briefings, feasibility reports; annual reports; press cuttings; in-house magazines *Relay* and *Airflash*; letters to policymakers, MPs and authorities; press releases, training projects and evaluations), located at the CMA headquarters in central Sheffield;
- The electronic and hard copy archives of the three stations that form the case studies of this thesis, including promotional materials, press reviews and letters of support of their licence applications.
- The electronic archives of Ofcom and the Radio Authority, including documents on the processes of consultation and licensing, policy statements, presentations, and reports from meetings that preceded the introduction of Community Radio, and more recently, the Community Radio Sector annual reports based on the submission of reports from individual stations;
- The mailing list and electronic archives of the CMA and the mailings lists of the European community media organisations (CMFE and AMARC Europe)
- Conference reports and other publications not indexed by library systems.

Whereas the documents published by Ofcom and the Radio Authority are available on the current and legacy websites of the regulators, and the mailing lists archives are also publicly accessible, digital documents of the stations and the CRA/CMA were accessible only from their intranet networks, and not available to the public. Older CRA documents, either released originally to the public, or for internal circulation, are stored as hard copies and are not readily available to casual library researchers. These papers were not classified at the CMA headquarters, apart from being signposted as older CRA documents.

Indeed, access to the archives listed above was crucial in informing the conclusions drawn from this research project. These documents were approached critically, bearing in mind the concerns of fellow scholars and librarians about the origin of such documents. The absence of proper historical archives for community media researchers, apart from the collection of the CRA's newsletter *Relay* (kindly donated by Peter Lewis to the LSE library and available to fellow scholars), is also an issue that researchers in

this sector have to deal with, since copies of historical documents are not classified and, apart from the CMA, are stored informally and piecemeal by practitioners and researchers.

As for the documents available at each radio station, which included printed materials and a copy of the programmes broadcast during the week I visited them, they differed from station to station in terms of quality, quantity, and the manner in which this information was stored. They were nevertheless useful to help sketch a clearer picture of each station's history. For example, at Forest FM, I was given full access to letters of support by individual members of the community, which had been referred to in their full-time licence application; this helped to understand the support the station garnered during its RSLs, and prior to the application. In the case of CSR, this meant gaining additional access to minutes of the station's board meetings and promotional material, which were useful for tracing the early developments of the project. Finally, flyers and promotional material of ALL FM were instrumental in helping to understand how the station represented itself from its time as an RSL broadcast, to an Access Radio station and finally, a full-time community radio station.

### *Oral History*

Oral history is a vehicle for the outsiders and the forgotten to tell their stories. (Janesick, 2010: 1)

Oral history is defined as 'the collection of stories and reminiscences of a person or persons who have firsthand knowledge of any number of experiences' (Janesick, 2010: 2), and located 'in the space between ethnography, sociology, and history' (Clark, 1999: 3). Given the gaps in academic and grey literature, the analysis of the period under consideration (1997-2007), and the importance of events that occurred prior to that, this research project has made a small but significant use of oral history methods, applied to a group of key figures in the areas of policymaking, regulation, practice and international networks of Community Radio. These were extremely important in unveiling the discussions and the social networks, and in describing in detail the social, cultural, and political contexts in which British Community Radio was framed.

Semi-structured interviews with key figures helped to uncover particular moments in the history of the sector, for example getting to know the dynamics ‘behind the scenes’ of lobbying actions or particular moments in history. Listed below are key figures interviewed for the roles they played in the above-mentioned areas:

- Steve Buckley, former President of AMARC (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, 2002-2010), former Chief Executive of the Community Radio Association (1991-1997), and Director of the Community Media Association (1997-2004);
- Phil Korbel, Director of Radio Regen, a charity based in Manchester (which has had an important role in shaping the current legislation), who promoted one of the main events in the sector – the annual conference Community FM – and has been the co-editor of the *Community Radio Toolkit*, a reference publication for the practitioners in the sector;
- Tony Stoller, Chief Executive of the Radio Authority, 1995- 2003.

Finally, extensive semi-structured interviews with managers and volunteers in a selection of three case studies were intended to provide further first-hand material on contemporary, community radio practices. This method was used to interview all members of staff (apart from one not available at CSR), a sample of volunteers/presenters, and individuals and community organisations involved in, or interviewed by, the radio station, during my time there. Background research was conducted on the stations, involving the analysis of their websites, their applications for the Community Radio licence submitted to Ofcom, and the stations’ key policy and activities documents. Apart from licensed community radio stations, I also interviewed Alex Gray, Station Manager of Two Lochs Radio, based in the Scottish Highlands, a commercial radio station fully run by volunteers, to show how community radio practice is actually also possible in this sector, albeit in specific conditions.

All the interviews helped to contribute further ideas to the research, as it developed. The accounts from the sector’s representatives, as well as the case studies, offered a lens through which different approaches to community radio policymaking – both from the advocates and the regulator’s point of view – could be evaluated, and also to understand the ethos behind each of the stations serving as case studies. Moreover, the on-site

interviews helped to find out ‘things that cannot be seen or heard, such as the interviewees’ inner state – the reasoning behind their actions, and their feelings’ (Seale 1998: 202). Where this could pose a problem in relying only on versions of stories told to me and the danger of the ‘automatic guarantee of the analytical status of the data that will emerge’ (ibid., 209), the approach to such stories was to evaluate them critically while positioning them in the larger picture of each case study. It was important to include presenters and volunteers as well as the managing staff, in order to also pay attention to the stories of those who *did not* have direct decision-making power in the station. With regards to the volunteers/presenters, the interviews were not subject to ‘gate keeping’ or suggestions by the station managers, as I was given total freedom as to whom, where and when I could interview during my time at the station.

### *Observation in the field research*

Ethnographic methods were useful in complementing the set of data that emerged from time spent at the three stations serving as case studies. Participant observation, though not extended over a long period of time, helped to produce a ‘thick description’ of social interactions within natural settings (Smith, 1997), using an approach that was ‘close to everyday interaction, involving conversations to discover participants’ interpretations of situations they are involved in’ (Becker, 1958: 652).

The research included both participant and, to a lesser extent, ‘complete’ observation of each of the three chosen stations in their everyday routines. This was made possible, especially in one case (ALL FM), where there was a high turnover of volunteers during the day. Rather than being specifically designed into the research, this was an unintended outcome of time spent at the station premises and proved useful in adding information to the observation of the station’s environment and its social dynamics. For reasons that will be explained later in this chapter, this was not possible at the two other stations.

The observation also was informed by understanding drawn from my previous experience as a volunteer (1992-1994 and 2000-2001) and deputy station manager (2001-2004) of community radio stations in Italy. This experience provided useful, prior background knowledge of the wider context of my research. In particular, my university

radio experience came in handy while conducting the case study of the student radio station, CSR FM. It is obvious that carrying out research on a topic that I am particularly involved in might raise some concerns about the risks of methodological bias. However, during the early stages of my research, which were perhaps characterised by a more romantic approach to the topic, my team of supervisors reminded me to keep critical distance when approaching and evaluating fieldwork material. The triangulation of the information gathered through the observational period was possible by checking information against background documents and grey literature on each station (Forest FM), personal experience (especially in the case of CSR), and by referring to previous sets of data and evaluation collected by evaluators and scholars at previous points in time (ALL FM).

### 5.5 Research hypothesis and questions

In the review of academic and grey literature in Part I, it was noted how, since Community Radio was a relatively late arrival in the UK, most of the conceptual thinking about Community Radio – about its ethos, its value and purpose – has been forged in non-British contexts. Further, those in Britain who have long been involved in campaigning for Community Radio were profoundly influenced by this international context.

Thus, there is a tension explored throughout this thesis, where we see a movement shaped by international thinking, and strategies being founded within a uniquely British context – and moreover, in the end, being founded as a result of a top-down political initiative propelled by broader social agendas. These tensions can be seen in a number of couplets: ‘international’ concepts of community radio versus ‘native’ models, ‘idealist’ perspectives competing with more ‘pragmatic’ concerns shaped by public policy, communal ambitions versus an emerging concern for individual empowerment, and so on.

My hypothesis is that both the historically ‘alternative’ British normative definition of community radio, and community radio practice in Britain, changed to adapt themselves to a new, political context that majored – in the context of cultural and social policy – on community, regeneration and widening participation, as well as prioritising the

acquisition of ICT and media literacy skills. Indeed, a stronger recognition of the community media sector, and higher amounts of funding, emerged in the context of a wider set of social and cultural policies promoted by the first two New Labour governments headed by Tony Blair (1997-2005). As George McKay argues in a review of cultural policies in Britain for the period 1960s-2000s,

The post-1997 ‘subsidy revolution’ – a New Labour government committed to more socially inclusive arts funding, urban regeneration via the engine of culture, and the funds from the then National Lottery to support such a ‘seismic shift’ (Everitt, 1997: 157) – in community arts in Britain saw specific cultural forms benefit significantly. These included community music and community media. (2010: 51)

As will be explored in the next part of the thesis, the success of the CMA in getting funding<sup>32</sup> to support its lobbying action and a more favourable political climate, in the end, opened the way for the Community Radio Order (CRO), approved in 2004. However, the CRO emphasises that the stations should deliver ‘social gain’ by contributing to social cohesion, helping to regenerate communities, encouraging volunteering, developing social enterprises, and facilitating ‘the delivery of services provided by local authorities and other services of a social nature and the increasing, and wider dissemination, of knowledge about those services’ (United Kingdom Parliament, 2004). The shape of this definition includes several items that ranked high on the New Labour social and cultural policy agenda and indicates a shift from previous ‘alternative’ discourses on community radio. A number of British scholars, though, have been concerned about the risks of such a formulated legislation. McKay suggests, for instance, that the contemporary uses of ‘community’ are ‘masking a depoliticisation of once radical projects or a dilution of their legacy’ (2010: 42). Janey Gordon, meanwhile, argues that,

The station needs to define where the money comes from rather than the funding bodies defining the nature of the station. Secondly the community stations need to examine their relationship with their audience and ensure

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<sup>32</sup> European Social Fund matched with Yorkshire regional development funds.

that they are not giving an over emphasis on the number of volunteers and the training they provide to make an undemanding claim for social gain (...) They cannot rely purely on social worth to show that they have the right to broadcast. The UK stations need to avoid becoming an arm of the social services. (2009: 77)

These identify the key concerns that emerge from actual community radio practice and funding considerations over the last years, and indicate some of the emerging tensions within the UK community radio sector. This work therefore aims to contribute to such debate through an historical overview of the period 2004-2007 in particular, and through providing an analysis of current practices, based on a comparative study of three stations.

This study aims to make an original contribution to knowledge on two levels. The first one is informational, in that the analysis and the discussion of a consistent body of grey literature, along with the case studies, will provide an historical narrative that has not yet been written or published. Indeed, the current literature overlooks a number of important documents present in the CMA archives in Sheffield. There are also very few comparative studies of UK stations, with the notable exception of a UK/US comparative study of stations in the London area (Coyer, 2006) and a UK/Australia comparative study carried out by Janey Gordon (2006).

However, the most important contribution will be on the analytical level. The difference between this thesis and existing knowledge, apart from bringing to light a range of 'hidden stories', is that it attempts to answer the overarching research questions:

- What was the influence of the New Labour's social and cultural policies, in shaping community radio policy and practice in Britain?
- How does the reality of community radio, now that it has been established as a separate sector in the UK, conform to (a) original ideals, (b) conceptual ideal of activists and theorists, and (c) Community Radio's own contemporary ideals, as expressed in their rhetoric?

This was, and still is, an area with very limited scholarship, with the exception of Australian scholar Ellie Rennie's global study of community media (2006) in which she briefly discusses community media in Britain in the context of communitarian and Third Way politics, and the article by McKay cited earlier (2010). The background to the overall policy context is given in the chapter on New Labour policies (Chapter 4), and the unfolding of policy and practice is discussed chiefly in the chapter on lobbying (Chapter 6) and in the three case study chapters.

When it comes to the three case studies in particular, the research also aims to answer the following research questions:

- How has the normative definition of Community Radio been interpreted on the ground by (a sample of) its practitioners?
- Given Community Radio's recent appearance as a distinct sector, in which elements of the established community radio ethos do participants perform more strongly, in their off and on air behaviour?
- Is it possible to see in the new tier of radio a role for community radio as compensating for 'market failure'? Does it deliver new forms of radio or radio programming, or is it emulating existing ones?
- What are the regulatory, financial or cultural barriers to community radio fulfilling its potential? In other words, are there things that they would do, but cannot?

This set of questions is explored by the case study chapters in particular. Here, the practices of the three stations are analysed not only in terms of programming, but also in their driving principles, their historical background and their own interpretation of community radio. Thus a key question is:

- Are there any similarities/differences within the ethos of community radio practitioners in Britain, over the last 30 years?

Looking at the current practices of community radio, and reviewing the processes, campaigns and practices that have led to the introduction of a third sector, I hope it will be possible to position today's practices in a wider historical context and appreciate the

differences across temporal and political contexts. These should become evident when comparing the review of the community radio sector in Part I and the analysis of recent dynamics in Part III. Thus, two further questions are:

- What is the role that has been played by the Community Media Association (CMA) in shaping community radio policies and regulation?
- What has been the influence of the local radio broadcasting practices on policy-making processes?

The activities of the CMA, and formerly the CRA, have been conditioned by a number of factors that have much to do with the national and international context. The latter because of the fact that a global association such as AMARC and its gatherings has informed the practice of its leading figures and because AMARC's European Secretariat was based at the same headquarters as the CRA/CMA in Sheffield. The CMA's successful lobbying action was a result of a successful bid for a consistent portion of European Social Fund money, matched with local resources, which had the mainstreaming of community radio among its main objectives. This can be seen both in the chapters which review community radio in Britain pre-1997 and in the chapter on policymaking and regulation post-1997. The examination of local radio broadcasting in Chapter 7 and the review of public and commercial radio in the national context show how contested the fight for the 'appropriation' of the term 'community radio' has been, among all the radio broadcasting sectors at the local levels.

The issues of political and economic dependence will also be explored, in order to see if the British sector is characterised by what Hamilton (2001, quoted in Atton, 2002: 142) calls 'institutionalised dissent', by which he means that the restrictions introduced by policy and regulation might form an obstacle to the creation of media operating on participatory and radically democratic lines. In other words, if on general lines, we compare the British community radio sector and its policy and regulation to other contexts, is this structurally preventing it from being more radical or participatory?

## 5.6 Selecting three case studies

The case study method, as van Vuuren remarks in her study of a sample of Australian stations, ‘has long been the favoured approach in the study of community radio’ (2008: 86). She lists a number of scholars who have used this approach (among others Barlow, 1988; Barlow, 1998; Berrigan, 1977; Browne, 1984; Coates, 1997; Downing, 1984; Girard, 1992; Jankowski et al., 1992; Gray 1986; Huesca, 1995; McManus, 1992; and Tebutt, 1989). Such an approach nevertheless has a number of pros and cons:

The case study method allows for depth of inquiry and permits comparison between cases. Generalisation is ruled out, however, although typicality can be determined by comparing elements particular to the case with more general data. The research approach requires flexibility, rather than rigorous adherence to method. The advantage of this approach is that it encourages theoretical development grounded in experiences in the field. One disadvantage of this approach is that it presents a snapshot in time, which may not be indicative of longitudinal trends. (van Vuuren, 2008: 89)

The studies carried out by Coyer (2006) and Gordon (2006) in the UK did focus on stations during their ‘access radio’ pilot project period. Therefore, an early decision I made was to choose stations that broadcast within the new regulatory scheme and that had been awarded a Community Radio licence by Ofcom. This brought new elements into the academic discussion. Also, the first award was made in April 2005 (Forest of Dean Radio) when I was scheduling my research – I planned to carry out my fieldwork from September 2006. For the sake of clarity, it is important to state here that, even though I am aware of the various forms that community radio assumes in Britain, the focus has been restricted from the start to broadcasting stations licensed by Ofcom. The scope of my case studies therefore excluded web-based stations, community-based projects that publish audio archives and podcasts, non-licensed (pirate) stations, RSL-only stations and the group of community radio stations in the Scottish Highlands that broadcast with a commercial licence. Whereas web-based practices will not be taken into consideration at all, pirate, RSL and commercial broadcasters are considered briefly in the discussion, when reviewing history (Part I) and current practices (Part III). This is not to say that web-based practices are inferior or of less value than their AM/FM

counterparts. But including them would have meant adding a further technological perspective that was beyond the scope of this project.

Therefore, the focus of this study is analogue (AM/FM), licensed, full-time community radio in the United Kingdom. Having said that, the stations that were gradually licensed by Ofcom, from April 2005 onwards, obviously have a number of elements in common but are very different in their origins, their approaches, their ethos, their internal ideologies and their problems. Again, the choices here could have been plentiful and a first exclusion was done on a simple feasibility basis, by not considering visits to those that would have been above the research budget offered by the university, such as the ones located in the Channel (Scilly Islands) and around the coast of Scotland. Including stations from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland would have also meant adding a different dimension on local culture and identity, and broadcasting history and practice in the Nations. It was therefore decided that all the potential stations would have to be based in mainland England.

Finally, some ‘community of interest’ stations, such as those with a religious ethos or those originating from the experiences of the British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS), were also removed from the potential sample group as being atypical. One category, however, was left in. As a former student radio manager, I was interested in exploring how a station coming from the UK student radio experience would perform in this new context. Three stations were considered as optimal, and given the time and budget constraints, I wanted to include one station that had been part of the Access Radio pilot project and one that had not. As Coyer (2006) conducted a comparative study of three stations in London, I believed that looking elsewhere in England would be beneficial to research by enlarging the academic discussion. Selecting only three cases was done to ensure some depth in this study. Though a small number of case studies cannot be considered to be representative of the whole sector, it would appear to offer a sufficient picture of how three different stations have interpreted the concept of community radio; in future studies, these can perhaps be compared to similar stations elsewhere in the UK.

In the end, the sampled stations included ALL FM (Manchester), Forest FM (Verwood, East Dorset) and Canterbury Student Radio-CSR (Canterbury). Each was visited for a

period of one to two weeks between September 2006 and March 2007. These three stations appeared to have very different approaches to, and very different histories of, community radio. The choices made immediately suggested the fluidity of the concept of Community Radio in Britain.

ALL FM was chosen as an old player that had been granted a series of RSLs and a licence for the 'Access Radio' experiment. The station is based in a culturally and ethnically diverse area of south-eastern Manchester and was part of a charity, Radio Regen, which focuses its work on the regeneration of the social and cultural tissues of local communities in the Greater Manchester area, combating social exclusion – all targets ranking high in New Labour social policies.

Very distinct from ALL FM, Forest FM is based in a relatively wealthy rural area of Southern England, with no regeneration projects in its immediate surroundings. Located in Verwood, East Dorset, in a demographically homogenous area,<sup>33</sup> the station mainly targets the town's 15,000 inhabitants and those of the surrounding small towns on the edge of the New Forest. Many volunteers already had experience in hospital or student radio stations nearby, or had been involved in the numerous RSLs preceding the launch of this station.

The third station, CSR, was the first student radio station to be granted a full-time Community Radio licence and is the result of a joint venture of two previously separate experiments at the University of Kent and Canterbury Christ Church University. The 'community student station' aims to involve all students, including those in sixth form and further education, to represent their voice in the local media, since they claim that the mainstream media misrepresent them. According to census data, Canterbury had approximately 40,000 inhabitants in 2001 (Canterbury City Council, 2001) and is home to three universities, the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University, and the University College for the Creative Arts. The first two had more than 30,000 students enrolled in their courses at the time of the fieldwork in early 2007. Canterbury, therefore, has a large proportion of students when compared with the overall population of the city.

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<sup>33</sup> According to the 2001 Census, East Dorset has a 99% White British population. Source: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/19UD-A.asp>

Once the sample had been chosen, I contacted the station managers to explain my research project. I sent a one-page brief that described what I would need to do and what I eventually needed from them. During these talks, I also highlighted how, having been a community radio station manager myself, I knew how time was precious to them. This appeared to help achieve some sense of solidarity. They were all made aware that I would need up to an hour with each of them, as well as with other members of staff (paid and unpaid), that I would interview a sample of presenters on their premises during my time there and, where possible, I would wish to get copies of promotional material published by the stations themselves. I suggested to the Station Managers that they inform stations' volunteers and staff, in advance, of my presence. All of the Station Managers were co-operative and confirmed their availability within a matter of days.

The visits to the stations were then preceded by a review of background information that could help clarify a station's 'image' of itself before getting there – examining, for example, their broadcast licence applications, the stations' websites, local community websites, and other information that could help to outline the main social and cultural characteristics of the area. This also included exploring the local media ecology, with a special focus on radio, but also getting information on the local television stations, dailies and magazines that were available in the area. I also listened to the station output throughout my stay in the area.

The three stations had very different sets of operational logistics and these need a brief exploration here. ALL FM is located in a stand-alone, two-floor building in the heart of Levenshulme, in South East Manchester, very close to the railway station and to the busy Stockport Road/A6, where most of the shops in the area are located. For accessibility reasons, all the social spaces are on the ground floor (live and recording studios, training facilities, a meeting room and the kitchen), while station managerial staff are located upstairs. Anyone entering the station has to sign a station log that keeps track of those on the premises. Here, my interviews were conducted in the individual offices of the staff members for each of them, and in the kitchen/living room or the meeting room, in the case of volunteers and presenters. Two things worth noting here are: 1) one interviewer at some point indicated the physical separation between volunteers and staff on two floors, by referring to 'us' and 'them' using her finger to

indicate the room above. This underscored the use of space and the dynamics at ALL FM. Because of the time-consuming paperwork of project reporting, quite heavy in a station such as ALL FM – majoring on regeneration and combating social exclusion – the staff needed to have their own ‘protected’ space where they could focus on this, with their office doors closed most of the time; 2) for a number of them, this was the first time they had talked at length about experiences at the station and the interviews often continued for longer than planned. By the end, one of them said, ‘I have never talked for so long about my experience here. Thank you for allowing me to do so!’ This is not to say that the station does not listen to its own presenters, but it is evidently difficult for members of staff to offer lengthy attention to each of its 100 or more volunteers.

This was the first occasion to reflect on their practice for many interviewees at Forest FM and CSR FM as well. As in Coyer’s research, I encountered a high degree of self-reflexivity among the interviewees.

Though not everyone within a community radio station approaches the experience with the same degree of interest in thinking through their mission, and some interviewees were not interested in expressing anything but positive stories, most were in fact quite open about many difficulties they had faced and how they would like to see their station grow. (2006: 20)

Also common to all three stations, the volunteers seemed to be very comfortable about being interviewed in an environment familiar to them and the discreet presence of a recorder and a microphone did not present an issue for people using them regularly on air. All of them had been briefed individually about the research project and about what I wanted to achieve by talking to them. They were all informed that they could have an audio file copy or a transcript of the interview if they wished.

The second station I visited, in early March 2007, was Forest FM. The station is located on the southeastern outskirts of Verwood in the Enterprise Park of the Ebblake Industrial Estate, a few hundred meters away from the connecting B3081 road to the nearby town of Ringwood. The location is not at the heart of the local community as ALL FM is, but neither the interviewed volunteers, nor the only paid person, a part-time administrator, seemed to mind this at all, given that the place was in any case easily

reached by foot, bicycle or motorised transport. The interiors of the station were quite different though. Once having climbed the stairs, almost everything on the first floor was visible to everyone. The main entry room had a reception desk with the station logo and promotional and community information on the desk. On one side, the administrative office, which had a see-through window, always had the doors open when the administrator was present. On the other side, the live studio and the main room shared a fully transparent partition. The only 'detached' spaces were the small kitchen close to the entrance stairs, and the recording studio, located beyond the live studio and separated by a traditional, wooden door. In other words, from my main position on the sofa, on one side of the living/reception room, most of the station's activity was visible.

With CSR FM, the fieldwork area changed again, as the station has two studios that are used alternately for live broadcasts, one situated on the main University of Kent campus up on a hill with a magnificent view of this cathedral city and the other on the premises of the Department of Media at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU), in the central/eastern part of the city. This meant alternating days at each of the campuses to be able to catch the station's managerial staff, volunteers and presenters. The project was supervised by a Student Media Co-ordinator based at the premises of the Kent Student Union (KSU), who was interviewed on location. The studio at the University of Kent was located in a rather obscure area of the campus with very little signposting and few students I asked for directions seemed to know about it. Apart from a few pages on the Student Union's monthly magazine, there were few things to suggest that there was a radio station on campus. The facilities included a live studio and a waiting room that also served as a CD library.

Given that it was difficult to set up the interview in that context, the interviews here were done in quiet public areas, in the canteen and the gardens on campus, at the suggestion of the interviewees. In the case of CCCU, the studio was more visible, thanks also to the fact that it was part of the facilities of the Department of Media there. The interviews in this case took place on location. CSR was to show the limits of having a project split among two locations. Moreover, stations such as these, run by students 'in transit' appear to have an issue with a relatively fast turnover. This will be discussed further as it impacts considerably on the organisational functions. A more detailed

description of the staff and volunteers interviewed in each station will be given in chapters discussing each station since the background, and especially the vision of the leading and managing persons, was seen as influential in steering the stations' practices.

Given that all the stations gave me valuable time, I also reflected on how I could give something back, apart from informing them of the results of this study. During my literature review, I came across a number of resources in the form of case study collections and examples of community radio practices from around the world, which were downloadable with open access areas and available to the general public for dissemination and discussions (UNESCO and AMARC reports, and collections of case studies like Girard, 1992 and Gumucio Dagron, 2001). I thought that this could be of help in informing their practice, so, before the end of the interview and observation period at each station, I copied this material and gave a brief 'guided tour' about it. All of the three managers seemed to appreciate this gesture but pointed out that they possibly lacked the time required to review this material, given their workloads. On another level, it also told me how, for reasons that will be explored in the relevant chapters, all three stations were connected – with varying degrees of participation – to the British scene, via the CMA but were otherwise mostly unconnected to larger community radio networks like the European or the global activity platforms of AMARC, where many of these materials originated.

It is interesting to note the coincidence between this and the fact that the former CMA/CRA director, Steve Buckley, actually led the global community radio movement as the President of AMARC itself. Finally, in the case of Forest FM, I was able to give some help to the Station Manager, Steve Saville, in setting up an audio service for an event, to promote a SmokeStop campaign in the neighbouring town of Ferndown and in playing out music during a community event like the competition for the Verwood Carnival Queen and Princess, 2007. This helped to observe the station in action, in local community events, providing further occasions to talk informally about the station.

### 5.7 Ethical matters

Burgess (1984: 185) states that ethical and political implications arise during a research process, including its eventual funding, and the collection of data, analysis and

publication. Whereas the expenses for travel and accommodation for the observational case studies, and attendance at a few conferences were all funded by my own research institute (CAMRI), visits to the CMA archives, other conference attendances and tuition fees were all self-funded. Approval to visit the stations was asked well in advance from each station manager and consent received in written form by e-mail, prior to each visit. None of the stations provided financial support, nor did I request financial support from any of them. Except in the case of Forest FM, no interviews were done with volunteers under the age of 18. At Forest FM, this was done in the presence of an adult, the station manager. Managerial staff and volunteers were all given my contact details, in case any matters arose after the interview. I did not consider it necessary to change the names, either of the station or of the volunteers, as no request for anonymity was brought forward.

### 5.8 Conclusions

By gathering and discussing further qualitative data on the community radio sector, I hope to contribute to new opportunities of discussion for media history, media policy and radio scholars, as well as practitioners, on a theme that has had relatively little academic consideration so far. It has still too few lines in key textbooks and even very recent historical overviews of British broadcasting tend to overlook this area.

The current manifestation of British Community Radio resembles some essential forms that characterise Community Radio worldwide: operating not for profit, being managed by bodies accountable to their own communities and run by large numbers of volunteers that are the backbone of an important local communication tool that contributes to preserve cultural diversity. However, its emergence under New Labour has influenced its development in Britain, adding new or different elements to the mix already described by its advocates and practitioners elsewhere.

By discussing the lobbying and the practice of community radio, the five chapters of the next and third part of the thesis will aim to make an original contribution to knowledge, by drawing on previously unpublished materials like interviews, unpublished documents and observational studies of a sample of three very different community radio stations.

Chapter 6 will discuss the lobbying process and how the community radio sector was able to accomplish its aim of introducing a ‘third tier’ of radio broadcasting by being more pragmatic and less ideological. It aligned with social and cultural policy priorities of the time in order to make a stronger case for Community Radio and this move, as it will be seen, brought with it some opportunities, but also some risks.

Chapter 7 will show how, in a context where New Labour used ‘community’ as a central concept in the development of its policies, the public and commercial sector also claimed to be doing some form of community broadcasting. The case of Two Lochs Radio will discuss how this was indeed possible, under very specific circumstances, in the case of commercial radio, even though this was an exception in the overall commercial sector. The BBC, due to its forthcoming Charter renewal and the need to demonstrate ‘public value’ also tried to maximise its community credentials. The chapter will additionally discuss how RSLs became, in fact, the immediate forbearers of Community Radio before the legislation and how this was informed by the outcomes of the Access Radio pilot project. Despite the introduction of Community Radio, though, it is likely that there will still be unmet demands in major urban areas, where frequencies are scarce and pirate broadcasters are often considered the real community broadcasters, by communities excluded from the possibility of having their own radio within the law.

Finally, the case studies of ALL FM, Forest FM and CSR FM will show the opportunities inherent in each of these very different approaches to community radio. In Chapter 8, the case of ALL FM will illustrate the achievements and the challenges of a multicultural station in an urban regeneration area, heavily depending on social policy funding. In Chapter 9, the example of Forest FM will demonstrate the case of an ‘ultra-local’ station in a relatively wealthy, rural area, poorly served by urban stations based elsewhere; and, finally, Chapter 10, the case of CSR FM, will examine how a station developed under the tradition of student radio is adapting to the new framework of Community Radio in Britain.

PART III:  
BRITISH COMMUNITY RADIO POLICYMAKING AND PRACTICE 1997-2007

## CHAPTER 6

### LOBBYING FOR COMMUNITY RADIO

#### 6.1 Introduction

We always need to ask why this policy is in this form now and in whose interest is it designed? Neither policies nor their presentation should ever be taken at their face value. (Garnham, 1998: 210)

The first part of the thesis outlined concepts of Community Radio, the British radio context and how community radio was practised in the UK prior to 1997, in the absence of distinct legislation. With the election of New Labour, a space for Community Radio opened up in social policy and cultural policy, finding its way into media policy. As we have seen, however, New Labour's approach to Community Radio was conceived within the broader context of its policies on social exclusion, regeneration, media literacy and widening participation. And it was in this context that the regulator responded, in drafting the policies of the overall framework, to signals from the Government and the lobbying actions of the CMA to introduce Community Radio in Britain.

This chapter will draw on grey literature from the CMA digital archives that have not been explored in academic research so far, including policy statements, policy briefings, and background material for the lobbying actions in the period 1997-2007. First-hand material will include interviews with key actors involved in policymaking until the introduction of Community Radio into legislation, such as the then Director of the CMA, Steve Buckley, and the last Chief Executive of the Radio Authority, Tony Stoller. The chapter will draw on press releases, statements and policy documents of the regulators Radio Authority and Ofcom, policy statements and documents published by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), statements from the BBC and commercial radio representatives and parliamentary records of the debates on community radio legislation (Hansard).

The analysis and discussion of this material will help to establish the role of the main players in policymaking and regulation and how events unfolded between 2 May 1997, when New Labour took power, and 20 July 2004, when the Community Radio Order was approved by the House of Lords.

The chapter will trace the development of the lobbying action of the CMA, the discussions and the tensions preceding the Government's approval to go ahead with a new sector, a pilot project, and the introduction of Community Radio into British law and media policy. It will argue that, despite having the merit of introducing a new sector in licensed radio broadcasting, after three decades of community media activists campaigning, New Labour fell short on its promises of funding the sector in its initial phases, denying it a solid and sustainable start. The consequences of this will have to be evaluated in the long term. Media policy was briefly touched on in Chapter 4 in the overall context of New Labour policies, showing how community media activists could discuss their ambitions with the government in a more favourable political climate. But even if the community radio sector benefitted from a generally helpful legislation, the path towards the approval of the Community Radio Order in July 2004 was not a linear one. It has left a debatable legacy in terms of overall long-term sustainability in the community radio sector. The sector and the evaluator of the pilot project that preceded the introduction of Community Radio agreed that a solid start, with substantial funds available for the early years of operation, to cover core costs (administration and management), was crucial to ensure success for this new sector. However, the lobbying action failed to secure the millions of pounds that had been envisaged for it – in the end, only a meagre £500,000 was destined for the Community Radio Fund.

## 6.2 The operational context of Community Media Association's lobbying action

Australian scholar Ellie Rennie argues that the CMA managed to make 'the most of Blair government's community rhetoric' (2006: 151). Indeed, the Information and Communications Technology Learning Centres initiative had been launched by the Government in 1999 through a Capital Modernisation Fund and the New Opportunities Fund, and the CMA had successfully argued for an integrated approach to ICT learning, incorporating wider cultural practice as well as business skills (Buckley, Interview, 2007). By 2003, the scenario included a growing number of community media centres

that were equipped with multimedia workstations, broadband internet, digital editing software and digital radio studios for audio/video production and live broadcasting. CMA staffing, mostly based at their headquarter offices in Sheffield, also reached a peak at this time: ‘We employed 25 members of staff, there was substantial growth of the sector, of membership, and growing political recognition,’ observed Buckley (ibid, 2007).

Through the New Deal for Communities and the UK Communities Online Fund – the latter an 80-million pound investment for neighbourhood ICT capital, funded by the Department of Education and Skills, DfES and containing initiatives aiming at bridging the digital divide, ‘many community groups were successful in getting funding and this also helped to create further awareness of the presence of the sector’. Moreover, the CMA also argued that ‘these multimedia centres had to involve disadvantaged communities to stimulate creativity as well as productivity’ (ibid., 2007). A substantial amount of funding was channelled into community media projects (e.g. £600,000 for a project in Sheffield only) and for those who were successful in jumping on the bandwagon, and making use of relevant Lottery funds, this was the opportunity to move from limited, technical resources to state-of-the-art digital production environments.<sup>34</sup>

In 1997, to better reflect the changed technological context, the CMA adopted its new name, after having been the Community Radio Association (CRA) for 14 years. This involved opening its membership base to community television stations and an increasing number of web-based practitioners and projects. This was reflected in the approval of a Community Media Charter in Edinburgh on 25 October 1997 (CMA, 1997), a document that shares many elements with the AMARC *Community Radio Charter for Europe*, discussed in Chapter 2. A development of this document then became the Community Media Manifesto (CMA, 2001).

### 6.3 Advancing media policy: 1997-2001

As discussed in Chapter 1, the 1990 Broadcasting Act established the Radio Authority (RA) and the Restricted Service Licences (RSL), which had been ‘energetically

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<sup>34</sup> Details of the CMA’s approach are reported in Community Media Association (2000).

grasped' by community groups; this provided an 'invaluable "nursery slope" for those unfamiliar with broadcasting and helped to demonstrate the potential of community radio for local people' (Everitt, 2003: 17). It also enabled the sector to 'develop its thinking and refine its policies' (ibid., 17). The 1990 Act promised to increase the range of possibilities and services but apart from the RSLs, the benefits to the community radio sector were limited to a small number of community groups that had obtained licences in rural areas. Especially in urban areas, the characteristics of the act had favoured music-based commercial radio providers. Most of the RSLs, though, were limiting their broadcasting to one or two months a year, making it expensive to buy or rent the necessary equipment.

In November 1998, in a response to the Green Paper on Regulating Communications promoted by the DCMS/DTI, the CMA asked for permission to use the RSL licensing category or to establish a separate category of local radio service altogether, to enable the RA to 'issue a limited number of community radio pilot licenses over a two year period in advance of new legislation' (CMA, 1998).<sup>35</sup> In doing so, it cited a similar experimental approach, used by the Irish regulator IRTC, to develop Community Radio in Ireland back in 1994. This had proved successful and the CMA was confident that an experimental period would have been helpful, to give further indications that could help to inform future policy in the UK. Moreover, the CMA asked for a relaxation of the public funding restrictions present in Schedule 2, Part II of the 1990 Act because allegedly, they had the 'effect of preventing access by local radio licensees to public funding programmes for social and economic development despite the fact that these funds are widely used to support other radio training and short term broadcasting projects' (ibid., 1998).

Up to October 1999, however, the RA was still evidently against this idea, on the grounds that this decision would breach the terms of the 1990 Broadcasting Act (ibid., 1998). In July 1999, the CMA also met with representatives of the DCMS to inform the policymaker about the underdevelopment of the UK community radio, in comparison to a range of European countries, but most importantly, on how community radio had the potential to make a contribution to policy objectives that had a high priority on the

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<sup>35</sup> Community Media Association (1998).

Government's agenda. These included tackling social exclusion, promoting lifelong learning, providing community access to new information and communication technologies, promoting community involvement in local development and regeneration, and encouraging volunteering and active citizenship. The CMA claimed that 'with the right policy framework it could play a substantial role in the delivery of many of the recommendations in the recent DCMS led report to the Social Exclusion Unit (PAT10)' (CMA, 1999c).<sup>36</sup> Attaching two successful case studies published in a DETR (Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions) newsletter, it remarked how RSL short-term licensing was the main limiting factor in the stations' ability to build on their own successes, and that the three related issues of licensing, frequencies and funding arrangements had to be considered in following policy discussions.

Maintaining constant pressure on the Radio Authority by responding to all the relevant consultations, the CMA pursued another important objective, in order to achieve its media policy objectives. It tried to convince lawmakers and the Government of the suitability of community radio to help achieve social policy objectives that were high on the list of priorities of the New Labour governments at the time. In doing this, it showed the potential demonstrated by hundreds of RSL projects across the country and envisaged what could happen if a new and distinct sector were introduced in the UK.

Where progress was being made at the policy level, at the regulatory level, the then Director of the CMA, Steve Buckley recalls how the background of the first Chair, Lord Chalfont (Alun Gwyne Jones), did not help in making a breakthrough.<sup>37</sup> He had, in the past, been a chairman of the IBA and a military expert, appointed by having been 'tapped on the shoulder' rather than through a competitive process (Stoller, 2010a: 201). The same applied to two other executives, also from military backgrounds; Buckley recalled that one of them, Paul Brown, later became the Chief Executive of the CRCA (Commercial Radio Companies Association). After a promising start, the perception of the RA, among the industry, had become hostile after two controversial licensing decisions in London, in the cases of LBC and Virgin Radio (ibid., 234-243).

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<sup>36</sup> Community Media Association (1999c).

<sup>37</sup> See Interview, 4 April 2007.

(...) for its defensiveness on licensing, the Radio Authority would have been better able to protect the local distinctiveness which was the unique feature of ILR. The influence it had lost by ceding to the moral high ground, however, meant that the companies were no longer ready to listen to the ideas of the Authority. Once the credibility of licensing was weakened, that diminished the respect for regulation and guidance in all other aspects of commercial radio. (ibid., 243)

Selected through a competitive process this time, the new Chief Executive Tony Stoller was announced by the Radio Authority in July 1995. A more left-leaning figure than his predecessors, he had been a member of the Labour Party in Birkenhead. He had previous senior experience in radio at the IBA, the commercial radio body Association of Independent Radio Companies (AIRC), and as Managing Director of Thames Valley Broadcasting. In the 10 years before his appointment, he had worked in an executive position in the retail sector, in the John Lewis Partnership. His latest recollection of the community radio sector was one of a polarised and ideological movement, where ‘political militancy had done a disservice to themselves’ (Stoller, 2010b).<sup>38</sup>

Stoller’s first meeting with community radio activists in his new role took place at the CRA annual conference in Sheffield on 15 September 1995:

I was listened to perfectly courteously and I gave what I thought was the ‘party line’. But it is interesting, for me, that the conversations I had around the edges with the people there sort of got me thinking. And nothing changed quickly. But that was for me, I think, part of the catalyst for changing my own mind.’ (ibid., 2010b)

However, relations remained cool for a while. The authority still believed that small-scale ILR was indeed community radio and that a new sector might have been a way to get a commercial radio licence by the back door (ibid., 2010b).

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Tony Stoller (2010b), 14 July 2010.

The state of the relationship between the CMA and the regulator, then, was one of deep dissatisfaction on the CMA's side. This can be seen from a letter dated 20 May 1999 and addressed by the CMA to the RA's Chief Executive:

Given the depth of dissatisfaction with the current local radio licensing system and the negative impact which has resulted to [sic] many Community Radio groups from competing in a system weighted towards commercial business models, the CMA Council is no longer prepared to endorse any recommendations for inclusion in Radio Authority local licence working lists. You are well aware from our previous discussions of the aspirations of most of our radio members to run full time free-to-air community radio services. Despite the many developments in radio broadcasting in recent years they still have no way of meeting this aspiration. The Radio Authority has a statutory responsibility to license "a range and diversity of services" yet Community Radio continues to be largely excluded from full time licensing. (Community Media Association, 1999b)

However, at the government level, things were beginning to change: 'Soundings from DCMS officials, and from ministers during 1999, suggested that they would welcome a move from the Radio Authority to re-open the community radio issue' (Stoller, 2010a: 318). At the same time, the authority was growing concerned about the loss of localness and increased consolidation of ownership in local commercial radio.

In 1999, the Davies Committee on the future funding of the BBC, also requested that any additional revenue given to the BBC (as a result of a supplement on the licence fee), be used to develop digital services in an increasingly converging media sector. The CMA used the consultation promoted by the DCMS to make the case for a Community Media fund, to support local public service broadcasting initiatives outside of the BBC system. The suggested share for a subvention was 1% of the licence fee, approximately £20 million of funding, at that time. The CMA claimed that both the BBC and the commercial sector were failing in the delivery of very local provision, stating that no local radio stations were present in the Nations, apart from England, and few ILR stations had by now a true public service ethos. Reflecting the new, multimedia nature of the organisation, the CMA proposed that the funding should be made available to any

possible platform, radio, television and internet projects; it illustrated the case of the community media sector funding scheme in the Netherlands in what is called 'local public service broadcasting (*lokale omroepen*), proposing it as the best practice to inform the UK debate (CMA, 1999a).

In January 2000, Richard Hooper, after having served at the Radio Authority since its foundation as part of the Board, was appointed as new Chair of the authority. Buckley acknowledged that Hooper proved to be much more open-minded on this issue: 'He was prepared to shake things up. That was important for us when we had the opportunity to meet him' (Interview, 2007).

So, by the start of the millennium, the policy context seemed to turn more favourable to the CMA's requests. The change at the top levels of the regulator, an increased concern by the RA on the loss of localness and public service remits in the commercial sector, and an interest by government officials to re-consider plans in view of a new Communications Act, looked promising for the future.

#### 6.4 The struggle for definition: access vs. community

In line with Stoller's intentions, instead of using a definition that had been shared by its practitioners in the UK since decades, the authority decided to name the proposed new sector Access Radio. This term was included in a submission to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), outlining the RA's principles for 'Radio Regulation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', submitted in June 2000 (DCMS/DTI, 2000). It confirmed that the new 'Access Radio' sector would use radio 'to assist in the broader aspects of education, social inclusion and social experimentation', with the 'purpose to enable public access to radio in a new and imaginative way', also motivated by 'evidence of demand from potential operators and of interest from the voluntary, educational and training sectors' (Radio Authority, 2000: 17).

The RA expressed the wish to experiment with a number of initiatives ahead of legislation and, if the White Paper on Communications accepted the principle, 'not least to learn more about the practical implications of an innovative notion' (ibid., 20). The

authority also proposed the establishment of a Radio Fund, to be coupled with enabling legislation for the new sector. This could provide start-up and non-recurrent funding for stations with social and programme ambitions, which would be wholly different from the commercial sector. The fund would be used either to pay fully for, or to initiate, programming of particular social value (which the commercial sector would be unlikely to produce), and to support the archiving of radio materials. The variety of sources that could be used for the fund included central, local and European government funds, lottery funding, revenue drawn from the cash bid payments made currently by INR licensees, a percentage levy on the national radio advertising revenue of ILR services, a percentage of the BBC licence fee for public service broadcasting, social funds, including the Gaelic Broadcasting Fund, and charitable foundations (*ibid.*, 19).

It is notable that the RA submission never used the words ‘community radio’ throughout its document, except in two critical remarks: ‘We do not entertain any doctrinaire approach to self-styled ‘community’ radio’ *ibid.*, 12)’, and ‘The proposals which we now put forward are much more radical and innovative than the old style approach to non-profit-distributing free-to-air “community” radio service’ (*ibid.*, 34). Stoller’s memories of community radio in the 1980s brought back a very ideologically charged, and left-leaning sector, and this move seems to have been an attempt to empty the definition of its ideological notions, offering instead a more ‘benign’ term.

The much contested use of this term, and the meanings associated with it, can be seen as a continuation of what had been happening in British radio for some time, as seen in Chapter 3. Both public and commercial stations claim to have done some form of ‘community radio’; the possibility of this being appropriated by a whole new sector arguably brought both sectors to pressure the RA to make use of another term. This led to considerable discontent in the community radio sector, as expressed by the then Director of the CMA, Steve Buckley:

Hooper found a way around the political obstacles by not calling it community radio because he knew that if we called it community radio, some people would say no. They called it access radio and they wrote this ridiculous paper where they claimed that access radio was not some sort of doctrinaire self-styled, community radio thing, but was a new and innovative

idea, which it clearly wasn't, where not for profit organisations would be able to take the airwaves, just what we had been asking all along! (Interview, 2007)

Although the cause of some dissension, practical progress was being made, as confirmed by Hooper's proposal of an 'Access Radio Fund' to provide seed corn, experimentation money.<sup>39</sup>

In December 2000, the White Paper, 'A New Future for Communications', included Access Radio in its section 4, titled 'Maintaining diversity and plurality'. However, a different tone can be noted here. While the White Paper does indeed use 'community radio', it keeps interchanging the use of this term with 'access radio', perhaps in an effort to please both community media activists and public and commercial broadcasters concerned about the appropriation of this term by someone other than them. An excerpt from section 4.5, titled, 'Community broadcasting' and including proposals also for community television, illustrates DCMS/DTI's approach at that time:

We seek views on extending the diversity of radio services through '*Access Radio*' (...) the constraints on access to non-commercial funding for permanent services have inhibited the growth of a strong *community tier of radio* (...) We would therefore like views on whether the benefits of *community radio* would justify greater public intervention. Some possible benefits are that: *very local community based radio* can help increase active community involvement, and local educational and social inclusion projects; *small radio stations* can provide a nursery for the next generation of broadcasters – providing hands-on training and experience (...) In order to provide more scope for such *community radio services*, the Radio Authority has suggested the establishment of an 'Access' Fund (...) (DCMS/DTI, 2000: 39-40, emphases added)

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<sup>39</sup> Community Media Association annual festival, Birmingham, (7 October 2000, in Stoller, 2010a: 319).

Community radio campaigners might have felt encouraged by the fact that the competent government departments had not written their definitions in stone. They felt able to ask for changes at a later stage.

On 12 February 2001, the Radio Authority promoted an 'Access Radio Seminar' in London to which interested parties in the radio industry were invited to give their views about the future actions planned by the RA, where it explained more clearly why the new sector was going to be called 'Access Radio':

We chose the term 'Access Radio' because it emphasized the broadening of access to the right to broadcast at a time when ownership consolidation was continuing. We did not choose the term 'community radio' because good ILR stations are community stations reflecting the locality and its concerns. (Radio Authority, 2001f: 3)

What the regulator demonstrated on this occasion was good intent, but it ignored much of the thinking in the White Paper itself, and the views of sector, where the term 'community radio' had been used without difficulty since the 1970s. As seen in Chapter 2, access is only *one* of the constituents of the concept, and using this name would have described those stations as models closer to the Scandinavian or German models of *Offene Kanäle* (Open Channels, see Jankowski et al., 1992), or US traditions of access programming (Howley, 2005). In other words, with an emphasis on pure and simple access to broadcast, for communities, 'A further difficulty arises in that the term 'Access Radio' can be seen to describe a very different type of radio service, where the station is not primarily a broadcaster, but operates as a 'publisher' of programmes' (Price-Davies and Tacchi, 2001: 60).

At the Access Radio Seminar, commercial radio representatives seemed to have diverging perspectives on the possibility of introducing a new tier of radio. Phil Riley of the Chrysalis Radio group was very much against the introduction of Access Radio for a variety of reasons. For example, based on the claim that community radio would have been beneficial in tackling social exclusion, he argued that 'a lack of radio choice could not be blamed for social exclusion in the UK' (Radio Authority, 2001f: 14). Not admitting that licensed commercial radio was still neglecting a wide range of audiences,

and ignoring the legitimate claims of all of the communities still was not covered by their own local or community of interest station, he added that ‘legitimising pirates would not help’ (ibid., 14) and that anyway, ‘genuine market failure should be addressed either by the BBC or by some other form of proactive regulation’ (ibid., 14), not by introducing a new sector.

I hope to show through the observational case studies in later chapters that such a claim was at the very least questionable. For instance, it is clear that a station such as Forest FM had tried several times to get an ILR licence, without asking for any funding, and had been rejected on the grounds that it was too small and unsustainable in the long term (Saville, Interview, 2007).<sup>40</sup> The empowering possibilities, including the acquisition of media and digital skills in an information-oriented society, were dismissed with the argument that ‘there was no shortage of media graduates’ (ibid., 14) and by questioning ‘why radio training should receive funding ahead of other concerns, also given that RSLs already provided practical experience, and that commercial radio stations provided formal training too’ (ibid., 14).

Here, Riley was overlooking the fact that an RSL could be active only for a very limited period of time and that, overall, it had high rental costs for equipment and that it partly expressed demand for more licences, as the applications for a full-time Community Radio licence would later demonstrate. It was also questionable for Riley to assume that media training should be a domain exclusively for graduates. Further, in forecasting that the proposed ‘Access Radio Fund’ would result in ‘dull as ditchwater programming as it had in the 1980s’ (ibid., 14), Riley also ignored the fact that only part of this would have been used on funding programmes that commercial radio would not have produced due to its nature of maximising profit. He disregarded the fact that a large part of these funds would have been a one-off to cover administrative positions, to help a station get off the ground in its early stages and that by any means – historically, socially and culturally – this was a very different Britain, and potentially a very different sector, than the one in the 1980s. In the view of representatives of the commercial radio sector, who ignored RSL experiences and a changing political context, Community Radio had not changed over the last two decades. But, as the forthcoming ‘Access Radio’ pilot project

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with the Station Manager of Forest FM, Steve Saville, 14 March 2007.

would confirm a few months later, the sector no longer consisted merely of a very ideologically charged, and left-leaning group of activists but also included an increasing number of practitioners and stations coming from very different backgrounds.

Arguably, more confusion was caused by the consequences of the rebranding of the RA, as Riley asked, 'Is there the demand or interest for public access radio? Would anyone listen? If no-one listens there is no point doing it!' (ibid., 14). As has been seen, the sector was not asking for 'public access' radio, so it was incorrect to set the terms of the debate in this manner. Finally, this was an erroneous assumption, because it ignored the obvious fact that the terms of the debates in mainstream media are set by a very different set of values and dynamics than *community radio* as Riley argued, when he brought up the matter of programming costs, namely that 'other media equally and often more cheaply fostered community debate' (ibid., 14).

How representative these claims might have been, of the feelings of the commercial sector as a whole, is reflected in documents released by the CRCA in this period, which will be discussed in the next chapter in the context of local radio broadcasting practice. Here, it is important to record the 'slightly' different position of GWR's Ralph Barnard, who was evidently more open to the introduction of a third sector:

This new addition must be given room to grow without being overshadowed by commercial radio or the BBC. Some communities of area or interest will really benefit from having their own radio service. Therefore GWR supports the creation of a third tier of stations (...) A third sector of stations should attract a third sector audience and be funded from a third set of resources (...) Broadcasting to a small audience is not irrelevant and (...) community radio has a vital role to play. (Radio Authority, 2001: 16)

He also agreed with the CMA's objection to the use of Access Radio, favouring 'community radio' instead: 'I'll tell you what I think Access Radio is. I think it's a title dreamed up by someone who hasn't the first idea of how radio stations, any radio station[s], operate. Someone who doesn't like the term community radio' (Everitt, 2003: 29). With reference to Barnard, Buckley says that 'they were not being entirely philanthropic about this. They saw the opening up as a way of extracting some

concessions from [the] government, so that they would allow greater concentration. For them, this was a bit of a strategic balancing act. They put a bit of weight behind what the Labour Party wanted to do, and what we had been pressing for a long time, in return for some concessions that would improve their businesses' (Interview, 2007).

In other words, representatives of the sector were more friendly during this debate, in order to obtain other concessions on ownership and further deregulation of the sector, hence the move towards less hostile positions in the debate. Overall, there was even less agreement on how Access Radio was going to be funded, with industry representatives very worried about possible top-slicing of the BBC licence fee or an imposed levy on INR/ILR stations.

Shortly afterwards, on 2 March 2001, the RA confirmed its proposal for the establishment of a third sector in a submission to the government. It recommended that Access Radio should be permitted mixed funding from both public funding and commercial support, and called for the establishment of a Radio Fund, the administration of Access Radio by the forthcoming regulator Ofcom, and for an indication of whether or not it wished to proceed with Access Radio. If yes, 'the Authority will structure a range of experiments, which will need to be carefully researched and monitored, in order to establish a clear potential approach which OFCOM will be able to adopt when the new legislation is passed' (Radio Authority, online, 2001a).

So, where the definition of their own sector made practitioners rather uncomfortable with the RA's choice, Community Radio's introduction also had the 'blessing' of the two other sectors, although with very different opinions among the commercial radio operators, and a proposal of the regulator on the government's table. As the CMA had wished, this included a pilot project to be conducted as soon as possible, from which lessons could be learnt and passed on to the forthcoming legislation.

The possible principles of the pilot experiments were then outlined publicly by the Chief Executive of the RA, Tony Stoller, at the Celtic Radio and TV Festival in Truro, on 31 March 2001. Highlighting that at the 12 February seminar, 'there was a widespread feeling that Access Radio was an idea whose time had come', and following

the approval of DCMS Secretary Chris Smith and the Broadcasting Minister, Janet Anderson, MP, Stoller stated that what the regulator wanted to achieve,

(...) is to test the various models, technical platforms and administrative approaches, in order to make sure that, just as soon as the new legislation takes effect, the regulatory body (...) has done all the testing it needs in order to get ahead straight away with the new services. To do that, we need to be sure that the pilots embrace a wide enough range of approaches, covering different parts of the UK and varied types of area socially, in order to allow an all-embracing regime to be established. (Radio Authority, online, 2001b)

Among others, the principals conducting the experiment had to attempt to replicate the approach, patterns and structures that might have governed the new sector, Access Radio, and ‘contain examples of the types of socially-regenerative and educational links, and of training and development of local community capacity’ (ibid.). The content proposal, it was suggested, should reflect the diversity present in British society, ranging from the more rural to the more urbanised communities, also aiming at communities of interest within localities, ‘not just all-embracing neighbourhood services, with the intention of establishing their role in serving minority groups and sustaining minority linguistic cultures’ (ibid.).

The diversity among the stations that would have been involved in the pilot project was envisaged as crucial to spotting the implications of very different funding models, as well as helping to inform the forthcoming regulator Ofcom on ‘how it should take account of the local broadcasting ecology in deciding how to protect existing small-scale services from unsustainable levels of competition’ (ibid.). Finally, the pilot licences had to be given for a fixed term and not interfere with the continuing award of RSLs. Importantly, the experiment had to be monitored and researched to provide a sound basis for its evaluation and future arrangements.

The emerging model of Community Radio, arising from the discussions outlined in this section, nevertheless continued to present a terminological problem, even if it did not ultimately block progress. Rather than being a model for an *alternative* to the duopoly,

what seemed to be emerging from this critical process of lobbying was a concept of Community Radio as *complementary*, and as a tool to deliver community involvement and development, gaining skills for the information economy and contributing to social inclusion. This placed Community Radio firmly in the social policy realm. What starts to become clear here is that, if approved, such a model of Community Radio would have favoured regeneration projects rather than very local community radio, pure and simple, which would have benefitted less from such a context.

At this time, though, the focus was on getting the legislation through. Speaking on behalf of the whole sector, the CMA therefore continued its efforts to push for a pilot project, to inform the policymakers in advance of legislation. With the road now paved for the pilot experiment starting as early as 1 January 2002, on 24 May, the RA invited interested applicants to submit letters of intent. These would be shortlisted and then applicants invited to apply in full. Excluding areas where ILR licences had been recently awarded (or would be shortly), the authority specified that applicants had to be prepared to start broadcasts by early 2002 and fulfil the characteristics outlined by Stoller in his Truro speech (Radio Authority, online, 2001c). Hundred and ninety-three letters were received and 15 groups were then shortlisted to submit a full application to be considered for a pilot licence, to be issued later in the autumn of that year (Radio Authority, online, 2001d).

In November, the Radio Authority announced the appointment of Professor Anthony Everitt – who had ample experience of evaluating community arts and participatory music projects (see 1997) – as the evaluator of the pilot project.<sup>41</sup> He had been Deputy and then Secretary General of the Arts Council of England between 1985 and 1994, with a particular interest in the history of ancient Rome. Significantly, in the same month, the government formally announced the introduction of the third sector, in its response – on the White Paper – to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee:

We recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the Radio Authority identify pilot schemes for expanded *community radio* projects for launch in advance

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<sup>41</sup> The study was co-funded by the RA and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's 'The Spoken Word', a fund designed 'to heighten awareness of the richness and variety of spoken language in contemporary Britain'. Source: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/archive/rau/newsroom/news-release/01/pr166.htm> (Accessed 3 July 2009)

of the introduction of legislation to give effect to the proposals in the White Paper. We are convinced that there is both a strong need and an overwhelming case for the establishment of a permanent *community radio* sector in the United Kingdom, distinct from and complementary to commercial radio. (DCMS, 2001: 10, emphasis added)

The response also gave further details about the ‘Access’ Fund and the way the ‘Access Radio’ pilot project had to be carried out and evaluated. At this point, the ‘testing’ phase of Community Radio could begin and the RA issue licences. The CMA did not intervene directly in giving suggestions as to which stations might need to be ‘privileged’ in the pilot, as this would have meant giving priority to some members before others. But on the selection process, Buckley commented, ‘The RA selected a diversity of types, including some groups not with [a] strong track record, resulting in some cases (...) [in the production of] some odd things and a waste of licenses. However, the stations provided the evidence needed for the project’ (Interview, 2007).

The RA’s justification for choosing groups without proven records was ‘to ensure a variety of funding and administrative structures and geographical spread across the United Kingdom’ (Everitt, 2003: 21). The RA believed, at this stage, that the pilot project should have followed the legislation. But the CMA insisted, successfully, that this should be carried out *ahead* of legislation in order to inform it and to learn from its outcomes before drafting the final bill.

The analysis of the submissions reveals some details about the spread of knowledge, about the possibility of ‘Access Radio’ across the UK, at this moment in time. For example, in line with RSL licences, only four letters of intent were received from Wales and among the communities of interest, only one requesting a licence for the Afro-Caribbean sector, compared with 27 for the Asian community. Given the high levels of involvement in pirate broadcasting, and the traditional distrust of the regulator, the Afro-Caribbean community appears to have become disillusioned by the real possibilities of this opportunity. Indeed, the degree of involvement of Black communities in illegal broadcasting, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, suggests that this is the case: ‘The reason they’re doing pirate radio is because there is no other option for them in their communities’ (McTernan in Lewis and

Scifo, 2007).<sup>42</sup> In fact, Everitt too partly attributed this to the high number of unlicensed pirate stations run by members of the Black community (2003: 20). Overall, the majority of the submissions (more than 100) came from geographically-based groups that wanted to serve all the communities in a particular area. The bias towards geographical, rather than ethnic or interest-based meanings of community, might have been a result of the scarcity of frequencies, especially in urban areas. This prompted diverse groups living in an area to come together and potentially increase the chances of getting a licence.

Whereas the selection process run by members of the RA's Access Radio sub-committee ran fairly smoothly, difficulties were found in the process of clearing frequencies to make space for the pilot process, with the authority's expectations proving to be too optimistic. The requirements set by the Radio Authority, on behalf of which the Access Radio Sub Committee had to judge the applications, included the demonstration of evidence of social gain and/or public service aims, to serve either a community of place or interest, to be distinct from ILR and to have existing expertise, so as to be able to start by 1 January 2002 (Radio Authority, 2001e).

Recognising that many of these stresses were caused by the pressure of the legislative timetable, the RA stated that it relied more 'on hope at the expense of experience' (ibid., 24). Listener surveys were not considered to be essential in the evaluation process, since most of the elements, necessary to measure the social gain achieved by the stations, were 'built-in'. This was also due to financial grounds: both the RA and the DCMS were unable to commit funds to run two professional listener surveys during the evaluation period, at an estimated total cost of £150,000 (ibid., 25). What appears more evident, here, is the interest in getting a critical amount of qualitative data and measuring the community development facilitated and enacted by the stations, rather than measuring how many people would have listened to a particular station. This is significant. It shows that the audience was regarded as a less important element in the context of the overall evaluation, than development was.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Statement of Donald McTernan, a London-based community media activist from the Afro-Caribbean community, at a conference co-organised by the author. See full report at Lewis and Scifo, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> In the course of 2002, the first two stations were given their temporary licences on 1 March (BCB, Bradford and Angel Radio in Havant), with the last group, Shine FM in Banbridge, to be given a licence on 23 September 2002.

Figure 1: Stations selected for the Pilot Project (table in Everitt, 2003a: 23)

TABLE 1: ACCESS RADIO PROJECTS

PROJECT	LOCATION	COMMUNITY SERVED	ON AIR 2002
ALL FM (RADIO REGEN)	MANCHESTER	ARDWICK, ARDWICK, LEVENSHULME	5 JUNE
ANGEL RADIO	HAVANT, HANTS	OLDER PEOPLE	1 MARCH
AWAZ FM	GLASGOW	ASIAN COMMUNITY	29 APRIL
BCB	BRADFORD	INNER CITY	1 MARCH
CROSS RHYTHMS CITY RADIO	STOKE-ON-TRENT	CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY	28 FEBRUARY
DESI RADIO	SOUTHALL, LONDON	PANJABI COMMUNITY	10 MAY
GTFM	PONTYPRIDD	PONTYPRIDD	27 APRIL
NEW STYLE RADIO	BIRMINGHAM	AFRICAN- CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY	14 AUGUST
FOREST OF DEAN COMMUNITY RADIO	FOREST OF DEAN	FOREST OF DEAN	19 JULY
NORTHERN VISIONS RADIO	BELFAST	BELFAST	9 MARCH
RADIO FAZA	NOTTINGHAM	ASIAN COMMUNITY	25 MARCH
RESONANCE FM	LONDON (SOUTH BANK AND BANKSIDE)	MUSICIANS AND RADIO ARTISTS	1 MAY
SHINE FM	BANBRIDGE,	BANBRIDGE COUNTY DOWN	21 SEPTEMBER
SOUND RADIO	LONDON	HACKNEY AND EAST LONDON	26 JULY
TAKEOVER RADIO	LEICESTER	CHILDREN	23 MARCH
WYTHENSHAW FM (RADIO REGEN)	MANCHESTER	WYTHENSHAW	6 MAY

In retrospect, we can see that the evaluation of the Access Radio pilot stations strengthened the case for the introduction of the sector. The use of the term ‘Access Radio’ was justified in the evaluation, on the basis that this would avoid the confusion ‘between radio which serves a community and that which belongs to a community’ (Everitt, 2003: 30), the first being ‘what commercial radio does at its best and the latter is what Access Radio aims to provide’ (ibid., 30). Moreover, it would be ‘unhelpful to give a third radio tier a title which embodied any ambiguity and in particular, which failed to draw the clearest of distinctions’ (ibid., 30), between the two sectors.

I would like to argue that actually, ‘access radio’ would have been a far more ambiguous term since it would not have reflected the fact that practitioners and advocates had been calling their own sector ‘Community Radio’ for almost three

decades. Only a small group of stations based in the Scottish Highlands could have claimed to be community radio stations in the ILR sector (as will be explored in the next chapter) and indeed had been, and still are, members of the CMA, without this causing any stir. Also, in the case of BBC Local Radio, for the reasons discussed in Chapter 3 (and that will be explored in Chapter 7, for developments after 1997), the term ‘community radio’ would not have been represented realistically, as it would have borne little resemblance to national and international definitions of what community radio actually was.

Anthony Everitt concluded that the stations had fulfilled their promises of social gain delivery in three areas that were also at the core of the New Labour Government’s social policy: a) individual empowerment and enhanced employability through the acquisition of transferable skills; b) boosting of community spirit; c) contribution to the delivery of public services and information, especially to ‘hard to reach’ groups (2003: 151). In short, Access Radio promised to be a positive social and cultural development and it was recommended that it should be introduced as a third tier of radio in the UK.

#### 6.5 The Communications Act 2003 and the Community Radio Order 2004

Following the results of the evaluation, then, it was clear that the introduction of Community Radio in the legislation was just a matter of time. Since the 1997 election, the CMA had been developing the support available in Westminster, culminating in the formation of the All Party Community Media Group (APCMG), in order to help in lobbying for a good final draft of the bill. This had been kick-started by a parliamentary reception hosted in 1997, followed by a corporate meeting in 2000, and encouraged by the MPs themselves. Community Radio was then included in the Communication Act 2003 (paragraph 262), with specifications to be outlined in an order approved subsequently by Parliament. Paragraph 359 also introduced the possibility of grants for community radio stations, to be administered by the new media regulator, Ofcom.

Once the Bill was published, the CMA familiarised itself with the membership of the Parliamentary Committee, and approached ‘friendly’ MPs of the Labour, Liberal Democrat, and Plaid Cymru groups. Buckley (Interview, 2007) recognises that some significant concessions were achieved via the House of Lords, with the crucial support –

among others – of Lord Bragg and Lord Puttnam (Labour), where the CMA was able to push forward changes, such as the re-definition and re-naming of Access Radio to Community Radio, and the increase of the scope of the Access Fund, so that it supported not only radio but also multimedia initiatives. At this point, Buckley adds, once the government had a substantial majority on this matter, ‘it was clear that it was going to push this through’ (ibid.). Putting this achievement in an historical context:

We got a reasonable piece of legislation in this country (...) it shouldn't have taken so long. It took so long because we were in the wrong political environment to achieve our aims. It could have happened five, 10 or even 20 years earlier (...) probably it would have been difficult earlier, but there could have been a possibility in the early years when Thatcher was not so ideological. (...) You see, the experiment was cancelled in 1986, but in 1985, they were still ready to go for it. By 1986, with the end of the miners' strike, Thatcher was at her ideological highpoint and nothing was going to happen. It took a long time to get beyond that. There is a lesson there and it is that these opportunities are intensely political. (...) The existence of [the] BBC has probably contributed to holding back development of community radio, particularly because it has [a] network of local radio stations, but [this] didn't prevent demand. (...) BBC local radio stations are not really local. Here, in Southern Yorkshire, it targets four major urban centres and thousands of villages. (Buckley, Interview, 2007)

The Community Radio Order (CRO) was approved on 19-20 July 2004. Lord McIntosh of Haringey, the Minister for Media and Heritage, had presented the draft order in the House of Lords, on 16 July, on behalf of the government and requested its approval. He also made a commitment to a review of the Community Radio sector by Ofcom after two years, adding that there would be an opportunity to remove the licensing restrictions introduced with the CRO, with a further order, if a future review would find out that those restrictions were unnecessary or too onerous. He was keen to underline how the introduction of this new sector should not be seen as a move to undervalue commercial radio:

It would be wrong to undervalue the role of local commercial radio, which provides an invaluable and popular service in the areas that it serves. It is more popular than BBC local radio and strongly contributes to an area's sense of identity (...) So we do not underestimate or undervalue the important role of local commercial radio. But we believe that there is also room for an additional tier of very local radio services along the lines of Community Radio. Properly introduced and regulated, Community Radio will complement existing commercial radio stations rather than compete with them. (House of Lords, 2004)

Lord McIntosh concluded by saying,

This is a historic day in the long journey of Community Radio. I pay tribute to the work of the Community Media Association, and in particular to Steve Buckley, who has been instrumental in getting us to this point. I hope that Community Radio will be an exciting and important development not just in UK radio, but also within UK society more generally. (ibid.)

The forthcoming regulator, Ofcom, was left with the duty to evaluate the applications for running a community radio service, based on seven selection criteria:

- the ability to maintain the proposed service for the duration of the licence;
- the provision of a service that caters to the tastes and interests of the members of the target community;
- the broadening of the choice of radio services available in the area;
- the provision of evidence of demand and support for the proposed service;
- the delivery of 'social gain' to the members of the target community;
- the accountability to the target community;
- the provision of access to facilities and training that could be used by the target community.

Having now the legal instrument to do so, Ofcom opened the first round of licensing for full-time community radio stations on 1 September 2004 (Ofcom, 2004a).

## 6.6 Conclusions

After a journey that lasted almost three decades, Community Radio became the third pillar of the UK radio broadcasting system. Although the legislation was clearly workable, when compared to contemporary regulations across Western Europe and North America (Price-Davies and Tacchi, 2001), the commercial radio lobby had managed to ambush the Community Radio Order in the concluding stages, drawing on more powerful and experienced lobbying tools and then including a protectionist measure for their existing, smaller stations:

OFCOM shall not grant a licence to provide a community radio service in any case where the licence, if granted, would overlap with another local licence for a service, other than a community radio service, the potential audience of which includes no more than 50,000 persons who have attained the age of 15 years. (UK Parliament, 2004)

This set severe limits on advertising for stations with potential audiences between 50,000 and 150,000 adults. For a sector that had traditionally championed the free market, and had pushed for further relaxation in ownership, this was an undoubtedly protectionist measure. At that point, it would have been expected that the Community Radio Fund, which had been changed at the last minute by the CMA to also include television and digital media, would have compensated for such measures. With a meagre £500,000 destined to cover part of the core costs of a station in its early stages, potentially available to more than the 200 stations licensed at the time of writing (2011), the legacy of the Labour Government in bringing Community Radio into British media policy was henceforth going to be limited. There is a very good overall framework for Community Radio, but also a great risk for the overall, long-term financial sustainability of the sector. Some of the implications of this risk will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

This chapter, then, drawing on the analysis of policy documents that have been ignored by current literature so far, and supported by interviews with key actors, unveils the details of the lobbying action by the CMA, which led to the introduction of Community Radio as a third sector of radio broadcasting in Britain. In looking ‘holistically’ at the

community media environment, as outlined in the methodology chapter, I hope to have given a sense of the interactions and the dynamics between the players in the policymaking process, and to have made an original contribution to knowledge that would help to understand the development of Community Radio in the UK, under New Labour, between its General Election victory in 1997 and the approval of the Community Radio Order in 2004.

To complete the analysis, though, it is be important to consider other seminal actors in the overall environment in which Community Radio policy evolved and to discuss the lessons and implications from early initiatives in Community Radio, from existing broadcasters in the same period (1997-2004).

## CHAPTER 7

### INITIATIVES IN COMMUNITY RADIO FROM EXISTING BROADCASTERS, 1997-2004: LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 7.1 Introduction

Where the previous chapter outlined and discussed the actors involved in community radio policymaking and regulation, this chapter will show how, when Community Radio was officially introduced in 2004, it could draw, if it so wished, on several years of initiatives and experiments in ‘community broadcasting’ emerging from commercial broadcasting, the RSLs and the ‘Access Radio’ pilot project that preceded the introduction of Community Radio itself.

Drawing on the interview with the Station Manager of the Scottish station, Two Lochs Radio, I will argue that, under specific circumstances, Community Radio was actually possible under the commercial radio licensing scheme. This was an exception, though, which could happen only in the absence of commercial competition and the presence of strong, local, voluntary support. As another interview with the Chief Executive of the Radio Authority at that time will confirm, the ownership regulations in place would have not permitted the survival of such experiences elsewhere.

Throughout this chapter, it will be shown how unpublished documents from the CMA archives and interviews cited above indicated that these early initiatives provided various ‘tools’ for social benefit, though also some warnings about the limitations in what could be achieved. Finally, I will argue that the survival – or rather, the proliferation – of pirate broadcasting, is an indicator of continuing unmet demands in local broadcasting ecologies.

To start, though, I will discuss the initiatives of the BBC in the period 1997-2004, in a period where the forthcoming Charter Renewal and the eagerness to show its ‘public value’ tried to emphasise its ‘community’ credentials in what seemed to be another

attempt to blur the distinction between local and community broadcasting, especially in England.

## 7.2 BBC Radio ‘where you are’

Through the 1990s, BBC local radio stations continued to further centralise their output, by merging some of the smaller ones. However, some initiatives that had been developed online, like the *Where I Live* sections, were contributing to an increase of the local audio archives available across local BBC websites. *BBC Buses* had also helped to reach out to a number of smaller communities by bringing the public broadcaster closer to some of its audiences. While I will not deliberate, here, on a qualitative analysis of local BBC websites, or on the participatory video project *Videonation* (see Carpentier, 2003), I believe that is imperative, in this context, to discuss *Voices*, arguably the most important ‘participative’ project carried out by the BBC, at the local level, in radio broadcasting.

Former BBC radio producer and broadcaster Matthew Linfoot reviewed this project in a paper that outlines and evaluates how the public broadcaster engaged with its public and the lesson learnt from it (Linfoot, 2006). *Voices* ran in 2003 on BBC Local Radio and national stations, involving 58 producers and working in 48 locations across the United Kingdom, part of the wider BBC’s *Connecting Communities* strategy, aimed to facilitate closer relationships between local stations and their audiences (BBC English Regions, 2000). It is interesting to note how the timing of this project coincided with the Radio Authority ‘Access Radio’ Pilot Project, carried out in 2001/2, the results of which were published in March 2003 and, as Linfoot notes, ‘the timing of these initiatives was particularly crucial, as it was in the run of-up to Charter Review, when the BBC was working hard to prove its connectivity with audience’ (2006: 125). The BBC had to prove its ‘public value’ to licence fee payers, also in view of the very positive results that were outlined by Anthony Everitt in the evaluation report: ‘Access Radio and the Corporation could find themselves competing for funds from public sector partners’ (2003: 127).

Interestingly, the key ambitions listed by Linfoot, with reference to *Voices*, are very close to those of community radio stations: get a wider range of people’s voices on the

BBC's airwaves, develop media literacy skills among audiences, form partnerships with groups and organisations in the community, and build closer relationships with the audience. Individual stations were given flexibility on how to carry out their projects, for which they had to apply for funding to BBC Nations and Regions.

*Voices* was 'not supposed to surrogate social work' (Linfoot, 2006: 130) and the primary purpose was to produce output for the BBC, with producers acting in the role of facilitators of community activities. In his evaluation, Linfoot sampled three stations, representative of the breadth of experiences of the project: Radio Shropshire, Radio Sheffield and Radio London. As Linfoot argues, in general terms, participants and BBC staff seemed to be pleased to be involved in the project and the role of the producers as facilitators was appreciated. It helped the BBC to produce less studio-based output, engage more closely with its local communities and produce compelling programmes. However, as a Radio Shropshire producer argued, 'It was all a bit wishy-washy...we weren't sure if we were supposed to be making programmes or building community centres' (BBC staff, Shropshire, quote in Linfoot, 2006: 134). Producers understood the 'value of people telling their own stories in their 'own' voice' (ibid., 137).

On the other hand, communities were energised, acquired new skills, got involved in project activities and got themselves heard on air but in some cases, they perceived the presence of the BBC as dominant and threatening, and viewed it with suspicion, given their negative past experiences with the media, and a general low trust in projects 'parachuted' from above. In his conclusions, Linfoot notes how the success of the project matched the BBC's charter review strategy, in demonstrating that local radio contributed to building 'public value' by including partnerships, working closely with communities and giving them a voice.

However, by 2006 (when the article was published), he remarked how budget cuts had already affected BBC Local Radio and the *Where I live* websites, with further, similar cuts probably to come, due to a licence fee settlement under the expectations of the BBC management, making another initiative such as *Voices* quite improbable in the future. Moreover, Linfoot stated, 'BBC Local Radio has also become increasingly homogenised in many ways, in terms of branding and the replacement (or at least

exiling into the evening schedules) of individual programmes by phone ins and generic formats' (2006: 139).

With 'communities' being put at the centre of New Labour policies in so many aspects, by carrying out such a project, the BBC tried to show its work among the English Regions, to emphasise its credentials before the 2006 Charter Review. Indeed, the remit published in the *BBC Annual Report 2005/6* stated that,

BBC English Regions aims to be the most trusted and creative *community broadcaster* in England, serving a widely diverse range of urban and rural *communities*. The stations also work hard to foster a sense of *local community* through such things as high-quality coverage of local sport, providing wide-ranging information about what is happening in the *community*, a strong emphasis on enabling individuals to get involved with helping others, and a stress on involving listeners in contributing to the output. There is also a good range of output in specialist languages appropriate to the *communities* served by individual stations. (BBC English Regions 2006: 55, emphasis added)

BBC English Regions also aimed to foster a sense of community, reflecting local life and bringing communities together, to mark key, local events and to be a powerful force for local cohesion. Local radio had to provide a distinctive, speech-based service across England, offering a forum for debate, a focus for key local issues and a platform for local people to share their stories and experiences. In 2006, BBC English regions also aimed to increase the opportunities for active citizenship and local democracy, by strengthening the links with the Community Media Association through a training partnership, following the signature of a memorandum of understanding (CMA/BBC English Regions, 2006).

When evaluating the experience of *Voices*, it is fair to say that it left a legacy among its producers and its audiences, but it is also true that this was done because of the will of the top management, eager to show its closeness to the public, and for the specific aims of the review, rather than for a genuine, bottom-up initiative. It suggests that the BBC was arguably worried about how the Access Radio pilot project might show a genuine

connection of those stations to their audiences, satisfying a demand for localness and engagement in the communities' own terms, rather than through a single, albeit important project like *Voices*.

Those connected with community radio regarded such experiments with a measure of suspicion. From their perspective, as the then CMA Director Steve Buckley stated, 'The BBC's attitude to Access Radio is [that] they feel it's something they should have done but they don't know how to' (2003, quoted in Coyer, 2006: 103). The BBC also seems to have had a problem in recognising that it did things differently:

The BBC is a top down monolith despite it pretending not to be. And community radio, if done right, is a ground-up grassroots organisation. There are things they can do together, but they are in fact, different. The problem is, the BBC still doesn't recognise the fundamental difference. (Hallett, 2005, quoted in Coyer 2006: 105)

Another initiative, apart from *Voices*, which raised more than a few eyebrows among community media and local commercial media representatives, was the so called "ultra-local" TV experiment launched in late 2005 in the West Midlands in advance of a ultra local news service to cover 50-60 areas across the UK with up to ten minutes an hour of genuinely relevant local news and information, not just at 18:30, but throughout the day' (BBC, 2004: 66), to be made available on Internet and Freeview. Whereas no statements or comments emerged from archival research of CMA official documents, a search on CMA members' mailing list revealed community media practitioners' resentment and scepticism towards the corporation.

The Corporation's culture of having to do everything including things other cultures thought of first just in case they miss out. Those of us sufficiently long in the tooth will recall the visceral way Auntie reacted to the offshore radio stations. Then they went and copied Radio London when they cobbled together Radio One, even down to recreating the same jingle package. There is an avaricious streak in BBC culture. "We can do community radio better than the people in the communities already doing it." It goes something like that. (...) Secondly, they have a complete misconception of what community

broadcasting is. The BBC clings to the notion that it must educate, hand down, patronise its marketplace. They claim, I perceive, that their 70 years' experience is more valuable than our knowledge of the places in which we broadcast (...) BBC culture regards community broadcasting as irrelevant and its practitioners as rank amateurs, in the worst possible sense of the word. We regard the BBC as irrelevant. Radio Wales is not local to Torfaen. Radio Cymru is not listened to here since hardly anyone speaks Welsh. The BBC cannot offer us anything useful. We have all the broadcasting experience we need within our own organisation to enable training to very high standards. What could we possibly want from the BBC? (Fossey, 2005)

What can be seen here is discontent generated by the fact that the BBC was entering what community media practitioners believed to be their territory, with some arrogance, and thanks to its financial muscle. That a number of BBC staff saw community broadcasters as amateurs is nothing new; throughout this thesis, we have seen how concepts of professionalism and quality standards have contributed to decreasing, or altogether removing, any community input to local stations. Finally, a source of indignation is also the fact that in this CMA member's own community, the BBC was not altogether perceived as a local broadcaster.

However, in the discussion following the post above, other CMA members were keen to remark that they enjoyed good, or even excellent relationships with their local BBC stations. The areas of support included exchange of materials, use of facilities and training support on matters like media law and media ethics. This support nevertheless seemed to exist, more due to the will of individual BBC local radio Station Managers, rather than as part of a wider BBC strategy at the UK level. Indeed, BBC's 2004 *public value* document did not mention community media anywhere, though it frequently used the terms 'community' and 'communities'.

What can be said, then, is also that the BBC's ultra-local experiment appears to have been another initiative aiming to show 'public value' in advance of the Charter Review, also supporting what the BBC had asserted with reference to *Voices*, 'active and informed citizenship' (2004: 12). As Aldrige has argued, the ultra-local television experiment could be seen as the BBC's attempt, in its dialogue with the government, to

‘put its ability to serve “the community” in the foreground’ (2007: 112), and serve the same purpose for Ofcom’s review of radio and TV’s ‘public purposes’ (see Ofcom, 2005: 17-23 for radio and Ofcom, 2006d: 30-34 for local digital services).

In a quote published by *The Guardian*, the man responsible for this new service, Chas Watkin, who was also editor of the regional news programme *Midlands Today*, stated that the experiment would have been ‘potentially the most revolutionary move since the launch of local radio news 40 years ago’ (Gibson, 2005). Instead, the plan was dropped two years later, as part of a series of ‘cuts prompted by its lower-than-expected licence fee settlement’ (Brook, 2007).

The fundamental distinctions between the concepts of *localness* with *community* were not being fully recognised by local commercial radio stations and their representatives, who, it could be argued, often confused the two. In the “Building Public Value” document (BBC, 2004) and successive documents, the corporation never suggested that its relationship with the communities would be two-way or that it would ensure more direct input by the communities it would serve. The expansion of local services and further engagement with the public, at the local level, came during the same period when the community radio sector was launched and might have conceivably ‘obscured’ initiatives from a sector that had much less power to stimulate discussions in mainstream media and the general public.

This research does not include an analysis of media coverage of both issues, but surely BBC projects such as the ones discussed above could count on much wider discussion on national dailies and on the Internet. Given that, in the end, *Voices* was a one-off, and that the ultra-local experiment was cancelled, and that they both mostly served the purpose of informing a Charter Review, it should not come as a surprise that practitioners of Community Radio – a fragile sector already showing signs of funding problems – might harbour bitter feelings about the corporation’s expansionist plans at the local level.

The BBC was not alone in claiming that it was providing a ‘community’ service in these years (1997-2004). Local commercial operators had been claiming their ‘community’

credentials for years and, with the introduction of a distinct community radio sector, such calls grew even stronger, as we will in the next section.

### 7.3 The loss of localness in commercial radio

In examining the economies of local commercial radio by the end of the 1990s, Hendy argued that much of the increased profitability of the sector was ‘disproportionately in the hands of a big few operators’ (2000: 41). The obvious consequence was the rush towards the most profitable formats, pushed further by the entrance, in the radio market, of subjects that were not ‘pure’ radio players, like national and international multimedia conglomerates. As radio historian Seán Street writes, in those years there was an increasing ‘deterioration of programme standards towards a certain predictability of sound’ (2006: 21). Elsewhere, Andrew Crisell observes that local news was becoming ‘typically derivative and lacking in distinctiveness’ (1998: 30).

In *The Radio Handbook*, British scholar Carole Fleming also remarks how, after the 1990 Broadcasting Act, ‘although there were more radio stations than ever before, most of them were targeting the same audience’ (2010: 14), those with most spending power. Moreover, while perhaps adding some diversity of content (locally) and helping to save costs, the networking of programmes by stations of the same group gave force to the argument that it stifled talent and contributed to the loss of distinctiveness in a locality, where ‘schedules become dominated by a few presenters and there is no opportunity for new talent to break into the industry’ (ibid., 17). Local news content also suffered from a situation where balancing the books and making the station more profitable meant reducing it to the ‘minimal compliance with their regulatory obligations’, with most of the news bought from Independent Radio News (IRN) and locally generated by passive sources such as live events, courts police news, and press releases (Aldridge, 2007: 95).

In the literature written about the period, covered in this chapter, Tony Stoller’s comprehensive account of the history of independent local radio (ILR) in the United Kingdom is particularly significant, given the fact that he was the Chief Executive of the Radio Authority between 1995 and 2003. He observed how the changes in media ownership ‘changed the nature of programming content, which became increasingly homogenised within groups and decreasingly local’, representing ‘the triumph of

*commercial* radio over the constraints of *independent* radio’ (Stoller, 2010a: 245). Indeed, the 1996 Broadcasting Act allowed further relaxations of ownership, permitting 27 mergers or acquisitions between 1996 and 1997.

In the year when the Labour Party came back into power with a landslide victory, the Radio Authority awarded 23 new ILR licenses, passing the 200-station milestone in September 1997. Sixteen of those licenses were awarded to areas with an adult population below 300,000 and seven to areas with an adult population below 100,000. Quay West Radio in West Somerset, with a coverage of 20,000 and Lochbroom FM in Ullapool, in the Scottish Highlands, serving 1,500, showed ‘the Authority’s commitment to providing services for smaller coverage areas’ (Radio Authority, 1997, in Stoller, 2010a: 294).

Apart from the Highlands stations, which will be discussed more at length in the next section, the expectations of localness from these stations were to have a short life, too: ‘The natural levels of civic aspiration within these new groups might have provided a last flowering of the *independent radio* notion within the ILR, but all too often they hit the reality of the commercial world in short order’ (Stoller, 2010a: 294). Overall, the authority stated that it was satisfied with small-scale stations, even though most of them had to reach their third or fourth year before becoming profitable (minutes of the *RA Conference 1997*, in *ibid.*, 298).

The request for more local, low-powered stations remained high, and the authority also started to ask what part of a wider catchment area the applicants would have liked to serve, in addition to the programmes they would have liked to propose. RA’s senior team member, David Vick, named these kind of stations ‘Small-scale Alternative Location Licenses’ or ‘sallies’, which soon became the industry term for the smaller stations, whether based in an alternative location or not (Stoller, 2010a: 300). However, in many applications, the members of the authority expressed concern about the number of directors and investors not based locally, believing that they risked the dissipation of local knowledge and connections. Several of the newly licensed stations also believed that the limit of 100-watt power transmission, which had been applied to maximise the number of stations, was an obstacle for the more commercial, rather than the more community-oriented stations. Small and stand-alone stations also continued to be

licensed in 1999, with the authority favouring ‘the independent new entrant, especially where it could demonstrate genuine local roots’ (Stoller 2010a: 302).

However, as in the case of the ‘incremental stations’ rolled out from 1989, and the decision to license small-scale stations to make local use of available spectrum, the ownership regulation would not have voted in favour of community radio. As Stoller said during the interview,

They had to operate within the existing legislation and wherever the Radio Authority awarded a licence to a local community-ish group the chances were that it was going to be bought out fairly quickly. First of all, there were no limits in the legislation for selling those licences, which is crazy. And secondly, people get together, work hard to get a licence and then when the station went into trouble there were people around waving chequebooks and saying ‘How much do you want for your radio licence?’ (Stoller, 2010b)

What this tells us is that by now, there was some agreement, among community radio advocates and leading figures at the regulator, that the legislation available at that time was not fit for purpose for genuine community radio, that there was a need to move towards a separate and distinct sector, where such operations would not have been possible.

Meanwhile, in the industry, the disappointing figures in advertising revenue and listenership, at the start of the millennium, as well as the impact of Internet and mp3 downloads, pushed the sector to ask for further relaxation of ownership rules and increase networking among local commercial stations. For local licence holders, this was also seen as a good opportunity to cash in on their initial investments by selling them to larger groups. GWR was the first group to start this trend in 2000, with Emap and other groups to follow shortly, in 2001 and later. Stations that had been licensed to provide distinct local services continued to be networked. Local commercial radio, like the larger, commercial radio stations, suffered continuous drops in revenue figures and overall listening rates. In its epilogue to the history of independent radio, Stoller states a number of reasons that he believes led to such a result:

Commercial radio had suffered death by a thousand cuts. The long-term impact of networking programming had undermined the local relevance of the output. The lack of variety produced a mostly bland product which held its listeners by inertia; nothing must be broadcast which might cause people to tune away, and nothing surprising was going to be broadcast which might attract new custom. The supply of news from news hubs, rather than a genuine local newsroom accentuated this mind-set. The automation of output confirmed it. The decision by the larger groups to do away with local managing directors for individual stations denied their companies a local presence to sustain essential commercial interests. (Stoller, 2010a: 343)

It can be seen, then, how another space for community radio was opening here, given the commercial sector's move towards more profitable formats and the decrease of local content available in these stations.

The new 'super-regulator', Ofcom's vision for the radio broadcasting sector favoured further consolidation, and indeed between 2004 and 2005, another round of mergers took place: Capital and GWR merged to be rebranded as GCap, and Emap acquired Scottish Radio Holdings, with these two groups in fact becoming the dominant force of commercial radio. UTV and the Local Radio Company also increased their shares in the market by buying, respectively, the Wireless Group and Radio Investments. The Commercial Radio Companies Association (CRCA), however, despite evidence of changes in media ownership suggesting a different picture, was eager to demonstrate its public service and community credentials in the light of the introduction of community radio and Ofcom's question to stakeholders on what constituted Public Service Broadcasting (PSB).<sup>44</sup>

A publication released in September 2004, at the same time as Ofcom's publication of the information, on the format of the forthcoming community radio applications (Ofcom, 2004a), is the outcome of data and statistics collated among local commercial stations between 14 June and 25 July 2004 (this was also the time when the Community Radio Order was discussed in Parliament). By publishing the internal audit

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<sup>44</sup> Archived PSB consultations are available on Ofcom's website at:  
<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/reviews-investigations/public-service-broadcasting/>

‘Commercial Radio: in the public service’, the Commercial Radio Companies Association (CRCA) wanted to ‘document the measurable elements of public service content that the market presently offers and stated that ‘We believe that this audit represents the biggest survey of PSB in action within UK broadcasting. It discusses and embraces Public Service Broadcasting in a way that no abstract piece of phrase-making ever could’ (CRCA, 2004: 5).

The audit has an abundance of quantitative details on matters such as local news: ‘Each station’s different approach results in considerable local news choice for listeners’; weather and travel reports: ‘On a typical day, commuters in Kingston can tune in to 402 different bulletins, which provide a total of over five and a half hours of travel news between them’; ‘What’s on’ information: ‘As an industry, commercial radio *spends* almost 800,000 minutes (over 13,000 hours) a year providing What’s On information’; and Community, Charity and Social Action, showing how they ‘strive to be connected intimately with their communities’ by broadcasting material in support of their community around 38 times a week. Stations ran charity trusts, collecting ‘over £8.5 million’ and getting involved opening local fêtes and carnivals, giving presentations to local schoolchildren, and participating in community initiatives and panels by attending on average ‘three events in their community each week’ (ibid., 8-9, emphasis added).

Published just a couple of weeks before the announcement of the merger of Capital and GWR, on 29 September 2004, the audit still gives a varied picture of media ownership where

Stations range from those serving metropolitan areas to tiny rural community stations, staffed by volunteers. The industry has 23 different companies (...)  
Many stations remain in independent or community ownership, such as Oban FM whose listeners can each own one £1 share. (ibid., 10)

At a time when the commercial radio sector was arguably feeling the competition from the public and community radio sector, the report also aimed to show how ‘it has led the way in public service broadcasting in local communities’ and highlight how, ‘From the beginning, local commercial radio stations have only had a competitive edge over their

better funded BBC and national competitors by providing relevant local programming that connects with listeners' lives and concerns' (ibid., 11).

However, the CRCA seemed to be inclined to provide no more than a few minutes in a bulletin to community information, justifying this with 'some structural characteristics of the radio medium':

Although radio has many important strengths, such as its intimacy, its portability and its flexibility, it is not a medium best suited to delivering detail. Many stations now use their websites to list the kind of in-depth information that is less effective when delivered on air. (ibid., 29)

This is not the context in which to discuss such a claim in detail, but surely community-owned stations, either with a community or commercial radio licence, as well as similar RSLs, in practice showed how community information could be explained and discussed in longer formats without compromising the intimacy of radio, as the Highlands stations and community-based stations demonstrated. The audit did claim that local commercial radio helped discussion through its programming of a number of issues important to the local communities, providing valuable short news broadcasts, as well as weather and travel updates. However, this is no less than what a listener would expect from stations that were licensed for these purposes and because this was what stations had promised to deliver when applying for an FM licence.

In the first part of this thesis, community participation, as theorised by scholars and practised by those on the ground, showed how communities can become an active part of locally-based stations, apart from phoning in during discussions or simply informing broadcasters of major queues on a motorway, ahead of official agency and police reports. Community participation, though, is described by the CRCA in a different form: How the station staff gets involved in community activities, rather than the other way around. In other words, 'how station staff participate in local panels, making a positive contribution to communities' (ibid., 37), for example being part of task forces to reduce the anti-social behaviour in Birmingham, chairing fundraising appeals for a hospital in Swindon, raising money for children's hospitals around the UK, or sitting on a board that works to ensure the continuing vitality, prosperity and development of

Manchester's city centre. At this point, one may wonder if this participation was more dependent on the personal will of each individual, rather than being part of an overall CRCA commitment to encourage its members to give their time to communitarian causes and highlight its community credentials.

A similar response was published in the academic journal *Cultural Trends*, in an article authored by *London Weekend Television's* Nick Irvine, based on a PSB internal audit done by the CRCA four years earlier, in 2000. The intention of the Radio Authority to introduce a new tier of radio, as expressed in the White Paper on Communications (DCMS, 2000), seemed to provoke the implicit claim among people in the commercial radio sector that 'the Authority was making a *de facto* claim that the commercial sector did not fulfil these social and cultural goals', thus undermining 'the view that commercial radio serves public service objectives far beyond its remit' (Irvine, 2000: 37). The author wanted to dismiss the view that 'only freedom from the profit motive produces public service broadcasting', by questioning whether BBC Radio Scotland provided a better public service than small-scale stations like Moray Firth Radio or Oban FM.

Irvine argued that both BBC and commercial radio, in involving their listeners by being 'personal' and 'speaking' to the listener, made them feel as if they belonged to a geographical community or community of interest. This language echoed that which was used for categorising community radio in policy discussions at the time. Reiterating arguments put forward for truly local stations, Irvine emphasised the provision of 'local accents, dialects or languages' and the fact that commercial radio included 'audience groups who are notoriously difficult to target through other forms of communication' and offers 'educators and advertisers an invaluable (and efficient) tool for reaching groups [that] other methods of communication cannot reach' (ibid., 41).

Moreover, Irvine supported the idea of commercial radio encouraging citizenship by 'educating, informing, fundraising or appealing in behalf of groups and individuals in need' (ibid., 41), closing the gap between listener and broadcaster. The CRCA had done a public service output audit between 17 April and 11 June 2000 and it had defined the following categories as PSB output: education (such as revision help lines and information on adult learning), health education (such as campaigns on illegal drugs),

infotainment (such as information on the local football club or local music festival), information and support to donations in the event of disaster and emergencies, traffic and travel news, and ‘volunteering and linking people in need with people who can offer assistance of some kind’. The communitarian values, as outlined by Etzioni, and discussed earlier in this thesis, are seen as central to local commercial radio as well:

Certainly by speaking to the listener; by making the listener feel he or she belongs to the broadcast community; by giving information about the broadcast community and by being involved in that community, stations are able to create a service associated with certain values. These values are communitarian, perhaps not in their intention, but communitarian in their outcome nonetheless, and foster communication and citizenship skills in the listener. (Irvine, 2000, 42)

Although at the end of his piece, Irvine says that the future looks good for all radio services, including ‘Access’ radio, the general argument underlying his piece is to demonstrate how local commercial radio – as a tool to diversify the pluralism in the media – reflects a more multicultural society and fosters recognition of local identity, that it could help to achieve New Labour’s objective of achieving social cohesion by facilitating bottom-up initiatives from civil society and voluntary sectors. Local commercial radio was envisaged as a tool to ‘help society exercise its citizenship rights fully’ by protecting democracy, by being owned by different *people* (I suspect this refers to the owners of the licences, rather than the people from the local community, as implied) and by providing a ‘necessary check’ to the BBC as a large-scale media owner. Finally, it does argue that the marginalisation of different identities, supposedly a consequence of the BBC and media other than radio, could be reduced by devolving broadcasting to a large number of small-scale, self-organising operators, who would ‘provide services for listeners identified by language, race, taste or locality and are themselves members of those communities, all of this to be achieved by small-scale commercial radio broadcasters’ (ibid., 43).

What emerged from Irvine’s and the CRCA arguments between 2000 and 2004 was an attempt to position local commercial radio as a whole, as the ‘real’ public service and as community stations, by highlighting the credentials of its smaller stations in more

remote areas and the potential diversity of choice in urban areas, at a time when the Radio Authority first introduced, then decided to go ahead with Community Radio. However, what emerges clearly is the fact that where smaller commercial stations recruited staff locally and at times gave local people access to broadcasting, thus fostering participation in the station, programming or prioritising social aims was not the ultimate objective of the station, except in the Highlands case.

Evidence from most academic and policy research in those years pointed in a very different direction, as in the report commissioned by the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) and the Independent Television Commission (ITC), which had raised concerns about the increasingly lighter news provided by commercial radio:

Radio's biggest area of growth has been in lightly regulated commercial music radio, which mostly delivers minimal and probably decreasing local news. (...) On commercial radio, news agendas have moved towards being dominated by entertainment and sports news. An indication of the state of things is provided by the experience of the 2001 election when IRN (...) offered all 250 stations the opportunity to join a live phone-in to party leaders, including the Prime Minister. Only 12 stations were willing to take part. (Hargreaves and Thomas, 2002: 62)

Moreover, the authors of the report also underlined how 'Radio is certainly capable of serving smaller communities and special niches, but has tended to concentrate upon replicating successful music formats, rather than pursuing smaller, less profitable audiences' (ibid.). As Chignell has argued, 'local references in commercial radio sound more like symbolic responses to regulation [rather] than any genuine attempt to respond to the local community' (2009: 133).

It is then more accurate and fair to say that the further relaxations in ownership, introduced by the 1996 Broadcasting Act, did in fact make more evident the distinctions between the two kinds of private stations – the 'commercial' sector on the one hand, including for profit stations at the local, urban, regional and national levels, and on the other hand, truly local, grassroots-based, community-run stations with an ILR licence or an RSL licence, as well as student and hospital radio stations. As Meg Carter, author of

a report for the Radio Authority, on the 30 years of ILR, says: ‘Commercial radio became acknowledged as just that: a commercial business’ (2003: 16).

*Community ILR stations: the case of the Highlands*

A station that has often been cited as a case study by the commercial radio sector, even though remotely representative of the current average characteristics of local commercial radio, has been Two Lochs Radio (2LR), on air since 22 November 2003. Notably the smallest commercial radio station in the UK, with a catchment of fewer than 2,000 people, it covers the Gairloch, Loch Ewe and Loch Maree areas of Wester Ross, in the Highlands of Scotland. It has one part-time employee (with all the other roles carried out by volunteers) and is operated by a non-profit company, Wester Ross Radio Ltd, owned by the local community. It targets residents and visitors of this area of Scotland and, among its strengths, includes Gaelic broadcasting, making it in fact a bilingual station (Paul Zealey Associates, 2007: 15).

The station is part of the Highlands and Islands Community Broadcasting Federation (HICBF), an umbrella organisation for all not-for-profit and community-based radio stations in the Highlands and Islands area. Established in 1996, the HICBF includes seven out of the eight full-service, commercially-licensed stations in the Highlands, which have a total of over 300 volunteers actively working in the stations, in locations such as Campbeltown, Caithness, Stornoway and Stonehaven. Among other objectives, it encourages ‘the provision of community broadcasting services for the benefit of the public; provides advice and assistance with regard to the establishment and operation of organisations, which are established for the promotion of community broadcasting services’ (ibid., 6-7). With academic literature having largely ignored what arguably constituted the only ongoing successful cases of community broadcasting under commercial licensing, I interviewed 2LR’s Station Manager, Alex Gray, to discover the reasons behind this exception in the commercial sector.<sup>45</sup>

The idea of setting up a station in the area had emerged from discussion among local community members in the early nineties, but had not gone very far during that decade.

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<sup>45</sup> Alex Gray, Station Manager, Two Lochs Radio, Interview, 8 July 2011.

In the meantime, other stations in the area had started, such as Nevis Radio in Fort William (1994) and Isles FM in Stornoway (1998), demonstrating how non-profit groups could successfully apply to the Radio Authority for a commercial radio licence. In 1999, a fresh group of people very keen on the idea of starting a station came together again and started lobbying the RA in order to convince the regulator that there was a strong case for a local radio station in the area. Despite the small scale of the station, the documents were exactly the same as those that would have been requested from any other commercial radio licence applicant (e.g., Capital FM), including costs of approximately £6,000 and a 150-page application document (Gray, Interview, 2011).

The licence was eventually awarded in early 2003, with the station going on air by the end of that year. When asked why Two Lochs Radio did not consider applying for an Access/Community Radio licence, Gray replied that this would have meant acquiring a full-time Community Radio licence much later and losing momentum for the station.<sup>46</sup> This would not have had any advantage, apart from being able to apply to the Community Radio Fund and pay a much smaller application fee. On the other hand, it would have been severely limiting the freedom that 2LR enjoyed as a commercial licensee, to take in as much advertising as it wanted to, without the need to match this with other sources, as was the case for community radio stations.

Funding for 2LR is also raised through local activities and support from small businesses, most of which have supported the station since its beginning – more in the spirit of contribution to the larger community, rather than for any expected financial return. Such funds have helped the station to break even every year (which is its ultimate aim anyway), and to occasionally make a surplus, though not exceeding a few hundred pounds. In terms of government funding, the station has never received any UK government support, apart from a few Inland Revenue advertisements. A Scottish government pilot project for local advertising has been very helpful for their finances, but only in the last few years. Finally, relations with the Local Authority – the Highlands Council – are not good, despite the potential benefits implied in connecting

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the first of such licenses was awarded to Forest of Dean Radio, only on 7 March 2005. See <http://licensing.ofcom.org.uk/radio-broadcast-licensing/community-radio/current-licensees/awards-05-06/fod>

closely with people in the area; this is mainly due to the relatively high number of small stations present in the council's remit area.

Among the ILR licensees in the north of Scotland, Moray Firth Radio (MFR) was cited earlier in this thesis as one of the early examples of community-based broadcasting and indeed, the community ethos of that station has been an inspiration to the promoters of the project in Gairloch. Where MFR has followed the path of further commercialisation, similar to other larger commercial stations, Gray states that what has kept 2LR from following this trend is the real sense of community present in and around the station, 'done by the community, for the community, to cover matters of concern that no one else covers in the catchment area' (ibid., 2011).

MFR, in contrast, can cover the whole Highlands but has supposedly never had interest in focusing on the West Coast and the isles, mainly due to a lack of commercial interest. However, 'people like to hear issues from their own community and that are very local and relevant to them' (ibid., 2011). Two Lochs Radio has no competitors as no other commercial radio stations are available in the area and this, Gray argues, is what convinced the RA to award a licence to a station that they otherwise would not have considered in a more densely populated area (see the case of Forest FM in Chapter 9).

Not surprisingly, there has been a far lower failure rate among the Highlands stations (not of the seven has failed) than across the for-profit stations in Scotland. The crucial factor in keeping 2LR viable has been the support of its 30 volunteers, the smallest number among stations in the area, as the only fixed cost of personnel is the part-time salary of Gray himself. In terms of outreach, the station reports a loyal following in its catchment area, plus regular listeners via the Internet from the Netherlands and Germany, where most of the tourists travelling to the area come from. The station does not have routine support for Gaelic programming, with most of the public funds of Scottish grant funding for media being used by the public broadcaster's television programming BBC ALBA. Despite expressing some disappointment in the fact that stations in the Highlands do not have access to even a tiny share of such funds, Gray stated that he did not actually regard BBC ALBA as a competitor, pointing to programmes of potential interest to its listeners, during 2LR's programming. In the past,

when most of the Gaelic programming was aired on television on BBC Two, 2LR avoided broadcasting programmes in Gaelic at the same time.

The case of 2LR, and its sister stations across the Scottish Highlands, is an example of how a commercial radio station can also be a truly community-based radio station when the ethos and the remit of the station is preserved during its operations. However, the exception to the rule that has characterised the development of commercial radio stations, outside this area of Britain, is mainly due to the absence of commercial competition and the availability of frequencies in areas not covered in depth, either by the BBC or for-profit commercial radio. It has showed how the ILR system had the potential to support community broadcasting, but has largely failed to do so when commercial imperatives became the first priority. However, these important developments in Scotland only ended up helping the commercial radio sector to stress its community credentials in an almost desperate attempt to argue that a separate sector for community radio was not needed. On the other hand, the CMA would have had no advantage whatsoever, in relating this example at a very crucial time in its lobbying efforts (2003/4).

While the 1990 Broadcasting Act did make way for the further commercialisation and loss of localness in commercial radio, with the exception of the Highlands case, it introduced what later turned out to be a tool to demonstrate further demand for community-based radio services in Britain, the Restricted Service Licences (RSLs).

#### 7.4 Restricted Service Licences

RSLs, which are a way to provide access to radio to a larger public as well as to very small communities, was defined by Stoller as ‘one of the most striking of all innovations by the Radio Authority (...) beyond question a form of community radio, and one unforeseen by either its early advocates or by the shapers of broadcasting policy (...) its effect was quietly revolutionary’ (2010: 313-4). Moreover, ‘it revived the notion that community might still thrive in the UK, and offer something different from the increasingly commercial nature of ILR’ (ibid., 313-4). Indeed, between 170 and 270 stations had been annually licensed in the first five years after 1991, bordering on 500 in 2005 and remaining at this level even after the introduction of the community radio

sector (Ofcom, 2008). Licensees included for-profit projects, the coverage of major events and festivals, as well as religious festivals like Christmas, Easter, Ramadan and Diwali.

A second category, the long-term RSLs (LRSLs), added later for broadcasting licences used by prisons, hospitals, universities and military bases, permitted the switch-off of induction loop systems and the use of short-range transmitters to irradiate these premises. In 2000, seven such licenses were released for the British Forces Broadcasting System (BFBS), with the one based in Folkestone – home to the British Brigade of Gurkhas – programming in Nepalese, and partly produced and presented by military personnel’s wives (Stoller, 2010: 316).

The only publication that is dedicated to RSLs was published in 2000 and authored by Janey Gordon, a former BBC producer who then moved to an academic career as a radio scholar and coordinator of University of Luton’s RSL project, Luton FM. Before the term ‘media literacy’ became a keyword later in that decade, Gordon remarked how RSLs had the merit of having encouraged access to the airwaves and helped hundreds of people to understand how media worked. Focusing their energy in the limited time they are allowed to broadcast, these projects do not have the problems connected with planning long-term strategies, although on average, they are relatively expensive to run when licence, transmission and rental costs are added up. Still, Gordon argues, as ‘traditional’ stations, an RSL station can help to construct a community, which engenders civic dignity; it can reflect less established groups – minorities, sub-cultural views and interests, and those without great purchasing power (2000: 16). The central part of the book evaluates what were labelled Millennium Stations, a group of 25 RSLs that were specifically aimed to broadcast at the turn of the millennium between December 1999 and January 2000.

The licensed applicants included groups focusing on training and education, those trying service for future ILR licences, churches and Christian groups, and multicultural stations. Two of these stations committed to operating according to AMARC and CMA guidelines, while others appealed to a community of place or interest. Apart from one, none of the stations was run for financial gain. The participants in station management and programming – often dissatisfied with the offer of mainstream broadcasters – aimed

to provide content unavailable in their areas. For smaller communities, it was also an opportunity to boost their self-esteem: 'I'd like the audience to get some self-esteem from the station. Buxton is always on the fringe of everything. It is not recognised and left out' (Prinz Holman, Manager, *The Edge*, quoted in Gordon, 2000: 30).

Gordon concludes by highlighting the successes, in terms of the satisfaction of managers, volunteers, listeners and the increase of content available in the area where RSLs operated. The evaluator of the Access Radio projects, Anthony Everitt, also remarked how community groups had energetically grasped this unexpected opportunity, providing a 'nursery slope' for those inexperienced in radio broadcasting, demonstrating the potential of radio for local communities and enabling the wider sector 'to develop its thinking and refine its policies' (2003a: 17).

It can be said that the RSL scheme, with relation to the community-based stations, was the immediate ancestor of today's community radio sector. As a letter retrieved from the CMA archives testifies, the organisation agreed that 'these have proved valuable in testing and proving the ideas for Community Radio services and demonstrating local support' (1999b). However, the temporary nature of such licences was seen as very unsatisfactory because the high licensing costs and the short period offered (a maximum of 28 days) were inadequate to build and to develop the long-term services they were aiming for; 'even for groups that have run regular RSLs for several years, there is simply no reasonable route for them to progress towards a licence for a full time Community Radio service' (ibid.).

The opening of the Radio Authority to long-term RSLs was restricted to stations with a very limited transmitting power (1-watt on AM, 5-milliwatt on FM), therefore mostly suitable for very small localities or student and hospital radio stations. Therefore, the CMA asked to allow greater transmitter power and licences, on a two-year experimental basis, and argued that 'an experimental licensing period would be more useful in advance of legislation, such that the nature of the legislation is informed by the results of the experiment' (ibid.).

As seen in Chapter 6, the CMA succeeded in inserting an experiment to inform the legislation. It is to the Access Radio pilot project that I will now turn my attention, to

discuss how the CMA further articulated its definition of community radio, ahead of the discussions for the Community Radio Order 2004.

### 7.5 Access Radio practice

While the previous chapter discussed the policy developments that led to the Access Radio pilot project, here the focus will be on the actual practice of the stations involved in the project, with the main references being the evaluation by Anthony Everitt (2003a) and a follow-up document published seven months later, in October (2003b).

In his evaluation, *New Voices*, Anthony Everitt outlined how the pilot project had met, and at times exceeded, its targets. The 15 participating stations had recruited over 3,000 volunteers and provided IT skills and training to more than 1,700 people and he had been struck by the enthusiasm and loyalty to the projects (2003a: 109). The stations demonstrated how they could become a training ground for future, full-time broadcasters (New Style Radio, Birmingham), provide accredited training and radio skills (ALL FM and Wythenshawe FM, Manchester; BCB, Bradford), cover local, political events in detail (Cross Rhythms, Stoke-on-Trent; and SoundRadio, London), deliver oral history projects (Forest of Dean Radio), and projects for local agencies and urban regeneration projects (ibid., 110-113). Access Radio stations gave airtime to a wide range of languages not broadcast by any other station in the UK, with a number of projects themselves including multilingual programmes, like SoundRadio and Resonance FM in London, BCB and ALL FM. Radio Faza in Nottingham promptly reacted to the arrival of asylum seekers by adding two new languages to its programming. As a result of the participation in these radio stations, a considerable number of volunteers also enhanced their verbal skills.

While the Access Radio pilot was in operation, Everitt did send letters to broadcasters operating in the same area as the pilot projects, to gather the views of the commercial radio sector. The relatively low level of response (25%, 14 of 56 stations) would suggest that Access Radio was, after all, not such an issue, despite the concerns voiced by the CRCA. Instead, of the few responses, some were supportive of the sector's complementary benefits (Fusion Radio Holdings and the Capital Radio Group) (ibid., 121). But where the larger and regional stations did not seem too concerned, the smaller

stations were worried about the potential impact on advertising and support from local public authorities. However, they were quite accommodating of another station with a different ethos broadcasting in the same area. As for the BBC, some stations enjoyed constructive relationships with the public broadcaster, which offered support, training and work experience possibilities to community radio volunteers. Where it was noted that the BBC was embarking, at the same time, on a number of community projects, it was also noted how the difference in editorial policies of the corporation were not going to produce genuinely community-based broadcasting; it was suggested that the BBC should find ways to structurally engage with the sector, given its limited outreach to communities that would be falling below BBC Local Radio's radar.

In terms of finances and sustainability, in some cases, the commitment to the cause took its toll. For example, the manager of Angel FM in Havant remortgaged his home to help raise more funds for the station; a large funding gap at Takeover Radio in Leicester was covered by its founders, with one of them leaving work to dedicate himself to the project, then withdrawing completely from it, to go back to full-time work to earn a living. While some stations ran on a voluntary staff basis or staff who were paid very little, a station like Radio Regen in Manchester – one of the richest projects with a variety of funding sources – peaked to employ up to 22 people, including part-timers; several stations depended heavily on public funding at the local, regional, national and European levels. Apart from grants, advertising was a relevant source of income for Desi Radio in Southall. Also, a very successful membership scheme at Cross Rhythms in Stoke-on-Trent helped to bring 620 'Friends' to produce £74,000 of income (*ibid.*, 119).

On the very crucial matter of future funding, Everitt suggested the constitution of a fund to support the employment of station managers at a level of £30,000 a year for three years. This sum would be matched by other funds, in order to support the core costs of the stations and help to establish a solid ground in their initial years of operation. The total amount to be made available for such purposes would have to be in the region of £6 million, estimating a range of 200 licensed stations. What Everitt expected, in case of a much smaller fund, deserves to be quoted at length:

Were the government to establish a much smaller fund – for the sake for argument, at a level of 2 million per annum – very much less could be achieved. A different, more modest approach would have to be adopted and building a financially sustainable Access Radio sector would be a slower, more arduous task. (ibid., 139-140)

The concluding chapter will elaborate on the prediction of Everitt, which would eventually prove to be true, with funding remaining a key issue in the sector for the year to come, also for the weak foundations laid by DCMS in setting the size of the Community Radio Fund to a meagre £500,000 per annum.

The follow-up to the first evaluation report, published in October 2003, in order to account for a full one year of broadcasting by the pilot stations, substantially confirmed the findings of the evaluator, although adding, among other things, that the most important developments had been ‘the growth of their community role and the rapid extension of the work of staff beyond the business of broadcasting to wider concerns for social and individual empowerment’ (2003b: 3), with a number of stations seeing themselves as ‘social enterprises’ and establishing strong links with local community organisations and local authorities. Indeed, as Coyer has argued in her doctoral dissertation, Everitt’s report – a comparative study of the US and UK community radio sector – was instrumental in swaying policy-makers and ‘in situating community radio in the context of social policy as well as media’ (2006: 154). A quote from the UK *Community Radio Toolkit*, a publication destined to give hands-on advice to current and would be practitioners, arguably illustrates this point:

We completely underestimated the need to resource and properly ‘do’ the community side of it. We didn’t set up a radio station, we set up a community centre. By that I mean the needs of the volunteers were nothing to do with radio. We had to go with volunteers to court to stop them being evicted. We had to advise them on the personal issues that were messing up their heads and making them unwelcome in the station. (Phil Korbel, quoted in Fogg et al., 2005: 16)

This account showed the potential for community radio to act as a community development organisation, rather than just another local, or very local, radio station. The extent to which this approach developed will be discussed more in detail in the next chapter, with the case study of Manchester's ALL FM.

Finally, Coyer's study of the three London stations that were part of the pilot project, namely Desi Radio, SoundRadio and Resonance FM, showed the capacity of community radio to adapt to local circumstances and address social and cultural needs otherwise unmet by other stations, as well as community radio's contribution to local identity: 'It is thus the value in self-representation for neighbourhoods and people with collective interests and/or tastes, especially in low-income and minority areas often portrayed in limited fashion, that lies at the heart of community radio' (Coyer, 2006: 196). But in an area as densely populated as London, the scarcity of spectrum that could accommodate ethnic groups was still a problem, and also a sign of unmet demands, following the introduction of Community Radio, as will be discussed in the next section.

### 7.6 Pirate broadcasting

In the final part of this chapter, it is important to include pirate broadcasting in the picture, as research commissioned by Ofcom suggests that listeners do value their contribution to local broadcasting, especially in areas where community, commercial and public local radio do not cater for the communicative needs of the communities residing in those areas. The advent of DAB or Internet radio, Ofcom sustains, is not likely to significantly change the dimensions of this phenomenon (2007a: 2).

In the UK, London has one of the major concentrations of pirate stations and the research focused on the London boroughs of Hackney, Haringey and Lambeth, where listening to illegal stations is reportedly higher than the London average. A number of former pirate broadcasters had decided in recent years to move into the legal boundaries of broadcasting and successfully applied for a licence in the 1990s. These include Kiss FM in London, FTP in Bristol, WNK Radio in Haringey and KFM in Stockport. As in the commercial radio sector, the Ofcom report does point out that

(...) only a few (such as Sunrise Radio in London) remain in the hands of the original owners, with most having become significantly more mainstream and broadly-targeted as a result of commercial pressure to achieve not only greater audience numbers, but in some cases, to deliver particular types of audiences sought-after by advertisers. These target audiences may sometimes have been different to those which the original stations had initially set out to serve. (ibid., 4)

Elsewhere, during a conference co-organised by the author of this thesis, London-based activist Donald McTernan had remarked how some of the original members of these pirate stations had actually gone back to their way of doing radio:

I live in South East London: I don't see any change. I worked for a group of pirate DJs, I was a pirate DJ in fact. We campaigned and eventually after 8 years of campaigning we got a licence. The licence now is in the hands of the fourth generation of a commercial company. The DJs that were part of the original group are back as pirates. These guys were 20 and 18 and 25, they're now in their 40s. They're still doing pirate radio and the reason they're doing pirate radio is because there is no other option for them in their communities. (in Lewis and Scifo, 2007: 28)

The Ofcom research shows how illegal stations scored higher than other stations in the area, for providing information about local club nights and events, for being for the 'people of my community' and being 'local to my area' (Ofcom, 2007b: 10). The community element in everyday life was also remarked, as listeners stated that it helped them to 'feel part of a community and informs me about relevant community news and events' (ibid., 12) and helped them to satisfy 'everyday needs and interests [that] are passed over by mainstream media' (ibid., 13). Moreover, the research identifies a listener group that is described as 'Community Connected Audiences', bonded by strong cultural heritage that made this group appreciative of the community radio type of service, because of the cultural relevance of the stations and the local character and ethnic flavour of the news, information, and debate. Heavy listeners of these stations did indeed refer to them as 'Community Radio', and were likely to be over 35 years old,

from minority ethnic backgrounds, with kids, and read local/community press, e.g. *The Jamaican Gleaner* and *The South London Press*.

A panel of ‘expert interviewees’ also underlined how ‘illegal radio performed a community function which licensed stations could not, or would not, address’ (ibid., 22), how it was the first stop for community-oriented radio enthusiasts – a platform for educating youth against crime. They offered enthusiasts an ‘ethical’ and value-driven alternative to licensed radio, an alternative to the ‘red tape’ of acquiring a licence and the sole route into broadcast radio for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (ibid., 22). Pirate stations also performed vital social functions, such as passing information and appeals from the police to areas of the community inaccessible or hostile to mainstream sources; they served a local need, which commercial broadcasting, by its very nature, was unable to fulfil and (ibid., 22).

While the research offers interesting insight into the sector, even if from the perspective of the media regulator, it is unfortunate that the main comparison among radio stations is done as pirate radio vs. commercial and public radio, and very little is actually discussed in comparison to licensed Community Radio, apart from the technical aspect, i.e. that they might be the worst affected by pirate stations’ interferences because of their low transmitter power, when compared to larger stations. With respect to the possibilities of community radio filling the gap in the communicative spaces for communities living in densely populated areas as London, McTernan, a long-term resident of South London and arguably a representative of the frustration of those who are not served by licensed community radio in the city, states,

I find it difficult to understand why we are in exactly the same position we were twenty or thirty years ago. We’ve got 147 stations but we still haven’t got one in south London that is representative of the different communities in south London. (in Lewis and Scifo, 2007: 2)

## 7.7 Conclusions

The chapter has shown how in the years after 1997, the emphasis, of New Labour's thinking, on 'community', influenced much of the discourse of both the BBC and the commercial sector. In its policy documents, the public broadcaster, strong in its public service ethos, stressed the credentials of BBC Local Radio, particularly in the period leading to Charter renewal discussions, highlighting projects such as *Voices* and a number of initiatives aimed to involve local communities in the production of content, albeit supervised by BBC producers.

On the other hand, commercial radio stations, becoming more and more networked, merged into larger groups in order to make the business more profitable, drastically reduced their local input and much of their *independent* credentials, resulting in a decrease of the diversity of content proposal in both news and music programming. A number of ethnic minority broadcasters, while starting with the intentions to cater to underserved communities, have increasingly adopted more mainstream formats in order to be sustainable and/or profitable. Where commercial radio regulation proved to be unfit for community radio operations in the long-term, the notable exception of a group of community-owned commercial radio stations in the Highlands showed that, under specific circumstances, community radio *was* possible under such a licensing scheme. These circumstances required the absence of any commercial competition, and therefore of a 'market' for such licences, so as to allow stations like Two Lochs Radio to flourish. For most areas in the UK, such conditions were not possible and this chapter has shown that, in such cases, community radio experiences could develop only in the context of the RSL regime.

By the end of the 1990s, community radio groups had been using this option in their hundreds, making this, effectively, the immediate ancestor of Community Radio and prompting the CMA to lobby the Radio Authority for separate, long-term, experimental licensing for such stations. Eventually, once the New Labour Government gave its approval to a Radio Authority that was increasingly sympathetic to the introduction of a new sector, the CMA succeeded in having an Access Radio pilot in advance of legislation, and to show the potential of the sector to justify separate legislation for Community Radio.

However, in densely populated areas such as London, where spectrum is scarce and licensing does not allow sufficient space for a larger number of stations, several pirate radio stations that cater for minority communities are recognised by their listeners to be the only true community radio service in the area. These show that, even with hundreds of new stations now broadcasting throughout the UK, in urban areas, unmet demands will be still there for the foreseeable future.

Over the next three chapters, a sample of three very different community radio stations, visited between September 2006 and March 2007 – although by no means representative of an overall trend across the sector – will help to shed some light on contemporary practices of Community Radio. These chapters aim to present three models that are focused on regeneration, training and multicultural broadcasting in an urban area (ALL FM, Manchester); civic pride in a relatively affluent and predominantly White, small British town (Forest FM, Verwood); and, finally, on how an example of student radio is dealing with its transition to a Community Radio model aiming to target the wider community in the city (CSR FM, Canterbury).

## CHAPTER 8

### ALL FM

#### 8.1 Introduction

The first case study that will be analysed in this section, ALL FM presents a significant distinction from the other two, which will be discussed further in the following two chapters. Because of its birth under the umbrella organisation Radio Regen (RR), which had been influential in shaping the debate on Community Radio legislation, and ALL FM's participation in the Access Radio Pilot Project, ALL FM has a more consistent body of grey literature, part of which is not as yet discussed anywhere else in academic literature. This grey literature will be discussed before I present the analyses of my research findings in the second half of the chapter.

The fieldwork at ALL FM was carried out between 24 September and 1 October 2006 and consisted of interviewing paid and unpaid members of staff, presenters, and trainers at the station, as well as the Director of RR, Phil Korbel. I was granted access to the station on every day during this week and was able to observe the station at work, and interviewing all the staff on location.

Earlier in this thesis, social policies addressing the regeneration of areas that suffered from de-industrialisation and from years of under-investment have been explored. An analysis of New Labour's approach to such matters shows how, among other things, Community Radio has been seen by some of its representatives – most notably by RR itself – as a tool that could successfully enhance social and cultural regeneration in local communities, contribute to reaching local, regional and national governments' objectives and thus complement the work of other voluntary organisations and local authorities. This chapter will discuss what could be defined as the example *par excellence* of such an approach to Community Radio, its potential, its results and its challenges. To give a clearer picture of where ALL FM operates, the social, cultural and media contexts of the city of Manchester will be the point of departure of this chapter,

as its story, its radio scene and local political circumstances critically shape an understanding of the larger ecology of the place where the station is located.

## 8.2 Manchester

Manchester has ‘city’ status and is located at the centre of the third largest conurbation in the United Kingdom, the Metropolitan Borough of Greater Manchester, which, according to the last 2001 Census, had a total population of almost 2.5 million. The City of Manchester, where Levenshulme – home of ALL FM – is located, is the most populous one, with 392,000 inhabitants, of which 81% are White British and 19% are from other ethnic backgrounds (Manchester City Council, 2001). A major industrial and economic centre until the 1960s, it suffered a consistent reduction of its heavy industry, under the Conservative Governments led by Margaret Thatcher after 1979, resulting in massive losses of employment in the manufacturing sector. Regeneration projects began in the late 1980s through the creation, in 1987, of a development corporation by the government, ‘set up for the express purpose of circumventing “bureaucratic” local authorities and giving ownership of the challenge of regeneration to ‘the market’ to regenerate the downtown and Trafford areas of Greater Manchester’ (Taylor, Evans and Fraser, 1996: 300-1).

In the mid-1990s, Manchester reaffirmed its important position in the fields of arts, popular culture, music and more generally, the creative industries. However, at the start of the millennium, the City of Manchester was still suffering from high levels of deprivation as outlined by the ‘State of the City Report’:

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 (IMD) ranked the Council area as the third most deprived in England. Part of the city was rated the second most deprived area in England and more than half of the city’s areas were in the most deprived 10% in the country. Deprivation is widespread across the city, but the most deprived areas were in north and east Manchester, the inner city south of the city centre and in parts of Wythenshawe. (Manchester Partnership and Manchester City Council, 2007: 33)

As New Labour social policy majored on regeneration, the city has been a focus of social and cultural funding, as well as infrastructural funding for projects funded from national, regional (North West of England) and local agencies. As will be seen later in this chapter, a leading player in the British community radio scene would become the Manchester-based ‘community, media and urban regeneration’ charity Radio Regen, home to two of the ‘Access Radio’ pilot stations, ALL FM and Wythenshawe FM, organiser of key national events like the Community FM<sup>47</sup> conferences and author of the UK-wide “Community Radio Toolkit”, in both hard copy (Fogg et al., 2005) and its electronic version.<sup>48</sup> This is the key case study in this thesis that illustrates the relationship between New Labour policies and the British model of Community Radio, so connected with social policy discourse of the time. It analyses the development of ALL FM *under* and *out of* Radio Regen.

### 8.3 The local radio landscape

Interest in local radio in Manchester, in the form of the concept developed by Frank Gillard (explored in Chapter 3), was already evident in the request of the Manchester City Council to run a local station in May 1965, a proposal that had obtained the support of the then Postmaster General, Tony Benn (Linfoot, 2011: 127). However, such a request left Gillard concerned about the risks of political influence and eventual propaganda (Stevenson, 1965, in Linfoot, 2011: 126). This proposal was rejected on 1 July 1966, as ‘it was up to Parliament to decide the principles of local radio first’ (*The Guardian*, 1966, in *ibid.*, 132). Contacts with the Council were kept open as it was a potential option for the possible funding of a local BBC station. However, a swing of the local council from Labour to Conservative in May 1967 put such an operation at risk (*ibid.*, 145). Eventually, BBC Radio Manchester made its way through and started broadcasting on 10 September 1970 (*ibid.*, 323).

Arguably, either to sound more ‘local’ for a number of its residents or in view of future plans to license more local and community radio stations (which were discussed at the time at the national level), in 1983-1984, the station participated in an experiment in

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<sup>47</sup> See <http://www.communityfm.net/communityfm/>

<sup>48</sup> See <http://www.communityradiotoolkit.net/>

‘Neighbourhood Radio’.<sup>49</sup> In 1983 and 1984, BBC Radio Manchester broadcasted on AM part-time opt-outs to the main service, from a range of locations: BBC Radio Bury in late 1983/early 1984; BBC Radio Oldham and BBC Radio Rochdale for eight weeks from 14 May 1984; BBC Radio Trafford, from a mobile studio in a school playground,<sup>50</sup> and BBC Radio Wigan, in summer 1984. A few years later, though, a five-year plan announced in October 1987 included a number of cost-cutting measures for all BBC local radio stations, with Manchester, London and Birmingham ‘put on a three-year notice to show “evidence of increased and sustained demand for their services”’ (BBC, 1988, in Lewis and Booth, 1989: 195). Radio Manchester became Greater Manchester (GMR) in 1988, adopted an all-talk model for a brief time in the 1990s (renamed GMR Talk) and was re-launched with its original name and a new schedule, on 3 April 2006 (BBC Radio Manchester, 2006a).

On the profile published on its website the station pointed out its continuities and its changes:

The station also developed a number of community programmes for Manchester’s ethnic and cultural minorities. This commitment continues today with *Citizen Manchester* each weeknight at 18:30. (...) Although acquiring a deserved reputation for news and sport, by 2006, the station was ready for a more contemporary sound. In doing so, it went back to its roots and became BBC Radio Manchester once again (...) (ibid.)<sup>51</sup>

The ‘community programmes’ *for* ethnic and cultural minorities, like *Citizen Manchester*, were targeted at the Irish (Monday), Chinese (Tuesday), LGBT (Wednesday) and Jewish (Thursday).<sup>52</sup> The section ‘Communities’ on the website

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<sup>49</sup> As cited in Chapter 3, Langham reported a ‘Radio Manchester Experiment in Neighbourhood Radio’, January 1985 (ref: SP/85/9), in 1986: 73.

<sup>50</sup> This station was praised by Baroness Walmsley in the House of Lords Committee on the Communications Bill, during its second reading on 25 March 2003, noting ‘the warm response of the local people and their appreciation that their local radio station had made the effort to come to them’ (House of Lords, 2003). This happened in the context of the discussion on community radio and she remarked the need for such a station and the limits of the BBC’s ‘short experiment’. Her late husband, Christopher Walmsley, had managed this project for the BBC.

<sup>51</sup> Accessed on 22 August 2006.

<sup>52</sup> This format ran from March to October 2006 and was contracted to the independent production company ‘Made in Manchester’ to celebrate ‘the rich diversity of the various communities that make up

mirrored the programme as it broadcast for the Chinese (*Chinatown*) and the LGBT (*The Village*), plus *Masti* for the Asian Community and a section on *The Black History Month*, but did not offer space for the Irish and Jewish programmes. Other programmes targeting ethnic communities included Saturday's *Eastern Horizons* 'news and conversation in Cantonese and Mandarin' (18:00-20:00), *The People* 'BBC Radio Manchester's black show' (20:00-22:00),<sup>53</sup> and Sunday's programme at 20:00-22:00, hosted by Talat Farooq-Awan, targeted the new Asian generation.

The rest of the schedule<sup>54</sup> included 'generalist' and drive-time shows in the daytime, during weekdays, and substantial space was given to sports programmes (Manchester is home to two major football teams and global brands, Manchester United and Manchester City) between 19:00 and 22:00 on weekdays, 13:00 to 19:00 on Saturdays, and 14:30 to 18:00 on Sundays. The famous Manchester nightlife scene got its stream of programmes through the week, between 22:00 and 1:00. Other programmes complementing the schedule included retail therapy, week's news reviews programmes on Saturday morning and a local version of *Desert Island Discs* (*Simister Island Discs*) at 19:00-20:00. Space was also given to faith (6:00-9:00) and hits from the 1960s to 1990s (12:00-14:30) on Sunday mornings.

Finally, the local 'Where I live' pages included sections on the local versions of projects such as *VideoNation*, *RaW* (on learning and developing reading and writing skills, where the audience could interact with the station), as well as a space for Community Service Volunteers (CSV) interaction features, which aimed 'to tell Greater Manchester about issues affecting the local community and how to get involved', broadcast very on weekday at 6:20, 9:20, 11:20, 13:20, 15:20, 17:20 (BBC Radio Manchester, 2006b). *CSV Interaction*, part of a wider partnership at the national level that has lasted for over three decades,<sup>55</sup> offers a space that aims to inform listeners about initiatives in the area: 'We've helped recruit volunteers for the National Trust at Dunham Massey, given scores of Interaction listeners more information on battling migraine and attracted volunteers for a study into vitamin D' (BBC Radio Manchester, 2006b). However, BBC

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Manchester'. See <http://www.madeinmanchester.tv/2008/05/03/citizen-manchester-bbc-radio-manchester/> [accessed 8 November 2008]

<sup>53</sup> These two programmes were broadcast on FM only, with music shows broadcast on DAB instead.

<sup>54</sup> For all references to the schedule in this and the following page see:

<http://radiotoday.co.uk/2006/03/bbc-radio-manchester-schedule/> [accessed 23 August 2006]

<sup>55</sup> See Booth, 1980, for a detailed account of the period until 1980.

Radio Manchester's 'one-stop shop for the latest information on projects and events in your local community', although important in providing further space for events and projects in Greater Manchester, is done by a professional broadcaster, a staff-member of the BBC, Linda Kaye. It had itself little actual 'interaction' with listeners, serving rather as a tool to convey further public information from voluntary and community organisations to the general public.

What emerges from its statements and its public image is that the local station was undergoing a major change and it was not yet clear what its main purpose was; this was in the context of an ongoing series of changes that the station had undergone, especially over the previous decades. It tries to highlight its community credentials but outsources the production of a specific programme, with the rather unappealing name of *Citizen Manchester*; further, its online representation of its broadcast schedule is inconsistent. Its attempt to simultaneously be a bit of everything highlights the ongoing tensions in the funding, outreach and purpose of BBC local *public service* radio, which has been discussed in previous chapters, and in this case, the challenges of operating in a large and diverse metropolitan area like Manchester.

As for commercial radio, the local ILR, Piccadilly Radio, started broadcasts on AM and FM on 2 April 1974, with the station 'combining a disciplined approach to popular music programming with a strong range of the speech features which were the hallmark of an ambitious ILR service' (Stoller, 2010a: 60). The station eventually split its service in two in 1988, with the AM station renamed Piccadilly Gold and the FM station Key103, as a consequence of the 1987 Green Paper (Home Office, 1987) and in a move aimed to increase new audiences and move away from the Top40 music programming of the AM station (Stoller, 2010a: 170).

The increased number of local analogue licences awarded during the Radio Authority period led to a substantial increase of commercial stations licensed in Manchester. At the time of my visit, the stations broadcasting to the wider metropolitan area of Greater Manchester included, Century 105.4, Galaxy 102, Piccadilly Gold, Key 103, Smooth FM, The Revolution 96.2, XFM Manchester, and Asian Sound Radio. The table in Appendix 1 outlines the ownership, character of service and type of analogue

transmission of each station.<sup>56</sup> GCap Media featured three stations, Emap two, one station each was owned by major media groups such as Chrysalis and GMG, one by a local media company and one still independently owned by a purpose-made company, the only one addressing a specific ethnic community (Asians). The output of the stations is quite wide-ranging, from talk and intensive news coverage for adults of Century, to the entirely locally originated and non-networked speech content of Oldham's The Revolution, a station reaching most of the East Greater Manchester area. Revolution shares an adult contemporary rock proposal with the AM station Piccadilly Gold, which targets an older age group that also enjoys quality easy listening. Alternative rock music-led programming is then the focus of XFM, challenging mainstream pop, which shares the target of a younger part of the population with Galaxy 102, a station providing rhythmic music with a light touch of information and entertainment. Soft pop, local information, attention to an adult public and the privilege of being the first one in the city, are the features of the AM station Piccadilly Gold, which shares a focus on mainstream chart music and information, with the sister station on FM, Key 103, the latter aiming to additionally target a younger age group (15-44). A different animal from its predecessor Jazz FM, is Smooth FM, which has adjusted its target to 'easy listening influenced by jazz and soul', an attention to lifestyle and the only station to target an audience of over-50s. Finally, with a wide regional reach across East Lancashire, Asian Sound Radio (ASR) provides a diet of music and information to a generalist Asian audience in the region. ASR is the only one with a specific ethnic focus and has the remit to broadcast at least a third of its output in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi. This includes hourly peak-time news in English with Urdu/Hindi elements, and 'at least two other bulletins should be in Urdu/Hindi with elements of English' (Ofcom, 2006e). Moreover, the Bengali and Gujarati speaking communities also have their own news magazine programmes. The music proposal also reflects popular genres in these ethnic communities, including 'a mix of film music, mixed *geets* and *ghazals*, folk, Asian oldies and Asian pop, *bhangra* and *qawalis* (ibid.).

Overall, then, where the music proposals offer a wider range of choices, including alternative rock, the ethnic diversity of the city is not reflected in the mainstream radio sector, apart from some content on BBC Manchester and a station specifically targeting

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<sup>56</sup> The sources of stations' descriptions are listed in Appendix 1.

the South Asian communities. Age groups, especially audiences over 54 (excluding those targeted by Smooth), are not specifically targeted either, and this is also the case for BBC's Manchester station proposal, arguably leaving them with more adult choices on BBC national networks. A problem similar to the capital city London, is also the degree of 'localness' of stations in such metropolitan areas, given the very diverse composition, issues and social and cultural characteristics of residents in the inner boroughs of the city. Such issues were discussed in the context of Chapter 2 when discussing identity and localism and are surely important, especially when the destiny and strategies of these stations – in the case of large media groups – are decided in Central London or White City rather than locally.

A frequently debated issue in local radio has been how 'local' a station should be, especially in the context of larger metropolitan areas. Historically, community radio activists had been advocating that media should be closer to their own specific issues and provide a service for areas and groups that have been underserved by mainstream media. Over the next pages, by discussing the development of Radio Regen and the case study ALL FM, I shall draw first on grey literature, in the form of Regen's own communication materials, then on my own fieldwork, to briefly assess how the introduction of Community Radio affected the local radio landscape, and reveal some of its organisational dynamics. As a case study that aligns with priority social policy objectives of national, regional and local governments and agencies, this will also help to unveil the relationship between the sector and New Labour's approach to regeneration, and the role of radio within this context.

#### 8.4 Radio for regeneration

It is a strong personal conviction that the scarce resource of frequencies should only be put at the disposal of the most disadvantaged communities. It would also be disastrous if single-interest communities got stations at the expense of the broader community. We should go for umbrella stations that incorporate old people, young people, ethnic communities, different religions and every sort of music. As there are not enough wavelengths to go round, you have to look at broad-based partnerships that represent a large

swathe of the community because there will most likely only be one station per area. (Phil Korbel, Director, Radio Regen, in Radio Regen, 2004: 5)

The quote above was taken from *Five Years of Community Radio in Manchester*, a publication distributed at the first Community FM conference, held in Manchester in February 2004. In this booklet, Phil Korbel, Director of the Manchester-based charity Radio Regen and also one of the leading figures of the British community media sector, outlined his view on how Community Radio should be shaped and what its main function should be, although he acknowledged that ultimately, ‘Not all the other pilots share Radio Regen’s view of community radio as a regeneration tool’ (2004a: 5). Given the difficulty for the most marginalised group in society to access the airwaves, and the scarcity of available frequencies particularly in large urban areas such as London, Birmingham and Manchester itself, he suggests that groups should do their best to apply for a station based on the geographical area that they share, rather than privileging the ethnic group to which they belong. Further, he believes that the geographical area for Community Radio licensing should be chosen on the basis of a social disadvantage, for example poverty, but not ethnicity or culture. In other words, as British sociologist Hewson has commented, Radio Regen supported the argument that ‘legislation must recognise asymmetries around media access, and accordingly work with a priority scale, beginning with the need to engage the most disadvantaged’ (2006: 15).

Radio Regen works in neighbourhoods that have had large parts of their social fabric ripped out. The decline of the mass workplace, of places of worship, and of extended families (...) has deprived people of places to chat. (Radio Regen, 2004: 2)

The initial idea about founding an organisation offering radio training to the unemployed emerged in 1998 and its founders, Phil Korbel and Cathy Brooks, were at the time working in Manchester, for their own independent production company, Peterloo Productions. Korbel had been working as a radio producer for BBC Radio 4 since 1985 and among other things had been, and still is, a social activist and environmental campaigner. Brooks was a former Manchester City Council project manager. They were aiming to use their professional skills for a social aim and when

Manchester City Council told them that they should try putting radio to work in Manchester's 'regeneration' areas, they knocked on an open door.

The next step was to raise the funds necessary for such an operation and so they applied, with success, to the European Social Fund and registered Radio Regen as a non-profit organisation in April 1999, then partnering with the Manchester College of Arts and Technology (MANCAT) for the delivery of the courses. Following this, further funding was also obtained from the Learning & Skills Council (LSC), the Community Fund, the North West Development Agency (NWDA), the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), and other foundations and trusts (Hewson, 2006: 18; for a detailed list, also see Radio Regen, 2004: 2).

A story in the *Manchester Evening News* and an endorsement by actress Clare McGlinn of *The Cops* and *Coronation Street*, helped to ensure no shortage of applicants for the first year-long BTEC radio training course. Korbel recalls that where, in the first instance, 'the concept had been purely about boosting self-esteem and employment opportunities' (ibid., 4), RR envisaged that those skills used by the people coming from disadvantaged communities also had the potential to help regenerate communities, as well as helping individuals within them. RR then emerged from the idea of professional radio producers, one of them with a BBC background, a suggestion from the City Council and – it could be argued – also succeeded because of an approach to Community Radio as a regeneration tool, which resonated very well with social and cultural policy objectives of the time. The name of the project itself and the language used in a presentation of the project are also telling:

The Radio Regen team believes that community radio delivers skills, builds community spirit and connects communities to the agencies tasked to serve them in a way that no other tool can. (ibid., 34)

Radio Regen's two access projects WFM and ALL FM have proven to be economical and winning ways to communicate directly with hard-to-reach communities. Regeneration, health and arts agencies, as well as schools, colleges, housing providers and the police have all been involved with these

community radio pilots and are enthusiastic about their experiences. (ibid., 21)

Such an approach was praised by the Leader of the Manchester City Council, Richard Leese, who stated that ‘community is at the heart of all our regeneration work and community radio has made a strong positive contribution towards this by providing skills and confidence which can help them out of unemployment’ (ibid., 3). Not surprisingly then, the list of funders included the ‘European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, the Single Regeneration Budget, the (arts) Lottery, the Further Education Funding Council, New Deal for Communities, North West Arts Board and assorted trust funds including the Lloyds TSB Foundation’ (Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, 2001c). As Korbel states in a section of the publication dedicated to funding Community Radio: ‘Funding will come to you more easily if you are in an area of disadvantage and can make a strong case about how your station combats it. Talk to your local council, who have a brief to tackle disadvantage’ (ibid., 27).

It was natural then, given the favourable framework, to consider the broadcast of temporary stations on FM, with the more suitable option available then being the application for a Restricted Service Licence (RSL). In 1999-2000, Radio Regen ran two month-long city centre music stations, City Centre Life FM and Radiosonic. Daytime shows were fronted by experienced broadcasters ‘to keep the quality up’, and the trainees were mainly engaged in the production process, appearing in the shows in supporting roles. These experiences were followed by a series of three-day community broadcasts from libraries, community centres and social clubs in Manchester's less prosperous areas, namely Radio Moston, Radio Openshaw, Wythenshawe FM (WFM) and Radio Longsight, the ‘seed’ for ALL FM (ibid., 5).

The results of such experiences indeed resonated well with local councils and MPs, given that Radio Regen was cited several times as an example of best practice in a debate in the House of Commons, causing Labour’s Tony Lloyd<sup>57</sup> to say: ‘Community radio will give us something, the like of which we have not had in recent times. It will

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<sup>57</sup> Anthony Joseph ‘Tony’ Lloyd, Labour MP for Central Manchester since the 1997 General Election.

be part of the social cement that will rebind our society' (House of Commons, 2001).<sup>58</sup> Prior to that, Radio Regen had submitted a memorandum to the Select Committee on Culture Media and Sport (2001c) as well as being examined as a witness (2001a, 2001b), alongside three executive members of the CMA. It seems clear that RR also wanted to make sure that their take on shaping Community Radio in Britain would be given consideration as it represented views that were not all necessarily reflected in a national umbrella organisation like the CMA.

[Question 297, from Committee member Ronnie Fearn, MP, Libdem, Southport] (...) should priority be given to deprived areas or should it indeed be throughout the whole country as the Community Media Association would say?

*(Mr Korbel)* I think in an ideal world access and creation of a nationwide sector would be fantastic, there is no reason against it, but if there are scarce resources (I am really talking about money there) we should be looking at priority for neighbourhood renewal where there is most need, where a community does not have the wherewithal or the self-esteem to give itself a voice. It is a view of Radio Regen not of the Community Media Association, but it is from need. It is as simple as that. We have seen it work. The amount of people that have moved on even with the temporary licences we have achieved thus far can be multiplied hugely through full-time licences. (Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, 2001a)

Indeed, at the national level, the use of radio for regeneration was one of the elements in a wider range of contexts that embraced other forms of community media such as television and internet-based projects. The CMA had a 'convergent' approach within the framework of the forthcoming Communications Act to the role of community media in the information society and as a tool to exercise the right to communicate (for a detailed outline, see the CMA memorandum in Select Committee on Culture Media and Sport, 2001d).

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<sup>58</sup> Regen was also praised by Baroness Walmsley (see House of Lords, 2003).

In the memorandum, RR described itself as a unique community development charity, working ‘in the UK’s most deprived wards according to the Index of Social Deprivation [Benchill and Longsight, 2000 and 1999 respectively], in partnership with the relevant SRB agencies’ and stating that the ‘results of the projects make a very strong case for community radio in the context of neighbourhood renewal’ (Select Committee on Culture Media and Sport, 2001c). Its core activity was described as involving three stages – ‘training, broadcast and creating a sustainable media production resource for the community. The latter phase ensures a legacy for our work in the target areas’ (ibid.) The training included a BTEC National Diploma in Media Production (Audio and Community Involvement) for people recruited from the disadvantaged areas of Greater Manchester, and RR remarked that such courses had increased the employability of its trainees through its mix of teamwork, creative, communication and IT skills, therefore providing a ‘nursery’ for broadcast media.

The RSL projects, RR claimed, also helped to boost local self-esteem in areas that had been traditionally portrayed negatively in the media and helped local residents to learn that ‘there was a lot of positive activity in their neighbourhood’ (ibid.). Moreover, the fact that it was locally produced helped local regeneration agencies to communicate with an ‘appropriate’ language with residents, instead of relying on ‘badly-distributed print media’ (ibid.).

The memorandum also noted the fit of Community Radio as a tool for regeneration with cross-departmental governmental policies at the time:

[Community radio] addresses law and order by providing meaningful diversionary activity for disaffected young people and publicising Local Area Partnerships. By training and job creation, community radio contributes to education, employment and trade. By promoting community involvement, the sector addresses many of the themes raised by Gordon Brown in his recent initiatives on volunteering. These cross-sectoral benefits tally well with the approach suggested in the Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. (...) We also believe that the resources available for the development of community radio should be concentrated where they are needed most – in the field of neighbourhood renewal. (ibid.)

What can be seen here is how RR articulates its take on Community Radio, by making its case to lawmakers that this tool would be effective in achieving priority social policy objectives of the government. It is also subtly suggesting that more than any other tool, *radio* would be most effective to achieve such aims and, jointly with the CMA, it makes the case for full-time licensed stations to have such outputs ongoing all the time, rather than limited to occasional broadcast.

### *Community FM*

Before moving to discuss the early years and the outcome of the fieldwork at ALL FM, it is important to also briefly discuss the role that Radio Regen had in framing the discussions on the development of Community Radio policy with key events that were held in Manchester between 2004 and 2007: the Community FM conferences.

The first of such events was held on 13 and 14 February 2004. As the pilot project had been evaluated successfully at this time, the aim of the conference was twofold: ‘providing those who would like to apply for a licence with a ‘Toolkit’ on how to go about it’ and to connect them with ‘Representatives from groups and agencies across the board: housing, arts, regeneration, police, health, colleges or schools. All those who have a responsibility for providing mainstream services to the community’.<sup>59</sup> The conference was an occasion to showcase the best practice of RR’s ALL FM and WFM to a wider public of UK practitioners and agencies, and ‘a chance to hear about the very real impact made by one of the major initiatives to harness the power of *community radio*’.<sup>60</sup> Speakers included the evaluator of the Access Radio project, Anthony Everitt; the Community Radio Manager at Ofcom, Soo Williams, outlining Ofcom’s approach to the steps that might be following (the Community Radio Order had not yet been approved yet); and Ivan Lewis, MP, Minister for Lifelong Learning, who explored ‘the

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<sup>59</sup> *Community FM conference*: available from <http://www.communityfm.net/> [accessed 26 December 2003]. The date of this access and following ones, is marked as prior to the start of this research project because it refers to the time I accessed these pages and saved them in archives for future reference.

<sup>60</sup> *Community FM programme*, available from: <http://www.communityfm.net/programme.asp> [accessed 4 June 2004]

role of lifelong learning in regeneration, the place for “learning communities” in that process and how community radio can step up to that challenge’.<sup>61</sup>

The event had a national relevance, given the geographical distribution of the attendance, as can be seen in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: Community FM delegates map. Source: Korbel, 2004b: 7

What the geographical distribution shows is a widespread demand for such an event, at least in England, and the need for the sector to come together to discuss the ongoing developments and make the case in front of policymakers and regulators. By now,

<sup>61</sup> *Community FM follow up*, available from <http://www.communityfm.net/default.asp> [accessed 4 June 2004]

Radio Regen had developed from an organisation with three staff members in 1999 to 22 staff, 150 volunteers and more than 30 trainees in 2004.

The first gathering of new licence holders, Community FM 2005, was announced as an event that would see ‘the first 150 pioneers coming together to share their experiences, in Manchester, the UK’s creative hub and home of Community Radio’.<sup>62</sup> It was again time for Regen’s stations ALL FM and WFM to advise beginners, licence seekers and licence holders, with useful tips learned from their experiences in areas like volunteer management, funding, technical aspects, programming, rules and community outreach.<sup>63</sup> A whole stream of workshops was led by Community Radio Partners, agencies that had been involved in work with RR, and aimed at ‘officers of groups that work or intend to work with community radio stations’, where those agencies would ‘outline the nature of the work they do with community radio, what benefits it brings to them and what opportunities might be available for other practitioners in that field’ (ibid.). These workshops were led by agencies like the Willow Park Housing Trust Wythenshawe, the Manchester Crime & Disorder Partnership, the Wythenshawe Regeneration Team, the Arts & Regeneration Office Manchester Inner South, the Manchester City Council Social Care Team, and the Manchester City Council’s Local Strategic Partnership Community Engagement Team. The representative of the latter, Patrick Hanfling, championed the use of Community Radio and urged: ‘Agencies and service providers need to learn that community radio is out there, and they need some kind of realisation of what it can be’ (in Fogg, 2005).

This was also the occasion to launch the *Community Radio Toolkit*, a guide that the DCMS had commissioned, to advise practitioners on setting up and running full-time community radio stations, and help the sector ‘to thrive by growing and learning together’.<sup>64</sup> The publication was authored by RR’s co-founders Phil Korbel and Cathy Brooks, together with Regen’s associate Ally Fogg. Building on its continuing success, RR stated that, over the years they had

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<sup>62</sup> *Community FM 2005 Conference*, available from <http://www.communityfm.net/2005.htm> [Accessed 10 February 2006]

<sup>63</sup> *Community FM Workshops*, available from <http://www.communityfm.net/workshops.htm> [Accessed 10 February 2006]

<sup>64</sup> *Community Radio Toolkit* (2005), the section ‘About us’, available from <http://www.communityradiotoolkit.net/contact.html> [Accessed 9 January 2007]

(...) gained a wealth of ‘shop-floor’ knowledge, on setting up and running stations, on community development and volunteer support. We’ve worked with a wide range of agencies – local authorities, health, housing, police and education – and through our involvement in shaping the sector can add a strategic overview to the hands-on experience. (ibid.)

What this tells us about the emerging Community Radio model is the role of RR in shaping the framework for the wider discussion and showing its own approach to Community Radio in the context of regeneration. While examples of other stations are cited throughout the publication, it is RR’s approach that is championed and brought forward as a successful example to do Community Radio at that time. The next step, then, was to plan a national centre for community radio development, which would offer distance learning and professional development training. This was a bold and ambitious move for RR, in continuing to *shape the sector*.

The conference itself, mirroring the previous event, saw the presence of over 100 community radio practitioners from all over the UK, representatives of local, regional and national agencies, local MPs, including the Minister for Creative Industries, James Purnell. As the reporter for the Community FM site, Ally Fogg, stated:

Community radio is made possible by the politicians who provide the legislative framework and government support; by the regulators Ofcom who put that legislation into practice; and of course the community radio activists, enthusiasts and professionals who actually make it happen. All three prongs of the trident were represented at Urbis. (Fogg, 2005)

This, then, seemed a far cry from the difficult old days, with a collaborative and friendly tone from the sector towards the political and the regulatory stakeholders, who had by now delivered and put in practice community radio policy. Indeed, Purnell stated on that occasion,

I don’t think it’s a great secret that when community radio was first being talked about by government, there were those who were sceptical (...)

Community radio has confounded those sceptics who said it would never work. It's already working. (ibid.)

At a higher level, Ofcom's Chief Policy Partner Kip Meek positioned Community Radio in the wider context of the regulator's present and future strategies at that time, by stating that 'community radio enhances choice, diversity and innovation – so it's at the heart of our strategy' (Meek, 2005). Ofcom's vision included:

A multitude of community services at a very local level, providing social gain, community involvement and training for every community that wants and can sustain such a service, wherever they are in the UK (...) The arrival of this new sector offers the possibility for a wide range of new highly localised stations across the UK, allowing listeners to become much more involved in their radio stations than has previously been possible. They can be used for experimentation and to develop innovative new content, and will provide an important training ground for talent. (...) In addition, community radio will help to achieve the public purpose of sustaining citizenship and civil society, by providing a range of viewpoints and by contributing to the plurality of broadcasters. (ibid.)

Clearly, Community Radio had made a breakthrough not only in the sense that it was being introduced in Britain, but also that it was now considered a part of future landscapes, when planning future policy, given that Ofcom had started consultation on Phase 2 of its radio review just a few days earlier, on 19 October 2005 (Ofcom, 2005b). The regulator also emphasised the contribution of the sector in terms of localism, training, participation, pluralism and venue for experimentations that would have not been possible in commercial radio.

Finally, this successful format was repeated, for the last time to date, on 23-24 March 2007 for Community FM 2007. With its content and structure remaining pretty much the same, this was held at a time when many licensed Community Radio stations had already been in operation, hence the focus on 'Sharing Skills for Success' and

workshops including sessions for established stations on development and fundraising.<sup>65</sup> This time, high-level individuals included Ofcom's Deputy Chair, Philip Graf, who praised Community Radio's ability to make 'transformations in the lives of people who run the stations' (Healy, 2007) and the local MP for Salford, Hazel Blears,<sup>66</sup> who made a keynote speech on 'Bringing People Together to Build Communities – Community Radio as Social Cement', echoing the description that fellow Manchester Labour MP, Tony Lloyd had given in the House of Commons six years earlier. Blears, like her predecessors on this stage, gave her support to the cause of Community Radio as a separate, vibrant and creative sector:

Even our public service broadcaster the BBC, with its public service ethos and regional radio network, cannot match the enthusiasm and innovation of the community radio sector (...) There's a patronising attitude you hear sometimes that community radio is a 'noddy' version of 'proper broadcasting' or a place where people can learn broadcasting skills before going to work for the BBC or commercial sector. That's nonsense. I think of community radio as a distinct form of media, a sector in its own right, in no-one's shadow, with its own ethos and values. (in Healy, 2007)

What can be learnt from this brief review of *Community FM* conferences is the positioning of Radio Regen, and Manchester, at the centre of discourses on British Community Radio, where its views, its experiences and practices were showcased as best practices to fellow practitioners, policymakers and agencies working in the regeneration and community development sectors. It surely signalled a shift from older, 'cheaper' and 'alternative' locations, to more 'professional' and mainstream venues, arguably mirroring the move of the sector, from the periphery to the mainstream of broadcasting policy and playing well with government social policies and priorities of the time. Very successful in bringing together resources to make this happen, the presence of high-level, local political figures with key responsibilities, across governmental departments, helped to give material to RR, as well as to fellow community radio stations, which could be quoted or referred to when lobbying other

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<sup>65</sup> *Workshop details for CommunityFM 2007*, available from <http://www.communityfm.net/communityfm/workshops2007.htm> [accessed 27 May 2007]

<sup>66</sup> At that time, she was also Home Office Minister and Labour Party Chair.

departments locally and nationally, as well as using it in the sector's public relations by the CMA and RR itself. Arguably, it played well with local institutions and agencies, as this was portraying Manchester as a centre of community radio excellence and discussion, and yet another contribution to the city's pivotal role in the creative industries. Moreover, the reference toolkit of the sector, the *Community Radio Toolkit* (Fogg et al., 2005) was authored by key figures from RR, contributing to highlight the central role of the organisation in the British context.

With the CMA focused on lobbying for legislation and, after that, for further recognition and funding in governmental departments in London, this parallel work in the North West region helped to raise the profile of the sector in a number of contexts. What emerges, though, is also the close relationship with local agencies and the use of radio as regeneration tool, as illustrated by this quote from Patrick Hanfling, the Community Engagement Officer at Manchester City Council, who stated during Community FM 2007 that community radio should 'engage with local government structures and to *sell* themselves as the definitive way to help local authorities fulfil their statutory duty of community engagement' (in Healy, 2007).

Such a view is arguably not shared by many other stations, as the two other examples in this thesis will show, and that has prompted scholars like Gordon (2009) and McKay (2010) to raise concerns about the implications of such a conceptualisation of Community Radio, as discussed in Chapter 5. I will return to this theme in the conclusions of this chapter and this thesis but after this background analysis, it is now pertinent to move to the discussion of the case study for this chapter, ALL FM, and to start by reviewing its early years under the RR umbrella.

### 8.5 ALL FM

ALL FM has had a rather different story than the two other case studies present in this thesis. It was part of a wider group (Radio Regen), chosen as a pilot for the Access Radio project, succeeding then in being granted a full-time community radio licence and finally becoming independent from Radio Regen with the start of its new licence on 1 January 2006. Indeed, Korbelt had stated two years earlier: 'It is not our aim to run a

station or stations, we're here to enable the residents to do that for themselves' (in Radio Regen, 2004: 5).

During its Access Radio period, a number of evaluations and researches did take place at the station, like Everitt's evaluation on the Access Radio pilot project itself (2003a, 2003b), the external evaluations of learning projects (Manchester 2005, 2006) and an audience research commissioned by Ofcom (2004b). RR had showcased several outcomes and projects done at the station in the booklet *Five Years of Community Radio in Manchester* (Radio Regen, 2004).

### *The Access Radio period*

Beginning as a three-day broadcast as Radio Longsight in May 2000, the following RSL broadcasts were expanded to the neighbouring areas of Ardwick and Levenshulme, and based around the A6 partnership, which had been constituted to manage the area's Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) scheme. After two further RSLs were carried out in 2001, ALL FM successfully applied for an Access Radio pilot licence to be part of the 15 'pioneering' stations of the forthcoming third sector. In the evaluation of the pilot project, published in March 2003, Anthony Everitt cited ALL FM's volunteer Nadia Ali as an example of how community radio could boost self-confidence and personal development (2003a: 109). A British Asian, her experience as a single parent had been particularly tough as she was then living on benefits, after her separation from her husband. After a BTEC<sup>67</sup> course with Radio Regen, she had become a Project Officer for ALL FM and, with her programme *The Independent Woman*, 'instigated strong debates on issues such as forced marriages, which led to the setting up of a community group to address the issue' (ibid., 109). Moreover, three previously inexperienced volunteers who had joined, had later got a job with ALL FM and therefore been 'professionalised' (ibid., 110). Notable, in Everitt's view, was also the space that the station had given to languages other than English, with the broadcast of programmes in Urdu, Benin, Portuguese, Hindi, Kashmiri, Punjabi and Farsi (ibid., 114).

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<sup>67</sup> BTEC is a vocational qualification awarded in the UK. See <http://www.edexcel.com/quals/BTEC/why-btec/Pages/default.aspx>

During the Access Radio pilot project phase, Ofcom also commissioned a research to get further information on what listeners were making of the sector (2004b), which included Forest of Dean Radio, Awaz FM, Angel Radio and ALL FM. The methodologies used were both qualitative and quantitative, with the use of street interviews, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. For ALL FM, 685 street interviews, two focus groups and four in-depth interviews were conducted. When compared to other stations, the awareness of the station in the catchment area was relatively low as only 9% of the interviewees were spontaneously aware of the station and 28% recalled ALL FM after prompting. Of the sample, 12% said that the station was the one they ‘never listened to’ and 2% that it was the ‘most listened to’ (Ofcom, 2004b: 43).

A detailed outline of the quantitative findings is listed in Appendix 3, where it can be seen how listeners seemed to appreciate the diverse music mix offered by the station, and its music programming proposal above all, followed by its usefulness of having a station broadcasting in their language, *from, about, and by* members of the local communities living in the area. As for the qualitative findings of the research, the listeners’ sample confirmed its appreciation of a diverse music output, even though ‘Many listeners felt that the station is trying to please too many audiences by providing such a diverse programme output that listeners felt they could never be certain ‘what is going to be on’ (Ofcom, 2004b: 54).

Research among station volunteers showed that volunteers had approached the station because they saw this opportunity as a ‘career progression as well as personal development, involvement in the community and issue-specific roles’ (ibid., 49), and the possibility to broadcast specific music genres. Individual empowerment featured strongly in the case of an unnamed respondent who stated that ALL FM had given her/him

(...) a route back into society, a route back to climbing out of bed and doing something (...) the feedback I’ve got from the show and people in the street has boosted my confidence no end (...) it’s helped me recover from mental illness basically by providing me with something that I feel proud of. (ibid., 49)

Finally, the researchers had found out that the station was suffering from ‘a lack of funding to promote itself, its aims and its programmes – this factor, as well as the diversity of programming means potential listeners need to work hard to build loyalty towards the station’ (ibid., 52).

Ofcom’s research findings highlighted some of the challenges of a multicultural station that tried to reflect the diversity present in its catchment area through a diverse music schedule. With the sense of communities of interest (e.g. based on ethnic groups, age groups or music genre) arguably stronger than the sense of community of place, listeners often tuned in for specialist programmes, but very few of them continuously listened to the station, through the whole day. Given that this refers to the pilot period, it has to be taken into account that this was a new player in the local broadcasting scene and that the concept of Community Radio itself was something that the local audiences were starting to get familiar with. While this meant that a lot of work had to be done to get the message across to large parts of the local community, it also true that the possibilities of access, the degree of localism and of content diversity that were starting to emerge were surely stronger than in any other local broadcaster, with the *process* of broadcasting assuming increasingly more importance than the *content*, a theme that has already been discussed in Chapter 2 and that will be touched upon again later in this chapter.

#### *Applying for a full-time licence*

ALL FM, as a station that had been ‘pioneering’ Community Radio through the pilot project (and with the wealth of findings collected by documenting its output), was in a position to make a strong case in its application for a full-time licence (ALL FM, 2004). This clearly put the station a step ahead of any other eventual competing stations in the area, as it was based on real experience as a full-time pilot station to which, as an applicant, they could refer to.

For 2.5 years, ALL FM has enhanced skills, boosted pride, helped mainstream services to improve their delivery, and helped many individuals gain work experience which has led them to employment and further

education. ALL FM is in the process of becoming independent and locally owned. It will build on the experience of Radio Regen and skills of the staff team to make ALL FM one of the leading Community Radio Stations in the UK. (ALL FM, 2004: 3)

The main achievements, in line with RR's mission and policy priorities of the time, is not primarily the fact that a station was adding a new local level of broadcasting in the area and providing alternative viewpoints, but the enhancement of skills of the people involved in the station, which resulted in providing more for opportunities for employment or further education. Moreover, it emphasised the support in the delivery of mainstream services to 'deliver regeneration work across the more deprived areas of South Central, and East Manchester' (ibid., 19) and that the station worked 'with the A6 Partnership, the regeneration partnership appointed to co-ordinate regeneration work in the area' (ibid., 40).

The achievements of the station are also described in the section of the application that deals with the proposed paid staff structure, since 'The two Volunteer Support Workers and Administrator have progressed from being volunteers at ALL FM and our Community Outreach Worker worked for Radio Regen prior to working for ALL FM' (ibid., 17). The development aspect of the station is highlighted as it has now paid staff like the Community Development Worker, dedicated to outreach social groups in the area in order to involve them in the station's activities, using a proactive approach rather than waiting for them to come forward, and two Volunteer Support Workers, who take care of training and assisting volunteers in enhancing their radio production skills.

In describing the community to be served, ALL FM highlights some of the problems affecting the area it was aiming to target, a larger one from the 'pilot' licence: Ardwick, a dense social housing area had large numbers of refugees and students and was characterised by 'poor health care provision, poor diet, lack of education, high numbers of teenage pregnancy and the problems associated with serial deprivation' (ibid., 19-20); Longsight, although it had a thriving scene of Asian small and medium enterprises, had 'many problems with gang culture, youth nuisance, long-term youth unemployment, poverty and an extremely negative media image of the area' (ibid., 20); Levenshulme was the least problematic, with an increasing cultural diversity, in part

relatively affluent, but yet with ‘poor quality housing and high levels of unemployment’ (ibid., 20). The new areas to be served included other neighbouring areas and among them, Miles Platting, ‘currently one of the most deprived areas in the UK (Index of Multiple Deprivation)’, having poor quality local authority housing, high levels of unemployment, youth nuisance, crime and poor health’ (ibid., 20) and Moss Side, still with ‘many problems with crime and gang culture’ (ibid., 20). Overall, the emphasis here is on the several levels of deprivation and living conditions in the area, to regeneration work that is far from being completed and how radio can eventually intervene to counteract and tackle some of these problems.

The evidence of local demand for support again presents the possibility to showcase the work done as a an Access Radio station on air since May 2002: ‘78 volunteers engaged in production and research work’ (ibid., 22), the support of local Labour MPs Gerald Kaufman and Tony Lloyd, a list of over 50 groups, organisations and agencies that have been given airtime in the station’s programmes (ibid., 22-23) and, arguably victim of its own success ‘a waiting list with 16 people requesting work placements and 99 local people who have registered their interest in becoming volunteers’ (ibid., 22). This indicated the success of getting a number of different constituencies involved in the station activities, but also the problem of dealing with a level of demand with which the station could not cope, issues that have been touched upon when discussing access and participation in Chapter 2, like the issues raised by Hochheimer (1993) on organising democratic structures in radio and by van Vuuren (2006) on ‘equitable allocation of airtime’ to different groups. At ALL FM, in practice, this also included putting in place a rotating playlist comprising Chart, Gold and Community (Asian, African, Irish and African Caribbean music) during breakfast and drive-time shows and programmes in foreign languages that include Somali, Farsi and Kashmiri shows, allegedly with a large following in their homeland and across the UK (ALL FM, 2004: 26-27).

ALL FM also aimed to provide more local speech programmes focusing on the ‘ultra-local content on what is happening in Ardwick, Longsight and Levenshulme’ (ibid., 43), also because ‘There is very little non-BBC speech content on radio in Manchester’ (ibid., 27) and to do so in both English and foreign languages. However, the station recognised that ‘While it is not possible to reflect the exact demographic [based on the 2001 Census data] of the area in the schedule, this is what we aim for in the makeup of

our volunteer body and the programmes we air' (ibid., 30). This is also shown by targeting sub-groups in the ethnic communities, like Asian women, given that among other radio shows in the area 'there are very few programmes which feature women as the main presenter, and which focus on the issues faced by Asian women in the community' (ibid., 30). Programmes done *by and for* ethnic minorities with refugee status, especially the increasing number of Somalis, had the aim 'to integrate with the community and feel that there is a place for them in the City' (ibid., 34). Furthermore, ALL FM remarked that it would also be the only station 'where school children are given the opportunity to make radio' (ibid., 43).

To comply with statutory requirements of community radio regulation in terms of participatory structures of management, ALL FM planned to establish a Steering Group to enhance the possibility of the local community to also have a say in programming policies. This was going to be formed by local residents, who would liaise with the station's Board of Directors and would base its recruitment policy on the demographic representation given by the 2001 Census data. Its overall aim would be to

(...) ensure that the representative body for ALL FM has influence over the executive group regarding editorial matters. The Steering group will be comprised of members of ALL FM. As such, these members will have voting rights at the AGM for ALL FM and will have a say over the appointment of Directors and other constitutional matters. This group will also be responsible for devising a programme of community consultation events. (ibid., 37)

This body would then help to ensure that, as stated in the intentions of ALL FM in the application, the 'service is different from other local radio services in the area as it recruits local people and trains them to make radio. As such, the content of ALL FM's schedule is a true reflection of the community, *made by the community for the community*' (ibid., 43, emphasis added).

One of the last sections of the Ofcom applications deals with the planned finances of the station and significantly, it can be noticed how heavily ALL FM relied on public project-based funding, with almost half (43%) that would have been provided by

European and national public bodies via RR: European Social Fund via the Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus, Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Fund via the Manchester Adult Education Service, Refugee Integration Challenge Fund via the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate, and MANCAT (ALL FM, 2004: 49-50). More than half (52%) would have been provided by local agencies like the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund via the Manchester City Council and the Northwest Development Agency (*ibid.*, 50). The remaining 6% would have come from a mix of commercial sources like sponsorship and advertising. Again, it can be noted here how heavily the station relied on time-limited project funding, none of it covering the core costs of the station such as administration, station management, and technical support.

Here. Everitt's (2003a) and Gordon's concerns (2009) spring to mind again as the station is mainly funding-led when planning its activities, rather than the other way around: 'the activity of the radio station is led to a greater extent by the requirements of the funders (on whom we rely to survive), rather than the requirements of the community' (ALL FM, 2004). The nationwide Community Radio Fund (CRF) could have covered core costs, at least for a definite period, and its funding was seen as essential to 'be less pressured to accept funding simply to survive and [ALL FM] would not need to continually adapt our activity to meet funders requirements' (*ibid.*). However, with a meagre £500,000 made available by the government for the whole sector, any hopes of being substantially helped by this scheme simply would not have been realistic.

ALL FM was eventually granted its full-time community radio licence by Ofcom on 5 September 2005 (Ofcom 2005a) and the regulator's Radio Licensing Committee (RLC) motivated the award by stating that,

This is an experienced group with a proven track record of securing funding. It provides extensive evidence of local support. Its social gain objectives are well thought-through, and its experience in the provision of training is a particular strength of this group. It has sensible plans to develop a steering group as a mechanism for ensuring greater community involvement in the management and operation of the station.

The station continued to broadcast with the Access Radio licence until the end of 2005 and started under the new regime on 1 January 2006.

### *The schedule*

The proposed schedule for the station at the time of application is substantially the same as what was in practice at the time of the fieldwork visit (September 2006) and is attached in full detail in Appendix 2. Daytime programming included ‘a standard radio format of Breakfast and Drive Time Shows’ whose speech content consisted of ‘mix of entertainment, information, advice and signposting of the special interest shows (ibid., 42). Given that this is a station based on volunteering, and majoring on access, both drive-time shows did not have the rule of having the same person over on all the weekdays, instead involving a total of eight volunteers across these programmes.

The central part of the day, between 10 am and 3 pm, branded as ‘community shows’ time, included ‘Community Groups, Statutory Agencies and Schools [who] deliver information on the services they provide’ (ibid., 42), who aimed to maintain a ‘broad appeal’ while talking about the issues they focused on. Shows in this stream, in the 10-11 am time, included *Church Chat* (featuring information from local churches), *All through the years* (a cross-generational programme about the heritage of the area), *On the move* (brought by the Longsight Transport Project, debating transport issues in the area), the *Fire Safety Show* (presented by two members of the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service), and *Safe and Sounds* (presented by a member of the Greater Manchester Police and one from the Manchester City Council’s Crime and Disorder Team).<sup>68</sup> In the following hour, *Facing the Issues* debated ‘health and social issues for independent women everywhere’, the *ALL FM Community Show* reported on community groups’ services and events, and *Access All Areas* highlighted ‘skills, talents and health issues of the disabled communities’. The lunch-time hours (12-2 pm) were filled most of the week with automated broadcasting, except Monday’s and Tuesday’s

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<sup>68</sup> The description of all the shows in this section is taken from the station’s website [www.allfm.org](http://www.allfm.org) at on 10 September 2005. Shows that are not described, but are listed on the schedule in Appendix 2, were not on air at the time of the fieldwork.

*Aatish radio show*, delivered by a local organisation and targeting the Asian community in the area.

The following three hours (2-5pm) were instead envisaged to give space to very diverse programmes that had the common aim to develop new presenters and their skills. The genres played in these slots included Arab, Chart, Classic, Funk, hits from the 1980s and the 1990s, Indie, R'n'B and World Music. Other shows included *The Inspiration Hour*, aiming to give 'inspirational tips and music to give you positive energy', and, arguably the most political and alternative show in the station, *Under the Pavement: Anarchy on the airwaves – alternative radio for South Manchester's radical and activist communities*, which featured news from the Indymedia.

After the drive-time shows, the early evening slots (7-9 pm) were given to bilingual and foreign language programming, as well as those targeting a particular social or ethnic group. *Knowledge is Power: The Islamic Hour*, presented by three young Muslim women, 'challenges stereotypes, discusses deep issues around perceptions of Muslims as well as everyday issues, making Islam accessible', while other programmes featured genres like Bollywood and Bhangra music, Persian tunes and Farsi speech, Irish music and Gaelic lessons, a programme in Somali done by refugees, and a South American programme with Latino, Mambo, Cha Cha Cha, Salsa, Bamboleo, Reggae Tone and Latino Jazz.

Finally, the specialist music slots (9 pm-2 am) were a very kaleidoscopic range of programmes focusing on very different genres 'to ensure that music which is not played on other radio stations is given airtime, and strive to keep the specialist music as broad ranging as possible' (ibid., 42). Such programmes would include Soul, Hip Hop and R'n'B, Rock anthems, a selection of 'the best in strange and unusual music', Reggae, traditional music in Punjabi and Urdu, Dance, a show 'Playing everything from Punk to Funk from Sarah Vaughan to Japanese Bluegrass and all stations in between', Indian Pop, Drum'n'bass, Country and Folk, Punk, Goth, Techno, Jungle, and underground Urban music. Club and electronic music are featured usually in the late hours of the day.

Specialist music shows also characterised the weekend, with a selection of Soul, Soca and Jazz, African music, Nu Soul and by the evening, underground urban, hip hop and

house on Saturday, and Soul, Gospel, Jazz and Blues and Lounge music on Sunday, a day that also featured a cultural and an arts programme in the morning.

Responding to some of the questions that have been emerging throughout the thesis, a look at such a diverse schedule shows that first, Community Radio in the format proposed by ALL FM brought a very high number of music genres and speech content heard nowhere else in Manchester, as well as having a degree of localism that no one else achieved. In this sense, it *did* bring onto the air, content that the local BBC and the commercial station did not deliver, adding more colours to the local soundscapes. It did compensate for some of the failure of the market, by engaging with communities whose issues were not discussed or picked up by mainstream media, giving them the possibility to become 'one's own storyteller' (Rodriguez, 2001) and show that some areas had positive stories to tell, beyond the negative attention they received for crime episodes for which they were often known.

With reference to van Vuuren (2006) it also shows that the station tried its best to find an 'equitable allocation of airtime' for the communities living in the area, taking the proactive step of going out and getting in touch with those that, for one reason or another, did not come forward. It was admittedly not a perfect model and the 'waiting list' of volunteers did present challenges to the management where inclusivity was concerned. However, a funding-led approach to programming (i.e. the fact that it was heavily dependent on funding bids generated by RR) also carried the risk, as Gordon (2009) points out, of funding bodies defining the programming of the station, which seemed to be the case for most of its morning community schedule.

The fieldwork discussion that follows will confirm some of the tensions and contradictions that have emerged in earlier researches discussed above, on the processes of change in place as regards independence from RR, issues of organisational and financial sustainability, the recurring matter of participation vs. professionalism in broadcasting, and the empowering potential for individuals in the practice of Community rRadio. It will also bring to the forefront other emerging aspects like the practices of alternative journalism, the impact of child policies on participation and the role of ALL FM as a community centre bringing together diverse communities under one roof.

### *Going independent*

With the start of the new full-time Community Radio licence on 1 January 2006, ALL FM was already nine months into full independence from RR. Alex Green, ALL FM's Station Manager, provides an example here, of what occurred between the project-funding management in central Manchester, where RR's headquarters are based, and the community radio station based in Levenshulme.

We had a lot of issues about projects. I think that part of it was because of a lack of understanding on how funding works, so what you will see is that a project would be set up to work with refugees and then half-way through the project, the budget had changed and suddenly we can't pay expenses and that's quite emotive, because people who are vulnerable need to have their travel expenses back or their lunches, and the workers that were running that project were really upset. (...) So, on the ground you are face to face with people, you are accountable to people and then you get this distant management group, you never meet these people who are in the town centre having their meetings and [who] leave it to other people to do the grassroots delivery. So you will always have tensions between the management and the delivery. (Green, Interview, 2006)<sup>69</sup>

While RR's aims and its results achieved throughout the years in helping people boost their self-esteem and employability cannot be denied, at what price this has been achieved, must be questioned. In Chapter 4, while discussing New Labour's urban regeneration initiatives, Atkinson (2003: 170) noted how, in projects that have developed and empowered communities and their chances of democratic participation, in many cases, 'community involvement has rarely risen above the level of consultation' (ibid., 171). Indeed, the community radio sector did not seem to escape such an issue and in the case of ALL FM, Green recalls that this was due to a previous episode in the history of the station, which had long-term consequences in how RR was perceived in South Manchester.

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<sup>69</sup> Alex Green, Station Manager, Interview, 29 September 2006.

It has already been noted how the station grew quickly, ending up in a situation where they had too many volunteers broadcasting and not enough staff to sustain. RR believed that it had to take action and called the volunteers to a meeting where it was announced that it would be cutting the schedule and stop broadcasting at 8 pm, basically cutting 50 people off from their programmes. As Green describes, the volunteers reacted to this strongly:

What happened at ALL FM was that a large group of people came together and said, 'No chance, you are not taking our station off'. Then, they started negotiating and the volunteers formed their own groups, some form of organisation and structure, a rota system of evening managers and by hook or by crook they come together, they sorted that out and they kept the evening schedule, we didn't lose anything. But that set the precedent: 'Get your hands off our station!' (ibid.)

Green recalled how the perception of a 'top-down' model of Community Radio was being enacted by RR, where what the local community really wanted was not always taken into full consideration, going as far as being allegedly considered a mini-BBC among some practitioners in Greater Manchester:

Other community radio stations grow from the community, so [you have] one or two people in the community and (...) [it grows from there], whereas Radio Regen is dropped in – they have a worker, they send him in to an area, start some activity, build up and then you have got a station. Is not always the case, because sometimes is someone from that community that wants to do it and they will facilitate to do it, but it is perceived as in some parts of Manchester that Radio Regen is a 'mini-BBC' among other people who do community radio. I have heard this view expressed several times. I think that Phil [Korbel] knows this perception: Radio Regen is parachuted there, gets the money because they are well known, do something and prevents the real community people from doing it. That is something we had to tackle always. There has been a grumbling ALL FM being not owned by the community

and for the community. This ‘owned by the community’ is a very difficult thing. (ibid.)

Korbel indeed seemed to be aware of the criticism towards RR and its alleged approach to community radio, as well as being pragmatic on the reason that pushed RR in its search for funding and the need to avoid changing the nature of the station:

To some extent we can be accused (...) [of being] paternalistic in our approach as sort of ‘we know what is good for you’. Certainly, if you asked our residents what they would like, they would have said ‘more pop music!’ Then we would say ‘OK, but what community output do you want?’ to define the question and to put [it] in [the] context [of] community radio. (...). We have to be opportunistic in pursuing funding opportunities as they come. There are opportunities for core funding from the Big Lottery Fund but that is hugely oversubscribed and the opportunities to allow us to do community radio stations are very small. Then you look at the way the projects we pursue might come together and how it would enhance the general fabric of the station. Very few projects actually overwhelm the output. (...) If the government comes up with a huge fund to find lost dogs, we will pretty [much] go for it, but we are also aware that we can’t change the nature of the station. The station only works if is a trusted community radio station within the community and if we start to erode that trust and have too much unmediated authority, that will hurt the station. (Korbel, Interview, 2006)<sup>70</sup>

As can be seen from the contrasting opinions, there is a clash, or eventually there *was* one (when, by the time of the interviews, ALL FM had become independent) between the concept of a station that has been built up and managed locally by members of the community from the start (as in the case of Forest FM, see the next chapter) and one that was facilitated by an ‘external’ body, where important management decisions were often taken elsewhere. However good the intentions of RR were, considering that the *community radio* model aimed to put the local community at the centre of the production and management, of this new tier of radio, it can be argued whether or not the model

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<sup>70</sup> Phil Korbel, Director, Radio Regen, Interview, 28 September 2006.

should include ‘facilitators’ to help the local community, for a relatively long time, and whether it should so heavily influence what the station’s activities.

However, apart from organisational arrangements, in terms of sustainability, project-led funding was not the only issue. This was also a recurrent problem for multicultural stations (London’s SoundRadio had to hand back its licence for that reason) and it is this matter that the next section will look at.

### *Multiculturalism: challenges and opportunities*

Multicultural radio stations encounter more difficulties in getting funding, especially from advertising sources, as opposed to stations oriented to a particular ethnic community. On the other hand, single community broadcasters (e.g., Punjabi’s Desi Radio in Southall, London) have the opposite problem: they are so successful that they have had to build up a waiting list for local businesses eager to advertise on the station because of the 50% cap on advertising income in the community radio regulation. ALL FM’s Station Manager claims that, even though ‘inclusive’ stations like ALL FM aim to facilitate social cohesion and bring different communities together – and this was at the top of relevant departments’ and government priorities at the time of the fieldwork – they are in a very difficult position, which threatens their financial survival and even the prospect of a radio landscape where,

You will end up in a situation where ‘ghetto-radio’ will work, with single radio for single community and where multicultural ones won’t work on a sustainability issue and I think that’s a tragedy actually, it’s a shame. In ALL FM, you can see the benefits in cultural mixing, also simply on an internal basis where volunteers come in from different backgrounds, meet and talk with each other. There is a reason to interact. (...) Most people in Manchester don’t cross each other, there is no reason, no opportunity to engage and this gives an opportunity to engage both off air and on air. I think is very short sighted if multicultural radio is allowed to decline, or just by a natural process of sustainability they don’t survive. (Green, Interview, 2006)

The problem in getting advertising from the local businesses owned by different ethnic minority groups was that the schedule of ALL FM was based on their Census and other related data about the spread of the population in the area. So, for example, if the overall figure of Asians in the area was 12%, shows targeted to them would have a similar representation in the schedule. Therefore, local businesses serving Asian customers would not see the benefit of advertising on ALL FM because it only dedicated a small percentage to their group, so they could say to the station's business developers, 'You are not reaching my audience, why I should pay you when I can get Asian Sound Radio and get a 100%?' This turned out to be a problem in every community where, even though they thought that ALL FM was doing good work, the businesses would not be inclined to use it as an advertisement channel. In other words, the 'umbrella' model had the potential of having a dangerous economic flaw, as it could destroy the station's ability to very precisely match audience targets to advertisers.

On the other hand, bringing different cultures together had a beneficial effect on the volunteers presenting at the station, as interviewees stated that participating in ALL FM made them appreciate different cultures: 'I have learned so much about many cultures in doing this job (...) We live in a multicultural society and these are the issues we need to deal with' (White, Interview, 2006).<sup>71</sup> 'ALL FM brings us together and helps to embrace other cultures, that's how we develop an understanding about each other and become more tolerant' (Fly, Interview, 2006).<sup>72</sup> 'We embrace all cultures here. We are a radio for the minorities (...) it might not be a minority of class or race, but just a minority of taste you know. It gives people who would not have the opportunity to make programmes to do so and this is a wonderful thing' (Morris, Interview, 2006).<sup>73</sup>

It could be argued that these members of ALL FM might have had a positive attitude towards multiculturalism *prior* to the participation at the stations, given that they did not say that they had been *changed* by their participation. However, they underlined the process of *learning* about other cultures and being part of a platform that facilitated such processes. Green likewise reported changes of attitude that had taken place because of the involvement in the station: 'I have seen people with racist views

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<sup>71</sup> Gavin White, Administrator, Interview, 29 September 2006.

<sup>72</sup> Stevie Fly, Presenter - *Carribean Connections*, Interview, 30 September 2006.

<sup>73</sup> Ian Morris (aka Mog), Presenter - *Standing in the Shadows of Lev*, Interview, 30 September 2006.

changing their opinion while getting involved with the station. You put them with the people to whom they object and then you can put them in a room and get them talk to each other. You can have transformations' (Green, Interview, 2006).

In Chapter 2, issues around democratic management processes (Hochheimer, 1993) and risk of enclosure of the local public sphere (van Vuuren, 2006) were discussed, highlighting how uphill was the task of making abstract concepts work in practice. While these issues are continuously negotiated in more homogeneous community broadcasters, with stations like ALL FM, these tensions may tend to go even higher.

While Green recalls that 'it is great to facilitate a sense of community ownership that people feel is accessible, is responsible and responsive to them, so if they want to get involved they can', in some cases, the main drive was the editorial control, rather than caring about how to improve fundraising. Among the shows, ALL FM broadcast one produced by members of a Muslim literary association, which had as its main objective the promotion of Muslim literature and greater education in the Muslim community. No problems occurred until they reached the point where they wanted to exercise more control over other shows, until a meeting where they demanded full control of all the Asian content in the station. This was demanded on the grounds that the management of the station allegedly did not understand the languages and their culture well enough. The group claimed that since they understood these languages far better, they should be in charge of the Hindu and the Sikh programmes (the Indians' broadcast output), even though they were a Pakistani group of Muslims. At that meeting, the management made it clear that it was not the group's or their job to dictate to people what they could or could not broadcast. Green maintains, 'I don't have editorial control over the station. If something is wrong on air I will stop it, I will do it in that terms, but I don't drive content and this is the whole point. This is a platform, is not anyone's editorial path' (ibid.).

Linked to this, there was another example of people claiming to represent a community on the grounds that they would not be able to express and defend themselves. The station received a proposal from the local Territorial Army office to broadcast an advertisement to recruit young soldiers. Concerned that this could influence the stations' relations with the wider Muslim community, the management decided to find

out if it was appropriate to broadcast such an advertisement. It therefore contacted a local Muslim community leader, who replied ‘I don’t really understand why you are phoning me, why would this be a problem? What we want, as mainstream British-Pakistani people, is to integrate with the community, and it would be perfectly appropriate for Pakistani Muslims to go and enrol in the Territorial Army.’ But shortly after the first broadcast of the advertisement, the stations started to get e-mails from what looked like a large group of people. It was, in fact, principally one person who was behind the campaign – a radical activist who could not understand why a ‘progressive’ station like ALL FM decided to do this. He claimed to be the voice of all the people he was defending and, as Green describes,

(...) [His] line of defence was ‘You are offending all the Muslims in Manchester by putting this advert on’ but he was a white British man. I was quite annoyed, but not because he complained. Actually, it was a quite nasty and racist thing he was saying, like ‘These people are too stupid to have a voice and don’t speak the language, [so] I appoint myself as their representative and I challenge you’. I tried to e-mail him back and engage in a dialogue, and invited him to the station and discuss this on air with the people he was claiming to represent seated in front of him, to see what would happen then and after that, he completely disappeared. (ibid.)

This quote illustrates an episode of ‘multicultural backlash’ (see Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010, for a comprehensive European review on this area of study). Also, in order to facilitate a dialogue, it has to be noted that ALL FM was the object of the national news. It received media attention for its positive contribution to the dialogue between the Muslim community and the larger community in the area, with the programme *Knowledge is Power: The Islamic Hour*, reviewed three times in 2005, in *The Guardian’s Society* supplement (Benjamin 2005a, 2005b) and *The Independent’s Media Weekly* (Byrne, 2005).

NHS women’s health development worker and radio presenter Faiza Chaudri explained that the programme had been created because of her personal interest as a young British Muslim woman: ‘There were a lot of things I didn’t know about being Muslim and I had no one to ask. My parents are [from] a different generation and from Pakistan, whereas I

was born here. The imams often don't speak English, and anyway I don't go to the mosque – it's for men' (in Benjamin, 2005a). She also stated how listeners who contacted her were not only Muslims, as 'lots live in Muslim areas and want to know more about their neighbours' (ibid.), receiving 'positive responses because we've made it so straightforward that people can understand what our religion is all about' (in Byrne, 2005).

Chaudri believes that the programme can also help, on the one hand, to stimulate discussions and get answers to topics that are not discussed openly in her religious group, such as marriage and domestic violence, as well as, on the other hand, to combat a negative depiction of Islam in the media: 'The media has got a big role to play in the perceptions people have about Muslims. It's really easy to give a negative image of the Muslims, which sells papers. They need to combat that by giving positive responses. The Muslim community do feel let down by the media' (ibid.).

ALL FM also had the merit – a view shared among all the interviewees – to demystify the access to broadcasting: 'It's not something I would have gone into, but ALL FM has equipped me with the skills to open my wings. I just thought the media was really negative' (ibid.), said Chaudri. Moreover, the aural nature of radio makes the conditions of such dialogue more easy as 'I can go on air and talk about anything and people don't know whether I'm wearing a headscarf or what colour I am' (ibid.). What emerges here is the fact that the aural nature of radio, as remarked by several interviewees, helped some of the presenters to go on air with a greater confidence because it allowed them to be judged for what they *said*, rather than for how they *looked*. This would have helped to bring forward perspective, to counter-balance negative depictions in the media and to provide new angles from which to tackle current issues in their community.

### *Alternative journalism*

Whereas the mainstream has a tendency to privilege the powerful, alternative media set out to privilege the powerless and the marginal: to offer a perspective 'from below' and to say the 'unspoken'. Alternative and mainstream media not only use different casts of sources, they tend to have a

different relationship *between* producers and sources, with alternative media sometimes blurring the lines between the two. (Harcup, 2003: 371)

ALL FM's schedule included what its presenters described as 'Manchester's alternative/radical show', *Under the Pavement: Anarchy on the Airwaves*. Presented by two 'vegan anarchists', known to the public by the names David and Spike, the shows included 'alternative/leftfield eclectic playlist covering indie, punk, folk, experimental, hip hop, electronic and pop', news from the Indymedia Network and 'reports on direct action and grass roots resistance in the Manchester area'.<sup>74</sup> The show was originally broadcast on Monday evenings and, echoing similar critiques that have circulated in scholarly circles, the station's manager Alex Green commented that, at that hour, the programme was basically 'preaching to the converted', those 'who listened to it were activists, there was no one who wasn't' (Green, Interview, 2006).

Indeed, looking at the programme's website, enthusiastic feedback from the audience included a radical media blog, a punk performance poet and hosts of vegan radio shows from the USA. Arguably, to a critical eye, it would have been more interesting to know *who else* had been listening to the show apart from people whom one would have expected to listen to this. In other words, 'One would imagine that they [alternative media producers] above all would be passionately concerned with how their own media products were being received and used' (Downing, 2003: 625-6).

The station management felt that the timeslot did not involve a larger listening group and, as Green said, 'because we felt that if it's going to be an activists' show, they have to talk with people who are not engaged in their issues, who don't understand those issues. In [the] daytime, they wouldn't broadcast only to their own community, but to everybody else, being provocative and we thought "Let's give it a go"' (Green, Interview, 2006.). With the BBC's standards of 'impartial' journalistic values also permeating ALL FM, Green saw 'balanced reporting' as one of the challenges of *Under the Pavement*:

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<sup>74</sup> <http://underthepavement.org/> [Accessed 4 October 2006]

The most difficult thing with that show is that, if you take a group of activists and you get them to do a radio show about issues that are highly political, or they feel really passionate about, then it is very hard to be balanced. They are struggling really hard to be journalists, they think that if they try to be balanced or question the activists, they are endorsing the point of view of the government, the opposing viewpoint. The issues they are tackling are fine, what they are not doing, what they are finding really hard, is to challenge the activists. (ibid.)

Green recalled one episode of the programme covering a campaign against a company based near Brighton that allegedly was an arms manufacturer. Locally, activist groups had organised a campaign aiming to close the factory down, using tools like roadblocks and switchboard campaigns. The arguments against this company were highly emotive and the allegation was that the company was producing bombs, and that these bombs were dropped in Lebanon in strikes conducted by Israel earlier that year (2006), resulting in the killing of innocent people. The presenters interviewed the leader of this campaign, asked him about the campaign and he went on talking almost uninterrupted for half an hour, without the presenters challenging his views once, or asking for factual details: ‘They just gave him an half hour platform to put [across] that viewpoint and then ‘Nice one mate!, that is fantastic, smash this bastards’, whatever...’ (ibid.). At the time, a producer of BBC’s Religion and Ethics Department, Manchester-based Vanessa Baldwin had been seconded for a few hours a week to ALL FM, where she was listening to programmes and providing informal feedback. She was also eventually providing training to the station’s presenters, something that a number of volunteers whom I interviewed seemed to appreciate quite a lot.

She happened to listen to the show and spoke to the management of the risks of being sued for libel if the claims were not substantiated by evidence. Indeed, Green did some background research on the company and found out that it did not make bombs but rather, that it made the equipment that is used in planes to hold bombs. Even though the difference might seem subtle to an activist eye, there was a factual distinction and, as Green commented, ‘the whole emotive charge of their campaign was wrong’. At a subsequent meeting with the station management, the presenters did not immediately understand what was wrong with the show, even though they admitted they had not

done much background research about the company. In fact, they had been given a platform to campaign, on the basis of incorrect information.

My point with the activists wasn't that we don't want to be activists, we want it to be correct activism, factually correct activism. We will back you every step of the way. If you have got some serious thing on Tony Blair and you have the correct evidence for it, we will put it on air, we will expose it and go through the court if necessary, that's not the problem. But it has to be correct, it has to be not bullshit! (ibid.)

Referring to Hamilton (2001), one of the questions that this thesis attempts to answer is if the British community radio sector and its policy and regulation are structurally preventing more radicalism or participation. While on participation, ALL FM has proven to be very inclusive and proactive in trying to achieve this objective, its degree of *radicalness* has a certain number of limitations that are embedded in a station with a broadcast licence, when compared to an internet-only station. As Green underlines: 'I think this is one of the difficulties of doing radical radio. You know, we could lose our licence or get a fine that will close the station down. Probably one Ofcom fine will sink us and that is why we have to be very careful' (Interview, 2006). Such concerns were also echoed in the area of participatory journalism research applied to on-line media:

(...) a conversation is not 1,000 people shouting at once. Good conversation is two-way, among a few people. If viewers are allowed to post anything they want on the message board I host, it invites all sorts of dangers, not the least of which is defamation lawsuit. (Lasica, 2003, in Lievrouw, 2011: 110)

On the presenters' journalism practices, Green added: 'We want them to be journalists, but they find it very hard to challenge the McDonalds campaigners, they find it hard [to find] flaws in their argument (...) but an activist internet radio station is going to be listened [to] only by activists!' A similar example was also discussed by Atton and Hamilton (2008), referring to the case of a video report by arms control activists for the web-based alternative media outlet *Undercurrents*. They questioned if such examples threatened standards of journalism and argued that, perhaps, this was 'the wrong question to ask' (2008: 88). They stated that the primary aim of such a report was to

mobilise public opinion and that ‘the presence of explicit mobilizing information is an enduring characteristic of alternative media, the aim of which is to suggest possibilities for social action to audiences’ (ibid., 88). In other words, ‘the primary audience for such work, it was assumed [by the presenters] would be the activist community itself’ (ibid., 89). The way *Under the Pavement* reported itself seems to indeed suggest that the primary public was to report ‘direct action and grass roots resistance’ to like-minded activists, rather than trying to extend the awareness of counter-hegemonic practices to a larger number of people in the area. As Downing has noted,

We need to admit in all frankness that there have been only too many examples of people (...) who started alternative media ostensibly to allow ‘other voices’ but actually only to express their own, and where the term ‘dialogic’ has definitely been honoured far more in the breach than in its observance. (2003: 633)

In fact, when interviewing one of the presenters of the programme, David, ‘dialogue’ did not seem to be at the top of their priorities, where the aim of the programme was talking to ‘people taking action on issues’, trying to ‘get things across that you would usually not hear on mainstream radio that are relevant to our communities’<sup>75</sup> (David, Interview, 2006) and linking global with local issues. The week before my visit, there had been the annual UK-wide Labour Party conference in Manchester and the programme had reported on the initiatives of the *Stop the War* coalition and the CND campaign. The emphasis was again to ‘cover things not covered by mainstream radio and give space to people more involved in direct action’ (ibid.). The approach that privileges covering, in principle, ‘only’ what is not covered by mainstream radio makes one think that this corresponds to what Downing described as, ‘Just because people think their voice is not represented does not mean they are interested in other voices than their own’ (2003: 627).

It is useful, in this context, to point again to van Vuuren’s discussion on the struggle inherent in the production of knowledge and the representation of the community. The example discussed in this section illustrates how ‘far from being an open-access sphere

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<sup>75</sup> David, Presenter - *Under the Pavement*, Interview, 27 September 2006.

(...), a community public sphere is a more or less bounded domain', where the access is in fact determined by 'cultural orientations, norms and values' (2006: 389).

We don't see ourselves as a radical station. We don't see ourselves as how Indymedia views a radical station. We think we are radical in the way we do our work. If you have that diversity of voices, then you should achieve some degree of democracy, representation, integration and I think that's the secret. (Green, Interview, 2006)

What I have tried to reveal in this section is how ALL FM takes the issue of representation seriously, by giving space to 'alternative' and 'radical' voices within the community, and actually making a further effort to make such voices reach a larger public, among its listeners. It also reveals the challenges of doing 'partisan' broadcasting when reporting about events, and the importance of accuracy in the world of licensed broadcasting, when compared to the alternative media content available via the Internet. The station actually needs to be accurate because false allegations could risk putting it in danger, where it could receive an irreparable blow to its finance, or result in the loss of its licence altogether. It is also interesting to see how it challenges notions of 'radical' and 'alternative' by highlighting the limits of such approaches to the use of radio, by local activists. ALL FM is sincerely committed to including a plurality of voices and viewpoints, by providing a platform where the local community have the 'radical' option (possibly unlike other broadcasters in the area), to get their voices heard in programmes done *by* them and *for* them.

## 8.6. Conclusions

I got a qualification in radio with Radio Regen and it was a wonderful occasion for me to learn and I never got tired because I had the desire to succeed. (...) A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step (...) the first step was doing the course with Radio Regen for 18 months and then go out there to produce a show, run a station, go forward and I don't want to stop here, I want to go ahead (...) why not, one day on BBC Caribbean! (Fly, Interview, 2006)

The passion with which *Caribbean Connections* presenter Stevie Fly summarises his experience at ALL FM is an example of Community Radio's potential to boost self-esteem, stimulate learning and help people to use communication tools to produce a show, to share their issues and music with the larger public and to celebrate their culture. Such sentiments were expressed by many of the volunteers and staff at ALL FM, who praised the fact that it had helped them find jobs and be part of a larger project that shared their aims: 'What I have done with ALL FM has helped me to get paid work. It increased my confidence. I love the feeling of being involved. I do feel valued at ALL FM' (Edwards, Interview, 2006).<sup>76</sup>

Despite structural limitations, like the number of volunteers it can take in and the issues emerging from a heavy dependence on project-funding, ALL FM is sincerely committed to giving access to the station and to the airwaves, in a fair manner, to the community it serves. It uses a proactive approach in reaching out to communities that are not represented, offers possibilities of training and gives them a platform on which to discuss matters that are important to them, in their own words and in their own way. For several ethnic communities in the area, this is the only radio station to which they can turn, to share their concerns, hear advice and feel that their culture is part of a larger geographical community in the area. Arguably, as shown in the findings of this case study, the major positive aspect of ALL FM has been bringing together different cultures; this causes a beneficial effect on the volunteers presenting at the station, as they appreciated the fact that participating in the station's activities has given the possibility to learn about different cultures.

RR also has the merit to have had the vision and the expertise to make community radio happen in Manchester and to involve thousands of Mancunians from very different backgrounds, enabling them to take part in something that makes them simply feel better, makes them more confident, offers useful project management and media literacy skills and helps them to acquire a different perspective on their culture. Apart from the deprivation, the very difficult social conditions and the challenges of living in those areas, radio broadcasts that originated from those experiences – including ALL FM – show that such neighbourhoods are not the site for crimes, nuisance or burglaries.

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<sup>76</sup> Andrew Edwards, Presenter - *Art Beat*, Interview, 1 October 2006.

Indeed, they demonstrate the kaleidoscopic nature of the many social, ethnic and cultural communities (of interest) that are shared in a community of place.

As the review of local broadcasting has shown, no other operator in the area provides such a service, due to its remit being much wider and having to take into consideration a very large urban area (like BBC Radio Manchester), or simply because market conditions and different aims (like the maximisation of profit) do not go well with catering for very local or niche publics. In any case, both the public and the commercial sector also have to be seen in a context where decision centres are based out of Manchester itself; the decrease of local content has been characterising their operations and is likely to be the trend for the years to come.

I have also shown how ALL FM, rather than being *alternative*, can be better described as a *complementary* service, as there is no other station providing many of the programmes it proposed. In fact, most of the presenters, with the notable exception of *Under the Pavement*, do not see themselves as alternative to other stations in the area, and have no hesitation in stating that they are interested listeners of BBC national networks or other commercial stations like XFM. Moreover, the presence of a member of staff of the BBC, seconded from its Manchester site, has been especially appreciated by less experienced presenters who have been given useful feedback on how to structure and present. And the volunteers have also given something back:

I was conditioned by my background to look at things more professionally at the beginning, but now that I am getting to know the people and understand the ethos behind the station, [that it] is giving people confidence and a sense of ownership of the radio, I am looking at things in a different way. They are trying to give people an opportunity to go on air. It is not only about how good a programme is, but also how enthusiastic they are. (Baldwin, Interview, 2006)<sup>77</sup>

The findings of my fieldwork also revealed how multicultural broadcasting comes with a number of challenges. First, as the qualitative findings of the Ofcom research (2004)

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<sup>77</sup> Vanessa Baldwin, BBC Religion and Ethics Department, Interview, 28 September 2006.

revealed, ‘many listeners felt that the station is trying to please too many audiences by providing such a diverse programme output that listeners felt they could never be certain ‘what is going to be on’ (Ofcom, 2004b: 54). Listening to its output in 2006, I believe that the station had certainly improved from the time that report was published, by grouping programmes in different ‘streams’, in its schedule. This made the content proposal of the station far more coherent but as it aimed to reflect the social, cultural and ethnic diversity of its community, its schedule would inevitably reflect this for years to come. Music and linguistic diversity are probably difficult to reconcile in one coherent broadcast output but the station would need to bear in mind that alienating too many of its listeners could, in the long-term, compromise its appeal to its own community. There is no ‘ready-made’ solution to this but it will surely need to find a middle ground between pleasing its volunteers and offering its listeners a reflection of their own community in the music and the speech that it proposes. Second, the everyday management of a station had to deal with a very diverse range of cultural sensibilities when, for example, accepting advertising or giving space to radical programmes, as the cases shown above have demonstrated; this would also pose another set of challenges from the organisational point of view.

Above all, though, the main challenge that will be posed to ALL FM in the years to come, and has been known to the station since its early years, is the question of the *financial sustainability* of the station. Its heavy reliance on social policy funding has caused tense relations with its former parent organization RR and has conditioned part of its content proposal, leaving volunteers and members of staff at times wondering about the degree of influence that they really had in deciding how to steer the station. In the following quote, taken from a study done by British sociologist Chris Hewson, a member of ALL FM’s staff illustrates the conflict about the internal requests from the volunteers and the needs of external agencies working with the model proposed by Radio Regen, with projects that are shaped by funding and adapted to the station, rather than being an expression of the local community:

It is [about] different perceptions (...) ‘community’ is so big (...) The biggest clash we have is between community development and programming. Programming is the volunteer’s ideas about their community. Community development is working with local and regional agencies to say,

‘well, these are the big campaigns we are doing, and how can we fit in with this?’ And volunteers are saying, well that doesn’t really affect our community. There is a big clash between community development and programming. (Hewson, 2006: 70)

Where RR’s intent was to facilitate the creation of a communication platform for the local community, the findings have shown how solutions ‘parachuted’ from above can create tensions in a model that highlights, and champions, its bottom-up credentials. It can be at the very least questionable to have such an influence in deciding ‘what is good’, or not, in terms of funding schemes and ultimately condition heavily its output and its organisational arrangements.

In terms of funding, during my fieldwork, I also wondered how such a model would perform under very diverse circumstances, where a changed political landscape and funding priorities would force the station to look at other possibilities, to continue its operations.

While ALL FM’s model certainly had the potential to engage local communities in a dialogue, the fundamental problem in such a case was that, if a station depended mainly on public policies funding, its sustainability would last until the local council, or national governments, put funding into it. This still left the problem of who would cover the core costs of the station as agencies and authorities would fund projects, and not the management of the station.

Here, on the matter of funding, I would like to add two more contributions by sociologists who have carried out organisational studies on RR. First, Beverley Skeggs (2003) warned about the long-term issue of funding, as a consistent part of the ALL FM projects were financed at that time by match funding of the European Social Fund. Second, by early 2006, Hewson also warned that: ‘Whilst this funding landscape has sharpened the focus of Regen’s work, it has also meant that funding has generally been “project based” – rather than centred around core infrastructure concerns – leading to an almost inevitable organisational instability’ (Hewson, 2006: 19). Moreover, one of Hewson’s interviewees went so far as to suggest that this approach needed to change: ‘It isn’t sustainable, I don’t think, to be chasing pots of grant funding that can suddenly

disappear, which is what we have been doing at the moment. We need something more reliable' (ibid., 62). This was echoed by another volunteer: 'As soon as we started the training, we then had to look around for other funding to match the 50% [from Europe] we already had, which led us into other areas really. It was kind of funding led really, I think' (ibid., 46).

The consequent increase in administration tasks to be performed by the managing staff also meant that 'some actors within the organisation grew divorced from day-to-day practicalities, leading to diminished grasp upon the key issues which were currently animating the station's workforce' (ibid., 44). All these statements confirm a widespread concern among scholars, including myself, of community media initiatives that rely heavily on a range of short/mid-term, project-based funding which, while contributing to raising awareness and profile of such initiatives, cast doubts over the long-term sustainability of such models. Studies that will look at *community radio stations'* performances during and after the period of the economic crisis in 2008, and cuts in public funding enacted by the Coalition Government after 2010, should look at the impact across the sector, especially for stations 'at risk', like ALL FM. In the concluding part of my thesis, I shall briefly discuss this issue as it was and arguably continues to be, one of the main threats to the success, and the survival, of community radio in Britain.

It is now pertinent to see how a very different model of community radio works. To do this, after ALL FM, I headed down to the south, to the edge of New Forest in East Dorset, where the town of Verwood is home to Forest FM.

## CHAPTER 9

### FOREST FM

#### 9.1 Introduction

Localism in radio was discussed earlier in Chapter 2, highlighting the tangible editorial benefits of extraordinary vicinity – and the way that this can transform the relationship between producer and listener, as well as the communicative needs of those groups of people that fall below the editorial radar of the BBC and local commercial stations. In Chapter 3, the historical overview of British local radio showed how, even if equipped with the best intentions, both the commercial and the public service broadcasters have fallen short of their promises of genuine localism. As noted in the previous chapter, this is a trend that has continued consistently even after 1997. Reducing the number of local outlets by unifying stations and increasing networking has had the result, in the end, of decreasing the degree of localness available to people living in small towns, ethnic minorities and rural areas of the country. Moreover, the processes of the relaxation of ownership rules in the Broadcasting and Communication Acts in 1990, 1996 and 2003 concentrated local stations in the hands of a few owners concerned with maximising audiences while minimising the operational costs.

Forest FM, the object of this case study, is an example of an ‘ultra-local’ station in a relatively wealthy area of Britain, the northern part of East Dorset on the edge of the New Forest. What I wish to argue, on the basis of the findings of my fieldwork, is that the station could be described as an example of ‘civic pride’ through radio, where localism is genuinely different from the locally available BBC and commercial radio stations, and where there is a sort of ‘passionate romanticism’ about this medium, also demonstrated by the fact the many of them had volunteered previously for hospital radio or, in the case of the youngest presenters, for college and student radio. In other words, they *love* doing radio.

What makes this station different from ‘traditional’ models of community radio is the sense of professionalism – it has to ‘sound good’ – a point with which pretty much

everyone in the station agreed, also because of the presence of presenters who had been broadcasting previously from local commercial radio and, interestingly, Radio Caroline. The station sounded and – during my visit – behaved, less ‘politicised’, in the traditional sense, especially if compared with the case of ALL FM and more generally, with the ‘activist’ use of radio that characterises many of its European colleagues.

## 9.2 The local radio landscape

Verwood is located 15 miles north of Bournemouth in East Dorset, England. It is a rapidly growing area, which has had a 290% population increase over the past 35 years. The latest official figure at the time of the fieldwork available for the civil parish,<sup>1</sup> including the village of Three Legged Cross, was 13,680 inhabitants (Dorset County Council, 2004). It has a vibrant community life, including more than a dozen societies, a heritage centre (it was the site of potteries and brickworks in the past) and, since 2007, a Community Hub, where entertainment activities and local creative work can find their place.<sup>2</sup> In the period I visited Forest FM, between 8 and 15 March 2007, it gave me the impression of a pretty, safe and quiet corner of Southern England, an impression reinforced by the reading of local newspapers at the time of the visit. As anticipated in the methodology chapter, according to the 2001 census figures, demographically the area is quite homogeneous, with East Dorset having a 99% White British population. When compared to the mix and the issues of the area where ALL FM is located, this area presented itself as a very different case. Hence the interest to see how the local adaption of the concept of Community Radio had been put into practice.

There are no other stations operating in Verwood and therefore, the other local radio stations available in the area are broadcasting from major centres located towards the coast. Commercial radio stations broadcast from Bournemouth (2CR, Fire 107.6 FM and Gold-Bournemouth) and elsewhere in Hampshire (Wave 105FM, Fareham, 40 miles to the east). As for the content, the local commercial broadcasters cater for a wide range of tastes. The format of 2CR is based on ‘contemporary and chart music and information’ (Ofcom, 2006) aimed at under 40s in the Bournemouth area. It is mainly music-based, and speech accounts for at least 10% of the daytime output.

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<sup>1</sup> 2005 mid-year estimate from the local council.

<sup>2</sup> <http://verwood.org/> [accessed 25 February 2007].

Fire 107.6 targets a slightly younger age-group (15-34), and is also a music-based station, drawing mainly on what they describe ‘rhythmic contemporary’, plus dance, soul and related genres, with the aim of producing ‘appropriate speech content to appeal to young listeners living in the locality’ (Ofcom, 2006b). Moreover, it ‘should reflect the lifestyle of the area through a diverse array of features, focusing on both local information and entertainment/lifestyle news; regular programming/information of interest to the local gay/lesbian community must also be aired’ and particularly aimed at students, ‘in term time, a weekly two-hour show, with specific appeal to people studying in the area, must be aired’ (ibid.).

Gold Bournemouth, broadcasting on 828 AM, aims at an older group and is based on classic hits. In particular, it targets 35-54 year olds, where most of the programmed music is between 15 and 50 years old, with more recent music never accounting for more than 30% of the music output. Speech does not exceed 25% in daytime and 50% in other hours, apart from weekends or during major sporting events (Ofcom, 2007).

Finally, Wave 105’s approach is described as a locally-oriented music and information station for over 30s in the Solent and adjacent area. It claims to be very much the voice of the region, with speech content including ‘regular news, views, issues, activities, events and sailing information for the target audience’ not falling below 30% on weekdays. The music proposal is oriented towards soft and adult rock, and adult contemporary, including album tracks, with current hits not going over the 50% of the music output (Ofcom 2006c).

Overall, then, the range of commercial local radio can be described as catering to a variety of musical tastes, from the younger and upbeat Fire 107.6, passing through the contemporary style for over 30s of Wave 105, under 40s of 2CR, on FM, and the golden hits proposal for Gold on AM. With the oldest age group targeted stopping at 54, commercial radio does not specifically target people over that age or in retirement. Their proposal of 10 to 30% of speech during weekday daytimes is arguably of interest for those listeners favouring more music, short bulletins and traffic information across the region, fitting the profile of people commuting to the major urban areas in the area like Bournemouth, Poole and Southampton. Wave 105’s claim to be the ‘voice of the

region' seemed to be just a PR exercise, as its intended audience largely excluded the under-30s and its website did not list any further participatory possibilities, other than contacting the station via e-mail or for phone-ins.

The older population, asking for more 'traditional' and talkative local public radio would eventually tune into *BBC Radio Solent*, even though 65s would have had some doubts about this when, a few months earlier, the station had been at the center of a row on ageism, prompted by an internal memo allegedly circulated by Managing Editor Mia Costello, with a suggestion not to put 'very elderly people on air' (Plunkett, 2006).

The station, based in Southampton, approximately 30 miles east of Verwood, broadcast to a wider area when compared to its local commercial counterparts, and this is reflected by its website including material that appeals to the people living in the area.<sup>3</sup> Local news, weather and travel updates are complemented by sections present on other local BBC websites, where local history and heritage are explored more in-depth, such as *VideoNation*, including clips recorded by people in Solent. Social activism is encouraged by the station's *Action Desk* run in collaboration with the volunteering and training organisation Community Service Volunteers (CSV) and includes a wide range of appeals. Unsigned bands are given support by a dedicated programme, the possibility to sign up to be part of an archive, with their profile and suggestions on how to 'make it to the top of the charts'.

Finally, listeners and website visitors can have their say on 'the issue of the day' and get comments read out on air via posting on the local version of the English stations' message board. There is no specific document on the remits of this particular station, with the objectives for BBC Local Radio in England being listed on the comprehensive BBC English Regions documentation section on its website and Annual Reports, as discussed in Chapter 7 (BBC, 2006).

### 9.3 Forest FM

Forest FM built upon almost a decade of experience in running RSLs (previously as Verwood FM) and many of the volunteers who joined during this earlier period have

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/hampshire/local\\_radio/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/hampshire/local_radio/index.shtml) [Accessed 25 February 2007].

become part of the full-time station. But before illustrating the findings of my fieldwork further, I would like to turn my attention to a brief chronological review of the station, followed by an examination of the station's application for its Community Radio licence.

The successful path to a full-time community radio station in Verwood has also been made possible by the commitment of a group of local people who have spent most of their free time in the project and up until the time of the visit, putting their hand in their pockets and sharing some of the costs of running the station, even with interest-free loans. It is through this personal attachment, over a long period, that we can access the pre-history of Forest FM. Among them, the Station's Manager Steve Saville (as well as his wife Diane, who at the time of the research was working as Station Administrator with a post funded by Ofcom's Community Radio Fund) is the person who is the main driving force. During a typical workday (and I personally witnessed this), he opens the station at around 6.45 am (night time is automated), checks that everything is in order and that the morning presenter is there in time for the 7 am start and then, in his car (fully branded with the station's stickers and adhesives on four sides) heads off to Poole to his workplace, listening to Forest FM in the car (until the signal fades out), then continues to listen at the workplace, occasionally calling in during the day, finally coming back to the station on the way from work to his home. At home, he has a remote facility to control the station's playout system, which manages the live output just in case anything goes wrong.

During the fieldwork, on the weekend, he used his car and an amplifier/loudspeakers set to help raise awareness for the local NHS trust's anti-smoking campaign in the neighbouring town of Ferndowne, broadcasting a loop of a relevant interview recorded earlier in the week and recording further interviews on location. On Sunday, he spent the afternoon providing a sound system for the election of the Carnival Queen in Verwood and recording interviews with the organiser and with the winner of the competition. Both of these events were later reported in the local news broadcast, edited by him back at the station. As with many other people who consistently give up part of their free time, and at times some of their savings for no financial return, one might wonder what drives them to do so. Saville's love for this medium originates in his teenage years:

My passion for radio started when I was 14 years old. I used to go down to the East Coast of England, stay with my auntie for the holidays and that was the time when all the pirate radio ships were broadcasting, *Radio London*, *Radio Caroline* and all those stations there. I thought ‘hold on, this sounds really fantastic, really exciting!’ The BBC was very boring at that time, especially to a youngster. I also loved music and was playing it in [my] parents’ living room and I had this idea that it would be really cool, really nice to run your own radio station! (Saville, Interview, 2007)<sup>4</sup>

Although on a very limited scale, his dream eventually materialised during his university studies in Computer Science at the Thames Polytechnic in Woolwich, London, in 1973-4. Along with a fellow student, he set up a pirate, low-power, Sunday afternoon-only radio station transmitting to the community of students residing in the halls, reaching approximately half a mile in radius. It was a mix of rock, soul and disco which, he claims, was very popular among the students there. Before his final year, he decided to explore the world a bit further, moving first to Rotterdam, in the Netherlands, where he worked as a trainee in the IT department of a hospital that had its own radio station. There, he met some presenters from Radio Mi-Amigo<sup>5</sup> (a pirate station that was at the time broadcasting from the same ship as Radio Caroline) and visited the studios of Radio Netherlands in Hilversum. He was very impressed by Dutch radio – ‘American style in Dutch language’ – excited by their presentation style and thought ‘this could sound so good in England...’ and later on, during his frequent visits to the USA, he became an avid listener, visitor and admirer of the local stations there, especially between the mid-1980s and the late 1990s. He enjoyed the wider variety of music in the genre-based stations across the country and recalls that ‘the style was much more vibrant...when I came back, British radio sounded so flat’ (ibid.).

In 1990, Saville started to evaluate the possibility of setting up an independent local station in the Verwood area.

I was pestering the IBA and then the Radio Authority, saying ‘take a look at America: in a town of the same size as Verwood, you would probably have

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<sup>4</sup> Steve Saville, Station Manager, Interview, 13 March 2007.

<sup>5</sup> For a profile of this station see <http://www.offshoreechos.com/Sylvain%20Tack.htm>

three of four radio stations, albeit very small ones, so why can't we have the same thing in the UK?' They replied saying 'you can't have that many radio stations in this country because we don't have the frequencies'. That was the argument in those days. Of course, there were plenty of frequencies, which has been proved now that they [have] finally freed them up! (ibid.)

In 1996, the Radio Authority issued a call for applications for small, local commercial radio stations (the 'sallies' discussed in Chapter 7, see also Stoller, 2010a: 300-1). Along with a group of like-minded people, Saville decided to apply, even though they were sure that they would not get it because of their lack of previous experience, the very small area they wanted to broadcast to, and also because other applicants in the nearby urban areas (Southampton, Bournemouth and Poole) had established radio companies behind them. Despite 'losing' £1200 for the application fee and not getting the licence, Saville continues to think that it was a good learning process, as they had the opportunity to look at other peoples' applications afterwards. They refused to give up and subsequently decided to apply for a Restricted Service Licence (RSL), running the first one in 1999 as Verwood FM and linking up with the Verwood Carnival.

It was quite a novelty for the town. We got lots and lots of support and interest. I think everybody in the town heard of us and they saw us at the carnival. It was [a] deliberate [decision] to hook up with the Carnival, so to get [a target audience] of 5,000 people in those days, better than any advertisement, and it went very successfully, so we did another in November for the fireworks display. From then we did RSLs every year, until we won our community radio licence. In total, we did 11 RSLs. (ibid.)

Saville claims that it was 'a training ground' for newcomers, that the people in Verwood then 'expected us to be there every Carnival time' and some of them saw the an opportunity to get involved in radio as they did not need any previous experience to join. Among the comments (including letters to which I was given access and copies), listeners said that the RSLs helped to put Verwood on the map, promoted their clubs and societies, gave radio enthusiasts access to the airwaves, with a clear indication that this helped to affirm *local pride*. Among those who joined at that time was Laura

Jerome, now an afternoon drive-time presenter, who recalls that experience with a mix of sadness and pleasure.

[The RSL] started by not getting interest from much people, but over the four weeks, it would gradually build up with the carnival. It was the highlight of my year. It's such a local community thing, a big event for the local community. Gradually, in those four weeks, people were tuning in, we were having [a] lot of phone calls and by the end, we [would] get quite a good audience. And then...we had to switch it off! And then all over again to the next RSL. (Jerome, Interview, 2007)<sup>6</sup>

Station members closely followed the process that led to the eventual approval of the Community Radio Order, lobbying and gaining support from their local MP, Christopher Chope (Christchurch and East Dorset, Conservative). Following the experience gained through the 10 RSLs run prior to the application, they believed they had the capacity to submit a very good application, attaching all the letters of support, press cuttings and feedback that they had received until then. Saville emphasised that they sent it well in advance of the deadline because they were ready. Saville had very clear ideas about how they wanted Forest FM to sound eventually:

You have to be careful. If the station doesn't sound good, no matter what you are talking about or playing, people are not going to listen. It has to be a happy medium between providing the service, getting information across and sounding at least semi-professional. Otherwise, nobody will listen. They will listen out of curiosity for a little while and then go back to the commercial stations or the BBC. (Saville, Interview, 2007)

The prehistory of Forest FM, then, conjures up a vision of a radio enthusiast who had experienced very different flavours of local radio in the Netherlands and the USA, where smaller stations – when compared to the ones allowed in the UK – contributed to a very different, local radio ecology in their areas. Getting together with like-minded people, Saville led an initially unsuccessful application for a local commercial licence, then resorted to a series of increasingly successful RSL broadcasts that showed demand

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<sup>6</sup> Laura Jerome, Presenter - afternoon Drive-time - Tuesday/Friday, Interview, 13 March 2007.

and enthusiasm for the presence of a local radio station in Verwood. This provided a solid background, to prepare the next step and apply for a full-time licence once the new community radio sector was introduced.

### *The application for a full-time licence*

The station's application form for the full-time Community Radio Licence outlined some of the achievements of the station in terms of local outreach during the RSL broadcasts, claiming 'over 1,000 individual e-mails and letters of support' and a list of organisations that supported the idea of a local station based in Verwood, including a dozen voluntary organisations based in the town and approximately 10 others based in the East Dorset area. Moreover, the application stated,

Most [of the local residents] are extremely frustrated that the service could not be full time. We also received scores of letters from charities and individuals asking us to promote fund raising and local events because they do not get the attention and intensity from Bournemouth and Southampton-based stations that we provide. (Forest FM, 2004: 19)

This claim was supported documentation, in the form of letters of support for the full-time application, and by other letters sent to the station when they were operating as an RSL; these demonstrate how local civil society was operating below the radar of other stations available in the area.

Forest FM aimed to provide more localised news and current affairs programmes, as well as giving space *to a wider range of music genres* and widening the choices available in the area, catering for the 'significant proportion' of elderly people in the area ignored by local commercial broadcasting 'for example 50's and 60's music and items on local events such as the Rustic Fayre, the local pottery and other items of historical interest' (ibid., 21). Other groups to be targeted were the local musicians and bands who needed a platform where their work could be heard; the local farming community and individuals in such special groups as disabled, aged, housebound, youth and unemployed (ibid., 21).

Forest FM was eventually awarded its licence on 10 January 2006 and started its full-time broadcast six months later, on 9 July 2006. In the 'key commitments' document, the station states that,

Forest FM will be a truly local, non profit-distributing, community radio service for Verwood and the surrounding hamlets and villages of rural East Dorset. The station will 'belong' to the community and provide a means of access to the airwaves for local individuals, groups, societies and musicians, as well as providing media training and opportunities for young and old alike. Forest FM will truly be the voice of the local community. (Forest FM, 2006)

Moreover, the station aimed to provide 'an alternative listening experience' with a rural feel and 'will be truly and unashamedly local and aim to create an atmosphere of local familiarity' (ibid., 32). Music-wise, it would draw on an extensive archive of oldies, spanning from the 1950s to the 1970s during daytime, with a range of specialist programmes dedicated to specific genres in the evening schedule, including 'country music, 50s and 60s rock'n'roll, jazz, classical, folk and specialist rock' (ibid., 31). Here, it is worth noting the rural pride, the anti-urban and nostalgic tone of Forest FM. Something that should come as no surprise, given the traditional preference for the Conservative Party in this area of England, is that here, definitions of community are not aligned the with 'communitarian' concepts of New Labour, they point rather to more 'conservative' notions.

### *Professional Amateurs*

The title of this section might be misleading, suggesting that the volunteers in the other two case studies are not professional. However, the sense of professionalism among the directors and volunteers at Forest FM is much more widespread than in ALL FM and CSR. There was a shared belief that the station had to 'sound good' to hold listeners, and also that it had to be the 'mouthpiece of the community', essentially dedicating space to local issues and to a greater number of genres and songs, especially with specialist shows.

Attention to details, outlook and precision were also palpable at the station's studios located in an industrial area, just outside the town centre. I was told that volunteers with building and similar skills had donated their work for free to set it up and, fortunately for the station, the transmitter also provided his services gratis. The station entrance was clearly signposted outside the building; on the first floor, there was a small kitchen on the right and all the other rooms were located on the left. The administrator's desk was divided from the waiting (living) room, but a big glass window gave clear a view of it. Only glass doors separated the adjacent live studio and, proceeding further, there was the possibility to access a recording/editing suite, this time separated by a solid wall and by doors.

The waiting room also included a sort of reception desk, mainly used as a space to put up notices of community events, flyers and other general information about the area. There are no CDs left around or in a library, open to presenters, as all the content is stored in the playout system. Lavatories are located close to the entrance on the ground floor. In other words, except for the people 'locked' in the editing suite or preparing a cup of tea, on the first floor, everyone can see each other: administrator, station manager, the ones who just finished recording a programme, the ones just about to start, prospective guests and the people broadcasting live. The budget of community radio stations often does not offer the 'luxury' of many available options but in my experience, this 'transparent' structure facilitates communication among the people involved in the station in any capacity.

The station was designed to facilitate connections among all levels and this was evident when observing station volunteers coming in and being greeted (or waved to) by the part-time administrator in the office (whose door was always open) or by the presenter(s) speaking or having a break in the live studio, all in a convivial, informal and relaxed atmosphere. I was positioned on the sofa in the centre of the waiting room during my visit there and, without interfering too much, could record my interviews while having a look at what was happening in the station in the meantime. What appeared to be new and comfortable furniture imparted an overall sense of relaxation and warmth to the place. Ideally, it could be located in the town centre, where it could be 'visible' to the wider community (e.g. ALL FM on the corner of a busy area, just outside the railway station, is 'in the heart' of Levenshulme), but a step towards this is

probably the opening of a satellite studio in the Community Hub, a community facility opened in April 2007, including a 300-seat theatre, a 100-seat hall and a number of other smaller rooms, used for films, plays, concerts and other activities, that can be hired by local organisations.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, on the Community Radio Licence application, the facilities are described as provisional, with an intention to move closer to the centre, if financially possible, in the future.

What characterises many of the volunteers in this station, and this can be heard by listening to its output, is the ‘professional amateurism’ of Forest FM. This derives from the fact that more than half of its presenters have been involved in previous RSLs or have previous experience in other forms of radio broadcasting. Among the interviewees, four had previously worked in hospital radio, three in commercial radio, three in pirate radio and two in college radio stations, so Forest FM was not their first broadcasting outlet. For first-time broadcasters, training was provided in order to ensure that when these presenters went live on air, they would be confident and at ease with microphone and live broadcasting. This was because of a strong belief at Forest FM, shared by all the interviewees, that the station has to ‘sound good’. Forest FM is a natural step forward for those previously involved in college and hospital radio; for them, because this activity constitutes a hobby, this was a culmination or a final destination rather than a transitional stage, and it is worth exploring why presenters coming from more popular commercial stations seem to appreciate the ‘freedom’ of community radio.

#### *The unfulfilled duties of local commercial radio*

For Colin and Ros Ray, previously broadcasting on the Bournemouth-based station 2CR, the reason is quite simple: After having a slot for nine years in the station (since its beginning), the management decided to abandon specialist music, in their case country music, even though Ros told me that they were popular and had a big following, and even had full advertising slots. They joined the RSLs in 2003 and like to think that there should be space for specialist music on the FM radio dial also because ‘people doesn’t want to listen to pop music all day long, do they?’ and ‘listen to the same tracks from a computer day by day with the Top40 and nothing else’ (Colin and Ray,

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://thehubverwood.co.uk/>

Interview, 2007).<sup>8</sup> They enjoy the fact that ‘the programme is ours and we can do what we want to do...is nice to have a freedom like that, we are not tied to anything...or just press a button on a computer’. In these terms, the music policy of the station is quite open to a wide range of music genres, as long as it is ‘professionally’ presented and I did not perceive any problems of managerial interference among the interviewees on their music choices. It has to be said, though, that little of what is played on Forest FM was likely to have been the cause of any obvious controversy (e.g. swearing, highly politicised artists, etc.).

Geoff Dorsett, who joined Forest FM in 2005, is a presenter of a specialist programme and shares the concerns of local commercial radio and its alleged absence of true localness and music diversity. What he likes about Forest FM, and being a part of it, is the diversity of specialist programmes available (classic, folk, country, hard-rock), including his soul/dance/r’n’b programme where he spans from the ‘classics’ from Motown, Atlantic and Stacks, but also current stars like Justin Timberlake, Timbaland and Snoop Doggy Dogg, mixed with Otis Redding and Aretha Franklin. He also draws a parallel between his programming and iPod-like listening paths, where, he claims, people tend to choose individual tracks of very different times in history ‘which are good in their kind’. He maintains that this will never happen on commercial or national radio. He is very passionate about the local ties of the station:

The station has a tremendous amount of guests that will come in and talk about things that are going on in the community, initiatives for the disadvantaged, the disabled, the local theatre...what we can do is also training young people in their teens and 20s who want to go away to do media studies, but where else would they get the opportunity to come in, help in programme or even prepare one that will go out to their friends in school and colleges? And that I think is a great advantage, because you never get that elsewhere...and finally, the unsigned bands, groups that would never get a chance in a playlisted radio station. (Dorsett, Interview, 2007)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Colin and Ros Ray, Presenters - ‘*Keep it Country*’, Interview, 11 March 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Geoff Dorsett, Presenter - ‘*Soul Man*’, Interview, 10 March 2007.

The programme that devolves most of its time to unsigned bands is *WIRED!*, broadcast every Monday 8-10 pm and presented by Tony Warren, a former pirate broadcaster in the London area (also with some experience in college radio back in the US in the late 1970s), who moved to Verwood in 2000 and joined the station during its RSLs by presenting a folk programme, before starting his current programme. He aims to give access to local musicians and the local scene, especially people at their first gig, where they play their songs live, have a chat with him on air and make themselves known. He does not stick to a particular genre, as long as it is about local music and gigs, because ‘we have had to give that local feel to what people does’; he loves to help new bands and local musicians, to make them think that they can do it, by giving them the feeling that it is not as difficult to make it on air at Forest FM, as it may be on mainstream radio. The programme produces a local gig guide that is also used by other programmes during the course of the week and, at the time of interview, was booked for the following two months. As for the previous presenters, he is very critical of current, local, commercial broadcasting:

I think we have an ethos that is far away from all that mainstream syndicated stuff that I don’t like at all and I don’t like over here either...around here you can tune in to a dozen different stations and it’s all the same thing. They are feeding the masses with what the masses want, but I am much more into giving access and that’s what local and community radio should all be about! (Warren, Interview, 2007)<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting perspective, historically, was the chance to interview Roger Matthews, a former DJ of Radio Caroline now living in the area. He went into radio by broadcasting on a small cable station while serving in the Air Force and then getting a slot in what he described as the ‘highlight’ of his life during the 1970s, proposing AOR formats from Radio Caroline and living radio 24 hours a day. Then, he moved to Ireland and got involved in three land-based pirate radio stations in the 1980s, followed by a move to the UK to 24/7 pirate stations, and via a short experience in the Middle East, currently, also in the ‘new’ Radio Caroline that broadcasts only on the web<sup>11</sup> and on

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<sup>10</sup> Tony Warren, Presenter - ‘*WIRED!*’, Interview, 11 March 2007.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.radiocaroline.co.uk>

satellite. Regarding changes in local radio since the introduction of the ILR stations, he felt that they had lost their original mission by becoming too business-oriented, very controlled and that they had therefore lost a lot of their energy:

It has become so clinical and all about advertising, playing a few records and a very tight playlist and careful to not upset anybody and not being really creative. Now is a time when we are getting a second chance, in a way, to be creative on radio in this country. At its beginning, commercial radio was a bit like the local BBC, with a lot of information and specialist programmes. Then the rules got relaxed and all of that got dumped! With this new wave of radio, we are going to reverse that. (...) Forest FM has a lot of specialist programmes in the evening and we want to reflect [more of the music] that's out there. (Matthews, Interview, 2007)<sup>12</sup>

Then he drew a comparison between the spirit of Caroline and the atmosphere of freedom that he was enjoying again, being part of Forest FM, where the music programming was much more relaxed as opposed to the current trends of UK local commercial radio.

There is a lot more freedom (...) less pressure of businessmen trying to make mega bucks out of the station (...) I feel I have gone back about 30 years in fact, because the music policy at Forest FM is much like Caroline was in [the] 1970s (...) and it is a very relaxed atmosphere here. I think that if you look into the future, community radio stations in the UK are going to have a bigger impact on radio than people imagine. Because of the natural attitude, they are more warm, [it] is not a money-making machine. We are doing what we love, it's not about the money...it's about loving radio and loving the music, doing the programming (...) I think [it] is the beginning of a revolution for radio in this country, where people is going to have real radio again (...) The sector has just to remember that radio is about communication and not only about people making money (...) Do radio that people can relate to and it will be successful. ( ibid.)

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<sup>12</sup> Roger Matthews, Presenter - 2-4pm - Monday/Wednesday/Friday, Interview, 13 March 2007.

What emerges here is a sense of purity, when opposed to commercial broadcasting. Matthews, as well as other presenters in the station, maintain that they do this for free because they *love* it, not because of a financial return and that they enjoy the liberty of programming music free of any ‘business’ interference. They relate this experience to the *nostalgia* of a period when this was done in mythical and well-known instances of the past, like the famed Radio Caroline. Finally, Matthews touched on community radio and its proximity to the people whom he was broadcasting to:

Radio is about personality and this is why Caroline was so popular...we were a bunch of guys on a ship that people could relate to (...) they could relate to us as friends. In such a local community, the people knows the DJs, and they can meet them in the pub or on the street. We are more in touch with our community. There is no way a guy in London programming the music for a group of commercial stations can know what is going on in all the local areas, he’s not in tune at all, he has no real realisation of what the people in the ground want...that’s where community radio is going to have a very big effect (...) People uses it as a communication tool and can hear on the air about things happening in the area. It’s things within a few miles for them and where they are more likely to go to. If they listen to one of the bigger stations, they will be speaking about things happening 40 or 50 miles away and these may be things they don’t want to go to. (ibid.)

In the US context, radio historian Susan Douglas has explored the territory of nostalgia with a fascinating book (2004) and some of her feelings about a different, less formatted and less commercialised radio, are on the same wavelength as Matthews:

Maybe this is generational. But I want our airwaves back. I want a music radio station I can listen to that assumes I want newness as well as predictability (...) All of the market segmentation, the dividing up of programming into ever more narrow formats (...) With the shrivelling of communal imaginings comes an increased alienation from the concept of community itself. At the end of the century, our modes of listening, once encouraged by radio to be so varied and rich, are truncated. (...) We yearn for

a radio renaissance. I think we still want – and need – to listen. (Douglas, 1999, online)

While Douglas' appeal was grounded in the US context, as we have seen earlier in Chapter 2, the loss of localism was the cause of widespread concern among scholars and activists alike, a concern that was likewise echoed among long-standing practitioners in British radio. They had been part of experiences that had strong connections with their own listening communities and felt that, with the increase of mergers and networking among stations in the UK in recent years, *community radio* was the only tool left to regain a local voice and a wider range of music choices.

Finally, when putting Verwood on the map, people involved in the station *want to be able to describe local events from their own perspective*, changing the way the local area is at times presented in mainstream media.

In the Forest region, we have been picked up often in news items on regional and national radio only for negative issues, like burglars and murders. Nobody would ever say 'Oh, it has been a lovely day in Ferndown' or that there has been a carnival in Ringwood, these would have never been reported. Now that we have the facility to report directly [the] concerns of people living in the area, *it does highlight the area, is good for trade, is good for local businesses, is good for the community, is good for everybody.* (...) Also, most of the people who work in the station are genuinely concerned about the area, because they live here or very close. (...) We are able to be more focused on our area because it is much smaller, so we can dedicate more time on local issues, maybe spending 10, 15 minutes for something that would have been reported for 20 seconds somewhere else (...) it is a conduit for the community, that serves the community and permits [us] to interact between the community. (Sterling, Interview, 2007)<sup>13</sup>

The local perspective and the possibility to go in-depth when covering the local is seen as important here – to do radio that is *relevant* to the people living in Verwood. Community Radio is envisaged as a tool to bind them together in a manner that is not

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<sup>13</sup> Sterling, Presenter, Breakfast Show - Weekdays, Interview, 14 March 2007.

feasible in larger stations broadcasting from urban centres in the region; they are not forced to present their news bulletins in a few minutes or seconds, nor to cut short a show presenter's greeting. Volunteers of Forest FM come from different walks of life, share a passion for radio and a wide range of music genres, and some of them had already experienced radio as professional broadcasters. However, they feel that former ILR stations were losing ground and becoming more formatted, more playlisted and losing relevance for their local communicative needs. In their opinion, that's where a station such as Forest FM can fill the gap. In the next section, I will explore how such ideals translated into the station's schedule.

### *The schedule*

Probably because of the aura of professionalism in this station, Forest FM has opted for a relatively 'mainstream-like' schedule<sup>14</sup> from the morning until the late afternoon, which includes drive-time shows in the morning and the afternoon. On the clock, there are regular news bulletins, provided by the IRN feed, where they have attached a local news bulletin produced by the station and the local weather forecast which is taken from the BBC website. The sound of the station, if compared to the other two case studies, is much more professional, but retains a very local feel, thanks to interviews with local societies, or people who want to publicise a local event or campaign. While I was there, I listened to a very interesting interview with a local historian during a mid-morning programme, talking about the history of a heritage site in the area, that had the 'beauty' of not being cut short because of programming concerns, making the feel of the station closer to talk radio or Radio Four.<sup>15</sup> Another interesting aspect that characterises the station is the wider range of music that the presenters draw from, which makes long listening less subject to the 'listener fatigue' that might be experienced when listening to commercial outlets. The way the station envisages its morning station is described by Keith Sterling,

The way we feel about it is to have a look at the demographics of the potential listenership. There is a quite wide age range: lots of children but also lots of retired people. The morning is a frenetic time. The vast majority

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<sup>14</sup> The full schedule is listed in Appendix 4.

<sup>15</sup> On 14 March 2007, the talk would go ahead for over 15 minutes without any interruption.

of people, even if they don't go to work, or (...) [drop] children (...) [to] school, has a sort of schedule, has to go shopping... So, there is a limited amount [of time] for radio listening. They will be listening while waking, having a cup of tea. Then they stop, go in their car and may listen until they leave the area. We have, then, to give them as much information as possible in those short snips of time... We have to have a fast pace, it has to be lively and give four traffic reports, so we can guarantee that they have them every 15 minutes. The rest is trying to be light-hearted, up-beat...and the music has to appeal to this large cross section. So, it's a bit of the 60s, a bit of the 70s and then chart, then short bits, quick-fire, snippets that keep people informed and entertained at the same time. (...) The most important thing is when people turns to us when they have got an issue or a concern about the community. It provides access to people who have got an issue that they want to share, but it can be also a very simple request like a birthday request, which is also some form of community interaction. (Interview, 2007)

Perhaps the most important element in this sense, apart from a '*positive*' agenda is also the variety and wide range of music available in the evenings, each one with different presenters and genres, divided in two main slots between 8-10pm and then a later one, from 10pm onwards. Given that most of the presenters are quite experienced and knowledgeable about the music genre to which they dedicate those hours, listening to one of them makes it also a sort of educational experience, where music tracks are often contextualised in their period of publication, or the evolution of a particular genre is being narrated.

As the presenters are free to choose their own tracks and are not obliged by music policies to play particular tunes, the variety and diversity of the music that stations like these bring back on air is quite remarkable, including, as outlined earlier, a selection of 'oldies' (1950s-1970s), specialist programmes on country music, rock'n'roll, jazz, classical, folk and specialist rock, much in line with the demography at the local community and covering genres that have gradually kept disappearing from the other, local radio stations in the area. The weekend schedule is quite different from the weekday one and adds more diversity of programmes, also giving space to farming

issues and to a Sunday morning programme where a group of 13-18-year-olds already sounded very experienced, despite their young age.

### *Local outreach and politics*

A detailed study of the impact of the station on the local community is beyond the reach of this study but there is nevertheless some data emerging from the interviews and from a survey done by the station, that is worth discussing briefly. In January 2008, Forest FM commissioned an independent survey, carried out by students from Bournemouth University. People were questioned randomly on the streets of Verwood about their listening habits: 90% of them had heard about the station, with 48% of people saying that they listened to it.<sup>16</sup> As the station commented on its website:

We believe our truly local service and knowledge of our area, combined with our music policy, is something that attracts listeners. There are 16,000 people in Verwood itself and around 50,000 people in our immediate transmission area so we are estimating we have at least 20,000 listeners. Add another 4,000 people per month listening online and we have some pretty impressive figures. And by the way – we also asked people what they listened to if they didn't listen to Forest FM and most people told us – Radio 2, Wave and Radio Solent. The average age of those surveyed was 45. Most listened to us in the car with many listening at home as well. (Forest FM, online)

Drawing on his previous experience in working with local authorities, morning presenter Keith Sterling also reported that since the start of full-time transmissions, the station had allegedly had an impact in getting people more involved in voluntary activities and local initiatives.

Local groups have told us that it was very difficult to get volunteers in the local community. Since we have been on air, that uptake has improved tremendously. People have become more politically aware, more aware about local issues, they attend more meetings, they apply for voluntary

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.forestfm.co.uk/> [accessed 16 February 2008].

work...we have provided that kind of service and things have improved enormously (...) This is also important for political participation...local issues are not necessarily politically coloured, but people may have different opinions in the area. That is starting to improve and showing it with stations like this, because you can provide the conduit between someone who is saying something, moaning, but not doing anything. Now we have made it easier, because they just have to phone or e-mail us. So they become gradually more involved and we can have the impetus to make that work. (Sterling, Interview, 2007)

The veracity of these claims would need to be established through a mix of qualitative and quantitative research on audiences in the area, and the use they make of community radio. Such research was beyond the scope of my visit. What can be stated with some degree of safety here is that the presence of the station has certainly provided an outlet to a wide range of local associations, civil societies and citizens who would have otherwise stayed below the radar, as it was in the case of ALL FM.

While it is characteristic of many community radio stations around the world to explicitly favour a particular view on current affairs by making clear their political stance, Forest FM staff are happy for the station to be ‘the mouthpiece of the community’, without favouring or being supportive of a particular political party. This does not mean that it does not have a particular worldview, as can be seen from the concepts of local pride, rural identity, nostalgia and a more ‘traditional’ sense of community on which the station is grounded. The station gives space to local grievances, concerns that local residents have with the Council but they likewise give the Council an opportunity to respond. As Station Manager Steve Saville points out, ‘we try to remain impartial, we don’t take any sides, obviously, we are balanced and are here to be used and wish that people uses us more and more’ (Interview, 2007). Morning presenter Pete Samuels goes even further:

We discuss a whole range of issues. We obviously do avoid [party] politics. Is something we shouldn’t really touch on in terms of community radio because different people have different points of view and is not our job to promote one section of the community and alienate at the same time another

section of it. Politics is a subject which we keep away from but if people wants to talk about local issues that are not politically motivated, they can talk about it. They can talk about local history...I think one week doesn't pass where I don't learn something more about the community in which I live. (Samuels, Interview, 2007)<sup>17</sup>

When talking and listening to other presenters, I did not feel that they were promoting or otherwise acting in a manner that favours a particular point of view, nor were they reading local and national events through the lens of a traditional political standpoint. There is type of practice that comes from years of being accustomed to professional forms of journalism, as implemented, for example, by the BBC and IRN, i.e. 'balanced' and 'impartial'. Radical or alternative forms of journalism, combined with personal experiences that do not draw on explicitly political uses of radio, make the station sound quite 'impartial' indeed. This shows a departure from 'traditional' forms of community radio experienced in countries like Italy and France, and the alternative and radical uses of it, as described earlier in Chapter 2.

#### 9.4 Conclusions

What emerged during the RSLs in the appreciative feedback listeners sent to the station, is that they can directly relate to the things described by the presenters, in their everyday lives in Verwood and the surrounding villages. The station is used as a communication tool, to circulate information about the events and the heritage of the area. It seems to be the realisation of what Frank Gillard envisaged in the 1960s, 50 years later; even if the vision of 'a transmitter in every local community' is far from realised, at least community radio stations today are not encountering the practical, engineering problems of the early BBC stations.

Although at the time, a local area was far from being a homogeneous entity, here the process followed another path (see Ofcom, 2004a), since the regulator did not list beforehand the areas from where applications could be submitted. Ofcom had invited the applicants to submit a proposed site for the transmitter. They then evaluated the suitability of its location and would approve the suggested site after checking the

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<sup>17</sup> Pete Samuels, Presenter, Morning Programme - Tuesday/Friday, Interview, 13 March 2007.

availability for low-power transmission in the area. Arguably, in a demographically homogenous area like the one that Forest FM is broadcasting to and from, there is already a strong sense of community, reinforced by a radio station that gives airtime to local events and discusses very local issues at much greater length than could a station broadcasting from further away and to a much bigger audience.

What emerges additionally is a general dissatisfaction with the current practice and broadcast output of local commercial radio. Many of the presenters had experienced different and more 'free' forms of radio, either by doing the RSLs, or having participated in college, hospital and pirate radio, as well as broadcasting on commercial radio when, in the case of Colin and Ros, they had a more flexible music policy. Not to underestimated is the physical outlook of the station, which facilitates communication among members. All of the station members I interviewed had also described the feeling of being a part of a '*family*' in very positive terms, clearly regarding the environment as relaxed and friendly. This was an environment in which, above and beyond giving something back to their local community, and therefore feeling a sense of usefulness, they could also broadcast the music they loved through the medium they loved. It was not only about *what* was done but also *how* this was done.

While there were many positive aspects and most of them enjoyed their work at the station, the Station Manager, Steve Saville, did express his concerns about the restrictions in the funding framework that were in place at the time of the interview: 'We are very keen to keep to the key commitments, keep it community focused and a community-based organisation, but we would like to be able to survive with a higher ratio of advertising in the funding' (Interview, 2007). In a relatively wealthy area like the one which Forest FM broadcasts to, there are fewer possibilities to obtain funding that is allocated to regeneration projects, as for example in Manchester, Yorkshire or the Midlands. Moreover, considering its very large, white British population, Forest FM is also unable to access ethnic minorities funding opportunities.

Due to the footprint of this particular station not involving very major, urban centres, the overall number of potential listeners is also relatively low, so when evaluating the sector, the policymaker and the regulator may have to consider issues raised by stations broadcasting in similar areas. In practice, for every pound they are able to raise from

advertising, Forest FM has to match another pound from another source. However, because its funding options are limited by the social and economic conditions of the area, it has to work with a model that does not particularly favour its way of interpreting the contested and multi-faceted concept of Community Radio in its British incarnation.

The station generally follows a 'positive' agenda of civic pride and, with the increasing predictability of commercial radio, is a genuine space for music eclecticism. It favours a 'professional' style of presenting which, in aesthetic terms, takes this station closer to its counterparts in the public and commercial sector. When discussing alternative journalism practice in UK community media, Atton and Hamilton illustrate the diverse interpretation of this concept by citing the case of the website *Newcastle Community News*. They argue that

Other types of community media have little interest in political activism of any kind (...) These involve a high proportion of local, non-professional people, in news-gathering, reporting and production (...) There is little in courting controversy. Instead we find the promotion of more neutral, 'universal' values of local communities: place, tradition, conservatism. History, in the form of collection and reminiscence, is encouraged: much of the reporting on these websites is to do with preservation of tradition, with community journalism as the practice of demotic local history. (2008: 91-92)

One could argue that having an eclectic music mix, especially in the evenings, could be divisive of tastes, rather than uniting them, in the same way that ALL FM does when it speaks to different ethnic, rather than musical, communities. Again, this would be part of a wider research project looking at what audiences make of community radio. What can be said here is that it is impossible to see a 'one model fits all' scenario in British Community Radio. This will be confirmed by the very different case of CSR FM, which revealed a distinct set of issues during my visit to their station, and is explored over the next pages.

Before heading east towards Canterbury, though, it is important to position Forest FM in the overall context of New Labour policies. The only obvious connection here appears to be the fact that it actually enabled the introduction of Community Radio in

Britain and permitted Forest FM to obtain a full-time licence. Having said that, ideologically, this is an area that has historically been Conservative. There was no hint of any regeneration projects in the area. This area is predominantly White British, has noticeable civic pride and an attachment to local heritage. The main concern, here, was to get a station that would serve as a local tool for communication and explore more in-depth issues relevant to the local community.

Importantly, in terms of overall sustainability, the station has most of its (limited) costs covered by a combination of local public bodies like district and town councils, and local advertising. The operational costs are therefore much smaller than those of ALL FM. There is no reliance on social policy funding from national schemes promoted by New Labour and the programming is overall a more direct reflection of what volunteers want rather than being dictated by European, national and local policy priorities. In principle, such a station could fare better in the longer term, and with very little change, because it can count on a relatively more stable source of income and not be conditioned by the obligations of match funding and projects paperwork.

In other words, a station of this kind may be more likely to survive in different political and funding contexts because, after all, the core costs of its operation are supported at the local level and are not dependent on decisions taken in London or Brussels. I shall return to this matter in the concluding chapter of this thesis but it is now pertinent to move to the third and last station, CSR FM, to explore how another model of community broadcasting will fare in the framework of the new community radio legislation.

## CHAPTER 10

### CANTERBURY STUDENT RADIO – CSR FM

#### 10.1 Introduction

Radio stations based on university campuses are arguably as old as the medium itself, as experimental and educational broadcasts took place in Canada (Stevenson et al., 2011) and the USA as early as the 1920s (Wall, 2007). They have been called college, university, campus and student radio stations depending on national circumstances, with the emphasis put either on the host institution, the geographical location/outreach, or those leading and running these projects. A widespread phenomenon in the USA,<sup>18</sup> it is an established sector in France (the Radio Campus network counts 19 stations broadcasting full-time in FM) and other countries like Canada, where they are grouped with the community radio sector in the National Campus and Community Radio Association (NCRA) and most recently, in Italy (over 30 stations since 1999, see Perrotta, 2005 and 2009, Scifo, 2007: 234-236, and Cavallo, 2009).

Depending on local regulatory circumstances, in the past, student radio stations broadcast through induction-loop, closed-circuit and cable broadcasting systems. Nowadays, they tend to use low-power FM/AM, RSLs and the Internet. While this sector is more developed and recognised, such stations have full-time FM/AM broadcasting licences that reach over the limits of the campus and to the host city or metropolitan area.

Student radio stations have claimed to have been a training ground for future broadcasters aiming to enter the mainstream industry. They claim to be a space for experimentation with new formats, as well as a way of enhancing project management skills by frequently offering unpaid positions as station managers, programme controllers, heads of marketing or news, producers and presenters (Scifo, 2007: 233). Given that these stations are run chiefly by students, issues that are of interest to them – such as university services and music reviews – feature as the main speech content.

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<sup>18</sup> www.quadphonic.com in Wall (2007: 35) counted 1,400 stations.

Specialist music programming is seen as one of the most important reasons to join because ‘they are music aficionados and feel they need to share their music, spreading their appreciation around’ (Wallace, 2008: 55). Student radio stations are seen as a ‘stepping stone towards some other destination (...) a means for enjoyment and for learning radio skills as media message-producers’ (ibid., 61).

The programming is often run exclusively by students, with some stations opening their schedules to the local community, and adopting an ‘open format’ model. In smaller college/student radio stations, they usually have live shows at their peak during the term periods, with vacations periods often relying mostly on automated programming. Wallace remarks how in the less ‘professional’ ones,

(...) students seem to forget about serving any listeners beyond the institution, apparently on-air more for their own enjoyment, often discussing classes, bands coming to campus, dining hall food, and laughing at countless in-jokes. They often speak a less accessible ‘inside language’ of their school, as if unaware that anyone other than their fellow students could possibly be listening. People from outside the college campus are rarely, if ever, in the broadcast booth, so these stations have an insular feel to them, even if they can be heard a dozen miles away. (2008: 47)

Despite these limits, American scholar Jennifer Waits has remarked how college radio is a ‘fascinating example of underground culture, as they often exist in philosophical opposition to commercial, mainstream radio’ (2007: 83). In the context of mergers and acquisitions that have made local stations much more homogeneous, ‘college stations have had an even greater opportunity to fill the void by providing airspace for underground, unsigned, experimental and outsider musicians on independent record labels’ (ibid., 84). In other words, college radio ‘usually provide the main alternative to traditional format radio’ (Wall, 2007: 35).<sup>19</sup> In organisational terms,

At many college campuses, radio stations are run by students, with little to no involvement by the school, meaning that DJs and staff have more artistic

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<sup>19</sup> Wall’s study is an excellent historical overview on how the notion of alternativeness has been constructed in US music programming in college radio, with their roots tracing back to the early days of university radio stations in the 1920s (see Wall, 2007).

control than at profit-driven commercial radio stations. (...) DJs and staff are often volunteers, and so much of the work is done for the love of the music and the station, often creating a loyal and outspoken group of individuals. (Waits, 2007: 84)

College radio stations have a strong history of radicalism and affiliation with social movements in the Americas and Europe. In the USA, they have ‘played a key role in organising student involvement in the civil rights movement’ and against the war in Vietnam and Iraq (Coyer, 2007: 232) and also helped students’ uprisings against repressive regimes in Latin America (ASCUN, 2005). In France, student radio has been an activity connected with social movements since the late 1970s and whose activities are discussed in historical accounts of the community radio sector during those years.<sup>20</sup>

Compared to the UK, US college radio has received more attention from academic researchers, including authors such as Sauls (1995, 2000), Waits (2007), Wall (2007) and Wallace (2008). Sauls’ is arguably the most well known book on the subject, analysing the institutional and economic structures of college radio and highlighting how different they are from their mainstream radio counterparts. Most of the other contributions come in the form of articles in academic journals or sections of books dedicated to local radio. The fact that this sector has been overlooked by radio studies is remarked on by Wallace who, in reference to Sterling and Keith’s three-volume *Encyclopaedia of Radio*, with over 600 entries across 1696 pages (edited, 2003), remarks that there was only one entry on this sector and that ‘No specific college radio stations are mentioned in the index; it is a very minor format treated under larger rubrics’ (2008: 62). Indeed, college radio has been ‘rarely’ and ‘infrequently’ studied (Waits, 2007: 95, Wall, 2007: 35).

With scholars usually tending to study three ‘types’ of radio, public, commercial and community radio, student/college radio research has been overlooked despite being common on US as well as on UK campuses: ‘this radio ‘type’ is often ignored because college radio lacks influence in the mainstream media and is not seen as a site of community radio empowerment’ (Wallace 2008: 46).

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<sup>20</sup> For a detailed analysis of the period 1977-1981, see Lefebvre, 2008.

## 10.2 Student Radio in Britain

In Britain, student radio stations have been present in the local broadcasting scene since the 1960s, with the claim of the first student radio broadcast still a contested issue. The foundation of student-run pirate venture Crush Radio (formerly Campus Radio Hatfield), at what is now the University of Hertfordshire dates back to 1960,<sup>21</sup> even though Canterbury-based UKC Radio, from the University of Kent at Canterbury, claims to be first one by starting to broadcast in 1966 as Radio Rutherford, taking its name from the building from which it was broadcasting.<sup>22</sup>

The first test licence was instead given to a university, to the York-based station URY (University Radio York), in 1967 (Partridge, 1982: 8). With its launch in 1968, the station proudly claimed to be 'UK's first independent legal station'.<sup>23</sup> After that, stations were launched in Swansea in 1968 (Action Radio, now Xtreme Radio), Stirling (University Radio Airthrey, now Air3 Radio)<sup>24</sup> and Brunel (University Radio Brunel, URB, later B1000) in 1970, and University Radio Essex on 1 March 1971. Brunel's station started as a pirate station, transmitting by using radiator pipes and moving its basic studio equipment from room to room, in Chepstow Hall. Its content proposal included 'old BBC shows, presenters' record collections and interviews with bands playing at Brunel' (Connelly, 2002). *URB* opened officially on 18 January 1972.

Their representative body, the Student Radio Association (SRA) started its activities as the National Association for Student Broadcasting (NASB), also in 1972 (Partridge, 1982: 8) and, as of October 2011, it had 71 members.<sup>25</sup> It aims to represent and lobby on behalf of student radio stations in the UK at both the national and regional levels, as well as facilitating communication, giving advice and help to develop new and future stations.<sup>26</sup> Overall, the findings of the literature review also suggest that this sector has not been heavily involved, or tied, to the rest of the community radio sector and in some respects, has run in parallel to it.

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<sup>21</sup> *History*, <http://www.crushradio.co.uk/index.php?page=history> [accessed 10 April 2009]

<sup>22</sup> *About Kent 1959-69*, <http://www.kent.ac.uk/about/history/history59.html> [accessed 12 October 2011]

<sup>23</sup> *About: University Radio York*, <http://ury.york.ac.uk/about.php> [accessed 10 November 2005]

<sup>24</sup> *Air3 through the ages...* <http://air3.susaonline.org.uk/about/> [accessed 10 November 2005]

<sup>25</sup> A map of SRA's members can be viewed at <http://www.studentradio.org.uk/members/map>

<sup>26</sup> *About*, <http://www.studentradio.org.uk/about> [accessed 12 October 2011]

However, with the possibilities offered by the new framework for Community Radio Licensing, in place since 2004, a small number of stations took a step forward and applied for a full-time community radio licence. Canterbury Student Radio (CSR), Britain's first student radio station to gain such a licence, is based in Canterbury and has merged two experiences of student radio, based respectively at the University of Kent in Canterbury (UoK) and Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU), namely UKCR and C4Radio.

At the time of the fieldwork, another university-based station, although not a 'classic' student radio station, was licensed in Lincoln (Siren FM)<sup>27</sup> and 52 stations were broadcasting via Low Power AM or induction loop systems (Ofcom, 2007c). Until November 2011, this sector developed steadily to include stations led by, or primarily aimed at, students now broadcasting in Belfast (Blast 106),<sup>28</sup> Cambridge (CAM FM),<sup>29</sup> Falmouth (The Source),<sup>30</sup> Leicester (Demon FM),<sup>31</sup> Luton (Radio LaB),<sup>32</sup> and Sunderland (107 Spark FM).<sup>33</sup> Pontypridd's (Wales) GTFM has, in the past, been in a close relationship with the University of Glamorgan, but their relationship is at this time quite limited.<sup>34</sup>

Historical accounts on UK student radio can be found only on the Internet and are mainly anecdotal, with academic research having overlooked this area of study, despite its presence often being only a few metres away from the universities' media and communication departments. Significantly, at the time of writing (2011), even the website of the sector's representative body,<sup>35</sup> the SRA, had no section dedicated to a brief history or even a chronology of the milestone events. Most of the stations' websites had no such space either, arguably because of their transitional nature, where students are interested in the present and the immediate future of the station, rather than keeping track of the past. It is unfortunate that the university's institutions do not seem to care either for the collection or documentation of such material. This clearly makes

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<sup>27</sup> On 9 March 2006: see <http://licensing.ofcom.org.uk/radio-broadcast-licensing/community-radio/current-licensees/awards-05-06/mar06/> This case study is reviewed in Fleming, 2010: 51-55.

<sup>28</sup> Licence details at <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/cr140.htm>

<sup>29</sup> Licence details at <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/cr193.htm>

<sup>30</sup> Licence details at: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/cr114.htm>

<sup>31</sup> Licence details at <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/cr179.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Licence details at: <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/cr197.htm>

<sup>33</sup> Licence details at <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/cr143.htm>

<sup>34</sup> *About GTFM*, <http://www.gtfm.co.uk/about.aspx>, [accessed 12 January 2011]

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.studentradio.org.uk/>

the work of future media historians in this area more difficult, when they eventually try to put together the pieces of this puzzle.

In British scholarship, brief case study analyses in this area are limited, and include Janey Gordon's work on the RSL of Luton FM (2000: 11-15, cited earlier in Chapter 7's section on RSLs) and Carole Fleming's account in *The Radio Handbook* on University of Lincoln's Siren FM (2010: 51-55). The latter will shortly include a complementary chapter by the author (Scifo, 2012a, forthcoming), in an edited collection.

Luton FM, Gordon recalls, 'was set up primarily for the benefit of their education experience at the university' and also for 'promoting the university in the town and amongst young people' (2000: 11). Its schedule included an eclectic mix of genres from 'garage mixes and pop to acid jazz and black gospel, along with everything in between' (ibid., 14), with more extreme styles during the weekends, and also featuring 'new local bands with interviews, airplays and live sets' (ibid., 14). As an RSL, Luton FM did have the advantage of not suffering from problems of long-term funding, but had the disadvantage of having to reconstruct its community of local young people, every year with each initial broadcast. By 2011, the university had been renamed, from University of Luton to University of Bedfordshire. It had been awarded a full-time community radio licence with Radio LaB, which started its broadcasts on 12 April 2010.<sup>36</sup> It is not 'just' a student radio station though, as it aims to reach out to 'all young people in Luton in education and beyond, with an additional focus on older people, aged 55 plus' (Radio LaB, 2010: 1).

Siren FM, which started broadcasting a few months later after my visit to CSR,<sup>37</sup> on 11 August 2007, has a different approach from traditional stations based at a university. Its studios have been fitted along BBC local radio lines and the university directly employs a full-time Station Manager, whose experience of radio production at the BBC dates back to 1972. Although based in the building that hosts the Media, Humanities and Technology faculty, inside the campus in Central Lincoln, the station aims to bring 'the university to the community and the community to the university', as stated by Station

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<sup>36</sup> See <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/Community/cr197.htm>

<sup>37</sup> Conducted on 19-25 March 2007.

Manager Andrew David (in Fleming, 2010: 52). Apart from the bulk of university students that crowd the schedule, especially during term-time, its programmes include members of staff of the university, school children and migrant communities like the Polish, for a programme ‘in Polish, for Polish, by Polish’ (ibid., 53). The station builds on seven years of experience in online and RSL broadcasts and also aims to be a potential gateway to employment. The studios are designed professionally ‘to give presenters a taste of the real thing because my joy would be for presenters here to be poached by other radio stations’ (ibid., 53).

As will be seen throughout the discussion of my research findings at CSR, many of the tensions discussed above are also present in the Canterbury-based station, a newcomer to the world of community radio, which faces the challenge of fitting into a model that its founders were not familiar with. It would be helpful now, to start the Canterbury case study by reviewing local radio broadcasting in the area, to see the local context CSR was established in.

### 10.3 The local radio landscape

The City of Canterbury is located in the South East of England and, according to the 2001 Census (Canterbury City Council, 2001) had a population of approximately 40,000 residents. Three universities are located within the city: University of Kent at Canterbury, Canterbury Christ Church University and the University College for the Creative Arts, with the first two having more than 30,000 students enrolled in their courses at the time of the fieldwork on 19-25 March 2007. Furthermore, a dozen secondary schools, part of CSR’s target community of 15-24 year olds, operate across the city.

Canterbury’s local ‘radioscape’ includes two local commercial radio stations, KMfm and Invicta FM, and the local BBC station Radio Kent. Before analysing CSR, I will briefly discuss how these stations describe themselves and state their commitments and comment about their local and ‘community’ elements on their websites. This will give an idea of the environment in which CSR operates and the claims being made about the other local stations’ engagement with their communities.

KMfm for Canterbury, Whitstable and Herne Bay is part of the county-wide Kent Messenger Group that includes five other KMfm stations, local newspapers and magazines, and the local portal website KentOnLine. It claims to be ‘purely local for Canterbury, Whitstable and Herne Bay, playing the best music variety’, by broadcasting ‘a full service [of] local music and information (...) aimed primarily at 25-54 year-olds’ (KMfm, 2007). Speech is regarded as an important ingredient of the output as ‘information slots for travel, whats-ons, features and sport, should feature full speech-only blocks of programming, such as news/magazine programmes, for the local audience which must account for at least 30 daytime minutes each and its content ‘would not normally fall below 25% of weekday daytime output’ (ibid.). The music mix includes ‘hits from the sixties to the current charts, with current hits never comprising more than 45% of the music output’ (ibid.), plus specialist programmes that may be aired in non-daytime. Finally, in non-daytime, ‘live co-branded programming may be shared with other KM stations in Kent’ and such programming – the station claims – will nevertheless ‘retain appropriate local flavour’ (ibid.). The station’s website includes a section labelled ‘your community’, that provides an agenda of local events, road closures and traffic information, as well as charities’ fundraising and environmental initiatives. A sub-section with a message board, titled ‘Canterbury Community Bulletin Board’, gives the opportunity to ‘have your say, post your thoughts and generally take part in the show’ and at the date of access, was filled with community events and initiatives (ibid.).

A linked website, ‘KMfm Bands – Local Music’,<sup>38</sup> features an archive with the profiles of local bands, gigs, venues and sections with local music news and local charts. The station appeals to a wide range of people in the area, in terms of age, with a large time-period covered in terms of music, spanning over hits of the last 50 years. It forms part of a regional media group that has other stations, websites and hard copy publications across Kent. This is certainly a regionally rooted company that indeed gives space to local – and at times, very local – information at the city level, with the use of web-based community boards, and equally, to local bands. It has space dedicated for discussion and encourages local social action. However, it is also true that economic imperatives push the station to have slots of programming shared among stations in Kent, that speech would never go above 25% and that, in principle, it is not aimed at the 18-25

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.kmfmbands.co.uk> [accessed 22 February 2007]

age-group which, especially in Canterbury, forms a significant part of the population. The station invites participation, but its commercial radio structure, as in similar cases, limits this input only in the form of web-based forum discussions and phone-ins.

Invicta FM, part of the GCap Media Group, broadcasts ‘contemporary and chart music and information (...) for 15-44 year-olds’ on five frequencies to the Maidstone, Medway and East Kent area.<sup>39</sup> Specialist music programmes ‘may be broadcast in non-daytime for up to 30 hours a week’ (Invicta FM, 2007). The station is mainly music-based ‘but information and/or features of particular local relevance will be strongly in evidence throughout programming, with bulletins containing local news run hourly at least during weekday peak-time and during weekend breakfast’ with speech accounting ‘for at least 15% of weekday daytime output’ (ibid., 2007). The station’s website, arguably because of its ownership, has much less ‘local flavour’ than that of KMfm, limiting the local news to the review of some local events, and limiting the participation to competitions or subscriptions that give access to ‘extras’ like podcasts and ‘behind the scenes’ material. What can be seen here, then, is the obvious effect of having a station part of a much larger media group, not grown and not residing in the area, with its headquarters located in Central London. The focus is only on hits and contemporary chart music (note also the ‘may’ on specialist programming), there is a bottom limit of 15% only on speech content and, in fact, if it was not for bits of local information and traffic, the station could be based anywhere. These aspects illustrate the concerns discussed in Chapter 2, i.e. the effects of deregulation, merging and loss of local content.

The local BBC station Radio Kent is based in Royal Tunbridge Wells, 50 miles west from Canterbury, and targets a more mature audience than KMfm and Invicta FM. Arguably, because of its public service ethos, it reflects the social and cultural heritage better than its commercial counterparts. On the other hand, being a countywide station, it currently does not focus on just one of the cities, like Canterbury, even though some nationwide BBC projects (*VideoNation*, *Saving Planet Earth*, *How We Built Britain*) include content that originated there. Launched in 1970 as BBC Radio Medway and based in Chatham, the station changed to its current name on 2 July 1983, as part of a wider plan to operate countywide stations. Moving to the nearby Sun Pier in 1986, it

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.invictafm.com/> [accessed 24 February 2007]

relocated to its current location in 2001 and has two small contributing studios in Dover and Canterbury.

BBC Radio Kent adopted the same schedule on weekdays, Monday to Friday, with blocks of programmes that spanned from two to three hours each, including a mix of music and light entertainment, an approach that was also adopted on Saturday morning (6 am-1 pm) and Sunday (2 pm/9 pm). Frequent news and travel bulletins during drive-time periods were embedded in this programming on weekdays. Late evening programmes encouraged participation via phone-ins to discuss the day's events (weekdays and Sunday after 10 pm, Saturday after 9 pm) and requests, calls and space for listeners' letters were given on Sunday at lunchtime (11 am-2 pm). Local sports were given space on Fridays at 6.30 pm, with a round-up of the forthcoming sports events during the weekend, with a four-hour slot on Saturday afternoon (2-6 pm). Sunday programming was more varied, including programmes that discussed religion and faith (6-8 am), gardening (8-11 am), as well as giving space to local folk music (9-10 pm). Between 1-5am, the station switches to broadcasting Radio FiveLive's output.

As the station covers the whole region of Kent, its website consequently included material that appealed to the people living across the county. Local news, weather and travel updates were complemented by sections present across other local BBC websites, where local history and heritage are explored more in-depth, like *VideoNation* clips recorded by people in Kent, *Saving Planet Earth*, *How We Built Britain*, a feature on 'Kent People' with 'amazing stories of fascinating people, famous or not' and a section on the Romany roots in Kent.<sup>40</sup> Social activism is encouraged by the station's Action Desk, run in collaboration with the volunteering and training organisation Community Service Volunteers (CSV) and includes a wide range of appeals. Unsigned bands would be given support through a new dedicated programme, the possibility to sign up to have their profile as part of an archive, and suggestions on how to 'make it to the top of the charts' (ibid., 2007). Finally, listeners and website visitors could have their say on 'the issue of the day' and get comments read out on air via posting on the local version of the message board.

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<sup>40</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/kent/local\\_radio/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/kent/local_radio/) [accessed 24 February 2007]. The programme had not started at the time of fieldwork.

Overall, BBC Radio Kent and KMfm share a more local, county-wide approach to the Kent area, integrating multimedia operations, complementing the use of radio and web, and using their respective websites to store online archives and local information. The *Kent Messenger's* group station is part of a group that has its roots in Kent, its headquarters in the town of Larkside, on the northwest borders of Maidstone, with its older ancestor, the *Maidstone Telegraph*, founded in the Kentish city in 1859. BBC's decision making has its centre of power in Central London, like Invicta FM. In both cases, what happens in Kent can also be influenced by factors external to Kent: the licence fee settlements and the wider economy of the BBC, as well as the national strategies and the outlook of Invicta's sister stations. However, KMfm could relocate studios and network programming across its Kent stations, depending on its economic imperatives and if so required, leave a void in Canterbury.

Here, what can be seen then is that Canterbury did not have its *own* radio station, with decision-making based in the city, and that the large number of students present in the area were actually targeted mostly as music consumers. No speech-based content – that is, in the form of issues specifically related to them as students – was especially aimed to them in the local *radioscape*, and there was no space they could rely on, to ensure their active engagement or a say in the agenda. As in other communities of interest mis-/under-represented by existing media, the issue, here, concerns identity and representation, and the possibility of having one's own medium to facilitate discussion within a community and potentially, with 'others' in the geographical community, on students' own terms. How CSR aimed to tackle this was outlined in the application for a full-time community radio licence.

#### 10.4 CSR FM

It has been said how student radio in Canterbury had been present since 1966 with Radio Rutherford (later UKC Radio, then UKCR from 1995), broadcasting on AM across UoK's campus. In 2000, the station was granted a Low Power AM (LPAM) licence, starting to broadcast on 1350 MHz, and RSL broadcasts on FM from 1992. On the other hand, CCCU had initiated broadcasts in 1984 and been the holder of RSLs since 2002. In 2004, both universities had collaborated on a joint, three-week RSL (CSR, 2004: 15).

With the opportunities offered by the introduction of the new Community Radio full-time licensing framework, the two student unions at UoK and CCCU decided to join forces, to bid for a station in Canterbury. They constituted a separate body, Canterbury Youth Student Media (CYSM) Ltd., independent of both student unions and respective universities. Regardless of the outcome of their application, both stations had decided to go ahead with a common project, with UKCR to hand back its LPAM licence on its expiry date on December 2004 (CSR, 2004: 11).

The plan of the new joint station, named Canterbury Student Radio FM (CSR), was outlined in the application submitted to Ofcom in November 2004:

We intend to provide an educationally orientated radio service for young people studying in the Canterbury area within the Secondary, Further and Higher Education Sectors and for those involved in youth based community initiatives. We intend that the service should be run by, and as far as possible directed by, volunteers from the educational community. (CSR, 2004: 3)

The project had the aim of bringing together education providers from all the three sectors, offering an opportunity to students not available elsewhere in the area, 'a strong and independent forum for student debate and exposure of current affairs of interest to students' (ibid., 3).

CSR is keen for Canterbury's students to run the station and this makes an important departure from the two previous case studies, ALL FM and Forest FM. Here, the management would be by people in transit: *students*, instead of 'static' local community members (as in Verwood) or local paid members of staff (as in Manchester). With reference to ALL FM, some of New Labour's social policy concepts are present in CSR, to 'promote a culture of volunteerism and public spirit' and to 'establish an integrated and purposeful vehicle for effecting social change and inclusion' (ibid., 3) as well as the aim to extend participation in the station, to schools 'attended by children who would not normally progress to Higher Education' (ibid., 19).

While in principle, the station was open to access for the community of place, it is also true that its main focus was the student population present throughout the city, making this the only case study in this thesis that focusses explicitly on a community of interest *within* a place and making it very different from the *localism* and civic pride elements of Forest FM.

CSR's managerial structure includes a Board of Directors composed solely of volunteers

(...) responsible for funds and resources of the Company, for deciding the broadcasting philosophy, editorial policy, budget and strategy of the Radio Station, for approving the appointment of its Executive Committee and delegating powers to that Committee, and for ensuring compliance with all relevant licences, codes and legislation through the Company Secretary. (ibid., 12)

The Board is composed by nominated members from Kent Union (KU) - 3, CCCU student's union (CCSU) - 3, the Kent Institute of Art and Design (KIAD) union - 1, one member each nominated by UoK, CCCU and KIAD, and two selected among community figures. The everyday management is provided by a voluntary, and annually elected Executive Committee, with some help from a part-time Student Media Co-ordinator based at UoK. This way, the Executive Committee would be 'directly accountable to the student membership' (ibid., 21).

The programming proposal was envisaged to be 'radically different' from other local stations in the area, with youth-focused speech content like 'radio drama, documentary and discussion shows made by the students of Canterbury' (ibid., 18), drawn also from archives at the Radio Drama course at UoK and the Radio, Film and Television department at CCCU' (ibid, 26) and to be created in conjunction with local schools. Music output would be 'purely (...) specialist music shows and will be designed to broaden the horizons of the listener', not driven by commercial imperatives (ibid., 18). Programmes created through students' academic work would be 'thought provoking and will encourage discussion' (ibid., 20). Starting with university students, within six months of the start of broadcast, CSR also aimed to involve schools and colleges in the

area in the production of programmes, who would ‘take a lead role in the operation of the station during university recess’ (ibid., 22).

Finally, CSR’s budget was expected to be the smallest among the three case studies in this thesis, with its main operating cost (£12,500 of £20,000) to be the salary of the part-time Student Media Co-ordinator to be based at Kent Union (ibid., 31). Facilities, utilities, studio and broadcast equipment would have been donated in kind by UoK and CCCU. Ahead of the eventual approval of the application, the student unions at UoK, CCCU and KIAD had committed themselves to funding the station for a total of £6,500 and their respective universities for a total of £15,000 per year (ibid., 33).

The application shows how CSR aimed to present itself as a station for all the students in Canterbury, although led by those in higher education. Its programming profile did fit the ‘traditional’ student/campus radio station proposal, with a strong commitment to a very diverse music output and focus on student affairs. Unlike Siren FM, it also retained a strong ‘student radio’ element, with its everyday managerial board to stand for election every year. One risk in such an arrangement, as with all similar outfits that rely on people ‘in transit’, are the long-term plans of the station and the fact that the outfit would need to be handed over to other persons at regular and short intervals.

CSR would not be able to seek funding from advertising: the licence awarded on 9 February 2006 had a condition that prohibited income from the sale of advertising or programme sponsorship, given that its service fell within the pre-existing coverage area of KMfm, which had more than 50,000, but fewer than 150,000 adults living in its measured coverage area. This was one of the restrictions that were successfully lobbied for by the CRCA in the final version of the Community Radio Order 2004 (UK Parliament, 2004).

Ofcom’s Radio Licensing Committee (RLC) expressed its motivation for giving the award thus:

With a central educational ethos, this group puts forward ambitious programming proposals based on considerable experience which would broaden choice and which are well-supported locally. Other particular

strengths of this applicant were to be found in relation to accountability and the provision of access to, and training in, the use of facilities. (Ofcom, 2006f)

With these ambitious plans in place, CSR started its full-time broadcasts on FM on 15 January 2007, hosting a launch event at UoK campus club, The Venue.

### *A challenging start*

We had several problems in the station at the start of the broadcast. You know we have a switch between the studios and the procedure for switching was probably a little bit complex at the start (...) Then, and even now, we didn't have the technical infrastructure in place (...) there's no playout system at the moment... We are running completely on CDs and it's not good. (Kelsey, Interview, 2007)<sup>41</sup>

The station had suffered technical problems in setting up its sound since a processor that was scheduled to be installed in December did not make it in time for the launch. This resulted in listeners complaining on online forums that CSR was coming out with a very poor sound.<sup>42</sup> As the Station Manager stated, 'Tech was overrun with problems...nothing ran smoothly, ever. Tech was our fundamental group at the time and without them, CSR won't be ever launched' (Preston, Interview, 2007).<sup>43</sup>

The problems with technology were not limited to the launching phase though, since at the time of my visit, two months into full-time broadcast, the station had not sorted out its problems with phone communication tools. These *severely limited its communication potential* and I would say, its democratic credential and possibilities of debate on the issues that affect the student community; in other words, their intention to be the 'voice of the students' in Canterbury. Matt Gradidge, one of the breakfast presenters, describes his (frustrating) experience in the studio,

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<sup>41</sup> Simon Kelsey, Programme Controller, Interview, 22 March 2007.

<sup>42</sup> *Digital Spy Forum, CSR FM*, available at <http://forums.digitalspy.co.uk/showthread.php?t=514958> [accessed 20 March 2007]

<sup>43</sup> Liam Preston, Station Manager, Interview, 20 March 2007.

[The interaction with the audience] has been very difficult. We have got a lot, a lot of technical difficulties. We are kind of amateur, we are doing this in our spare time as volunteers and it's taking a while to get the things done. We need permission to do so and so, we need people, we need to contact business[es] to help (...) [us], so at the moment we are relying heavily on our e-mail and that's our main source of communication. A lot of shows try to make their own texts via SMS. But even with their independent source on contacting their show, it started to create some bad and some negative publicity for us, like you have a show competing with each other. We don't want to have that, so we had to shut all that down. Now we are relying heavily on our e-mails. We have got a phone, which is working but for some reason there is a fault with it and we can't rely on it to work. So, waiting for it to work, we are getting a professional text system, so text into the studio is easier and we have our webcam up there, so they can see us in our studio, working. So, it is really all work in progress at the moment, but everyone is really working hard to get it done and there is many in the Tech Crew that run in the ground and there is so much to do that so many people in CSR doesn't realise and ask 'I want this, I want this and I want this...' and we say 'We know, but we need some time to get to that stage'. So, hopefully, in a not so distant future, we will have everything we need for communication and not just e-mail, and it's kind of something that is letting us down a bit, but not too much, because we have regular listeners. A lot of the technology isn't there, but people is trying to contact us, it's not letting us down, but sometimes you have an e-mail coming three hours later and... It's all about having the right time and we trying to make sure to get that sorted out, maybe for the summer. (Interview, 2007)<sup>44</sup>

These words, and the tone in which they were expressed, suggested frustration for the ongoing structural, technical problems that were left unresolved, with other members of the station not fully understanding the technical issues with which the volunteer for this position, the Head of Tech, had to deal. The Student Media Co-ordinator Luke Nicholson explained the structural limitations of having to deal with volunteers charged with such crucial tasks,

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<sup>44</sup> Matt Gradidge, Presenter - Breakfast Show, Interview, 19 March 2007.

(...) is hard sometimes...if we do lose the connection between the Kent Campus and Christchurch Campus and Alex, the Head of Tech, is the only one who can fix it and I call up and he doesn't answer his phone, well, the connection stays down because is a volunteer and I can only push so far. (Interview, 2007)<sup>45</sup>

The degree to which this was happening suggested a poor pre-planning and testing phase and a rush, perhaps, to go live on air before having resolved these problems properly. Being based in two universities, it sounded rather odd that there seemed to be no sign of collaboration between any of the IT or AV departments, for sorting out such crucial communication tools. Nicholson's words suggest that, despite their best intentions, limited human resources meant that, in practice, the station was limited to the achievement of short and medium-term objectives, and had perhaps underestimated the extent of the technical tasks involved:

Initially we looked forward to have a launch in October [2006], but we quickly realised that there was too much work to be done. The first reason because we chose January 15th was because it was the week after the students had returned to the university. (...) it was hard. I was the only staff member committed to the project and my other commitments can't disappear either... Over Christmas it was just the case of making sure that everyone turned up on the 15th and that there was a schedule in place for the first couple of weeks... I don't think we looked beyond the two weeks at that point. (Nicholson, Interview, 2007)

More solid foundations laid *before* starting to broadcast, and thorough testing of equipment, could have avoided such problems, which did not arise in the other two case studies. However, it is also true that such problems frequently recur when student and community stations rely heavily on volunteer input to cover crucial infrastructure positions – a reliance that is caused by their need to find ways to deal with chronically under-funded and under-resourced outlets.

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<sup>45</sup> Luke Nicholson, Student Media Co-ordinator, Kent Union, Interview, 21 March 2007.

### *Community, identity and representation*

As outlined in their licence application, one of the main aims of the station was the creation of a sense of community among all young people in education in Canterbury, independent from the institution in which they were enrolled. The vision of the members of staff at Kent Union who drafted the licence application in 2004, was to give to the student community in Canterbury a tool that would speak as ‘one voice’ and eventually act as a platform for further discussion with the residents.

It would try to address the ‘communicative unbalance’ felt by the students when portrayed by local media as bringing only disorder, misbehaviour and drunkenness, by making the voice of the student body stronger as,

(...) current media platforms such as *Invicta* and *KMFM*, the *Gazette*, the *BBC*, they talk about achievements that the Universities might have here and there, but is not greatly student-focused. The student focus that they have is usually negative, quite negative. (ibid.)

The notion of access to the media and control over representation of its own group is central here. CSR’s Station Manager Liam Preston said that while facilitating the discussion, the station wanted to ‘control the content that goes out in the community’ (Interview, 2007), to be able to describe themselves in their own terms and not leave this to other media outlets present in the area. Clemencia Rodriguez’s (2001) conceptualisation regarding the possibility of telling one’s own story through the media, in the context of citizen media, is important here as the student population feels that the media ecology around them does not give a true representation of what they are or are able to do.

In local newspapers, students seem to be the worst thing that happened to Canterbury but no one really looks at the economic benefits of having students in the town. There wouldn’t be that many pubs or supermarkets because they wouldn’t be supported by the influx of students. At the moment, we don’t get much of a say. We are quite an ignored and irritable minority, who are not seen as adults and not seen as kids. We are seen as

reckless and irresponsible and because of that it's nice to see that we have something to show, that we are responsible, that we can do stuff. We want to talk about topical issues, we do want to talk about political things and be active, be a part of the community. I hope this will show that students can be a positive thing in the community and promote a better student image. (Longuet and Tee, Interview, 2007)<sup>46</sup>

There are similarities here with ALL FM's case, in the sense that CSR wanted to use *community radio* to combat stereotypes. While the Manchester station acted towards counterbalancing representations of a community of place, and the deprived areas within it, CSR aimed to do so towards a particular social group, the students.

One thing that we really want to do and we encourage is that we bring together people, who are not necessarily students, to raise issues that are part of student life, student behaviour or things like that. We openly welcome that on air and discuss it. Having that sort of forum will hopefully bridge the gap between the students community and...because at the moment it seems that there is only a fight going on between the students and the rest of the population in Canterbury. Certainly this is something we want to bridge the gap on. We want to discuss and challenge this. There are a lot of things in the mainstream media here that paint quite a poor view of students. (Hickford, Interview, 2007)<sup>47</sup>

The Student Media Co-ordinator also remarked how, in order to open the discussion in radio programmes to the city inhabitants, the station should have aimed to involve the larger community of place in the station's activities.

I think that now we need to crack on and get students *and* residents getting involved in the station, on-air. That's when we will start to have non-students listening, non-students participating in the station and actually have a platform for debate between residents and students. (Nicholson, Interview, 2007)

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<sup>46</sup> Owen Longuet and James Tee, Presenters - Breakfast Show, Interview, 20 March 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Ben Hickford, Head of Marketing, Interview, 20 March 2007.

The aim to involve the local population in the broadcast is not something new in the tradition of student radio stations, as this has been happening in similar cases especially in Canada, United States and Australia, but it is a relatively new phenomenon in the British context, with such efforts having been put in practice by stations like Radio LaB and Siren FM, cited earlier. As the time span is five years, I would argue that the station *needed* to build up consensus across its coverage area if it wanted to build up a case when the licence would be up for renewal in January 2012, five years after the start of broadcast. At the time of the visit though, two months into the licence, it was perhaps too early to see any signs of further connections with the city apart from a ‘vocal support’ from the City Council in its licence application form and the presence of the Lord Mayor, and a few councillors, at the formal launch of the stations.

At the time of the visit, though, there was no sign of programmes involving the wider community of residents and adults at large, and the claim to counter the stereotypes about students was pretty much self-referential, and did not engage in a direct dialogue with the rest of the resident community or organisations other than the educational institutions. At the time of the fieldwork, the only difference that the broadcast could make in challenging stereotypes, was the profile of a student population, through a wide range of musical culture, given that the station had privileged such a format in its early days.

However, notwithstanding the absence of dedicated programming, the words of the managing staff at the station signal a shift in its focus from being solely the voice of the students, and trying to re-address the stigma attached to the student population in Canterbury, to taking a step further and aiming to engage in a constructive dialogue with local residents:

I am a student, I am involved in the Student Union and I know the bad stigma that students have at the moment, like going out, getting drunk, spending money. There is so much that we can offer to the community and that’s what I want CSR to do. I want it to be our voice into the community and I want also the community voice straight back to us. That’s why we are holding debates and that’s why we will hold a debate with the community

where they can come along to us and talk about the radio station. It's a perfect opportunity for us to control the content that goes out in the community, so they can see 'Look we have these two fantastic universities who want to do stuff for us, who want to do stuff with us.' It's a great avenue for us to go down and I think that it will improve the view of students and the attitude of the community with regards to students around Canterbury. (Preston, Interview, 2007)

The community refers here to the local residents, and is seen as an external body, as Preston's choice of words suggests a bi-directionality CSR  $\leftrightarrow$  Community. Despite its licence stating otherwise, he also admits that the station is still a *student* radio station that is trying to become a *community* radio station:

I think that the problem we have at the moment is that, because we have a community radio licence, we are trying to attack the 'community' side of it and trying to work out how we can do it. It's ok in being a student radio station if we were only online, but there is this community bit that we haven't really taken control [of], like going out into the streets of Canterbury. And that is where there is my drive for next year, get the community more involved and I know that a lot of that will be marketing and have these road shows into town. But in terms of the managerial aspect, I need my DJs to talk more with the community and get the community to interact and that is the big thing for next year. That's what I have learned in the past two months. We are a great student radio station, but are we a great Community Radio Station? That's the big question that has been on my mind. (ibid.)

What emerges here is that *CSR* actually *missed* the opportunity to connect with the 'community' prior to its launch on air and to consult with the city's civil society, organisations and individuals. As resources were already stretched to put the station live *just* as a student radio station, arguably, little effort could be dedicated to wider consultations with the city's residents. The language is also telling: the issue here is also problematised as being one of marketing and to be tackled also with 'road shows', a far cry from ALL FM's Community's Development Officer, whose work was to

proactively engage in such work and avoid, where possible, the risks of enclosure of local public spheres, as articulated by van Vuuren (2006) earlier in this thesis.

However, it is also important to remember how, whatever the importance of such efforts, CSR was not required to do so by its licence's key commitments, where, apart from university students, the outreach work had to demonstrate the involvement of other educational institutions across Canterbury. On this matter, the responsibility of the Community Liaison Officer was to source content from local schools and CSR had been active in facilitating the production of content at the local St. Ann's School, such as band jams that were pre-recorded and broadcast by the station. Future plans included enlarging this outreach to youth centres and other youth-based organisations across the city, also because, as stated in the application, non-university students could serve the purpose of filling the schedule of the station outside term-time, especially in the summer.

Another interesting aspect to explore in the articulation of the station's identity and its *community-ness*, I believe, was to see how it represented itself via its own website ([www.csrfm.com](http://www.csrfm.com)) before, during and shortly after my visit. The main problem of its online presence was, in my view, the strategic error of raising the listeners' expectations on what the station could not deliver, ultimately also appearing to have been rushed in what it did deliver. Its community elements are quite weak in referring both to the targeted community (students) and what the station keeps calling 'the community', with reference to the city of Canterbury outside their respective campuses. CSR's transition from *student* to *community radio* is somewhat unrealised and what it really did appeared to be much less clear than in the case of ALL FM and Forest FM. In fact, CSR was still behaving pretty much as a college/student radio station, with a wide variety of music-based programmes, but missing the connection with the larger network of local community groups in the city, with the evident exception of educational institutions.

Indeed, the website also stated that 'The focus of the project is on the wider impact and involvement of the entire Canterbury *Community*' (emphasis added).<sup>48</sup> However, how the entire *community* would be involved and impacted is not clear and this statement is

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<sup>48</sup> *What is CSR?*, available from:  
[http://www.csrfm.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=19](http://www.csrfm.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=19) [accessed 2 March 2007]

probably even misleading, given that, on the same page, it says that ‘CSR provides students with the opportunity to make their voice heard in the city whilst ensuring there is a fresh sounding radio station that caters *precisely* for the needs of young students and individuals in the area (ibid.).’ A lack of a proper set-up of other communication tools and technical equipment, also meant that the station was not optimally set up before its launch, making a critical observer wonder why the station management was in a rush to go live before having sorted things out. The station claimed, ‘The community section is filled with news about events that CSR has hosted in the community.’ In practice, this meant a list consisting of only three news items: the launch night, a jam session in a school and Red Nose Day, and in all three cases, these were accompanied by a single picture featuring one or more members of the Executive Team.

While it was not particularly necessary to discuss ALL FM’s and Forest FM’s web presence, given that they give all the necessary background information and do not raise unfulfilled expectations, I believe that it was important to give space to CSR’s online presence as it stands out for what it *doesn’t* do and to highlight some of the limits of this model. In the end, CSR is currently the *only* community radio station available in Canterbury and much of the image that local residents (and students) might build in their minds, of community radio and its communicative possibilities, also depends on the station. At any rate, the most important tool a station uses to represent itself to its public is surely its programming; the next section will therefore focus on the station’s schedule and its programmes.

### *The schedule*

The schedule of the station gives a sense of the variety of voices, genres and number of people involved in running the station and is typical of a student radio station’s approach to ‘open format’, common to stations elsewhere in Europe and North America.<sup>49</sup> When compared to the other local radio stations in the area, CSR offers content that fills a gap by broadcasting a very variety of genres and time periods. On the other hand, this variety prevents it from achieving a distinctive sound. The station’s manager was of the opinion that the schedule was still very much a work in progress:

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<sup>49</sup> The full schedule of CSR, as at 19 March 2007, is attached in Appendix 5.

We are searching for a balance...in terms of what is on Monday at 11 and on Tuesday at 11, it is really different and we are now trying to work out whether it's best for the station to have this complete diversity where you tune in to CSR and you have no idea of what's going to be [on]... We don't know if diversity is the key to success... When you turn on and switch on Invicta FM, you know what [you] are going to hear before you switch it on and that's why you listen. (Preston, Interview, 2007)

Another way that would have perhaps attracted the audience to listen would have been, as was the case at ALL FM and Forest FM, a schedule published on its website with brief descriptions of the programmes. This would have also served the purpose of starting to make voices and presenters more recognisable to the public. Unfortunately, such information was not made available on the website and, given that very few programmes did actually link with each other during my listening of the station on location, the only way to understand what stood behind programme names that featured just the presenters' full name, was to listen to them. The absence of links also gave a sense of the '*insularity*' of the programmes as it gave the idea that the presenters were only interested in delivering their programme, rather than inviting the listeners to stay tuned into the station.

With the night-time schedule mainly covered by automated programming, drive-time breakfast shows would start at 8 am and continue until 11 am on weekdays (9 am-noon on weekends) featuring a five-minute news bulletins strangely close to the programmes, at 8.30 and 9 am, then at 12 noon, and with a last extended news review at 6.30 pm for 30 minutes. With the exception of two, long sport programmes (Wednesday 4-6.30 pm and Saturday 2-6 pm), most of the schedule featured a wide range of specialist music shows that appeared to be slotted on the basis of the presenter's availability at some point in the day, rather than on any programming decision. The only clear difference among them, at that point, was the fact that more 'extreme' shows featuring electronic music were broadcast in the late evening, with more 'mainstream' shows broadcast during the rest of the day.

Programmes played in the late morning included the self-explanatory *Motown*, the independent music selection of *Batman and Monty's Indie Baguette* and the golden hits

selection of *Terry's All Gold*. The afternoon, perhaps the most 'disconnected' part of the schedule, included dance, rock and acoustic music. In the early evening, there was space for indie rock and underground music, with the late hours – arguably more consistent in terms of the continuity of the music content – featuring electro, urban, house, club and, in general, upbeat music. This probably does not sound surprising as most of the students are busy in lectures and other activities during the day, and are more available late in the evenings, helping the station to be more consistent in its music programming by the end of the day.

Despite the station boasting its training credentials, and having stated repeatedly in its licence application that CSR would have been able to deliver comprehensive training before going on air, technical constraints meant that some of the volunteers had very little time to prepare themselves for live shows. A few programmes sounded very amateurish, without a clear sense of direction and very self-referential, like the female presenter on the morning of Saturday 24 March 2007, who repeatedly complained, over two hours, that 'The co-presenter has left me alone in the studio this morning and unfortunately I have a very bad cold this morning'. This left *me* with the sensation that the presenter was relating this to a small circle of friends, rather than addressing the whole target community. Aesthetically, this relayed a sense of isolation, rather than providing companionship to students on that morning. It sounded quite unprofessional, leaving me, and probably other listeners, wondering why she had even decided to go on air that day. I also wondered if anybody was listening that morning, given that no messages were read out despite the presenter repeatedly giving the station's contact details. Overall, the presenter seemed to have been caught completely unprepared by the circumstances.

*Back of the Net*, the sports programme broadcast later that day, also sounded self-referential and, in its format, not too different from a mainstream one, being quite strongly focused on mainstream sport scores (e.g. the Premier League) rather than local events in the area. Giving more space to local events and sports news may have been much more relevant for a station like this and, after all, major sport events are better reported by the BBC or a thematic sports station.

The amateur and self-referencing style of some of the speakers was also the subject of discussion on web forums where CSR staff were involved, and where they attempted to explain to critical listeners how this was happening because of the limited experience and limited training of the presenters.<sup>50</sup> The comments related to the very first days following the launch on 15 January 2007 leave little room for ambiguity.

Whilst talking about talking, some of the guys there need some training when it comes to link content. I was tuned in for 20 minutes on Tuesday. None of the content had anything to do with Canterbury or student life. In fact it was about upsetting dolphins, well that was what I could gather from the link, I couldn't hear the rest due to the microphone issue. Not all links have to be 20 minutes long either. You can get your message across in 20 seconds as well as 2 minutes. And while some of the people there are getting their personality on the air which is great, some of it is too far out there. (Forum user *radiobloke2004*, posted on 19 January 2007)

I'm listening to a couple chatting at the mo, the girl is saying 'like as soon as like the next like record is on, I'm like running for some like food. Well, not like running, like walking. I am soooo like getting some food'. The guy who seems to be anchoring just spent the first minute of the link trying to find out the name of the artist they just played and keeps saying "like shuh" and has a general air of contempt. (Forum user *Pete The Meat*, posted on 21 January 2007)

It all seems terribly "in-jokey" (I must admit that I was the same when I was on student radio, but then we were on a closed loop around a student union, not broadcasting to the masses on FM). The guys were saying hello to the programme controller and how he liked them... sadly that sort of stuff only appeals to those on the inside rather than those listening in. As a small suggestion, get the guys who are on air to think about the people in the city as well as those in the studio, there is the potential for quite an audience out

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<sup>50</sup> Digital Spy Forum, CSR FM, available at <http://forums.digitalspy.co.uk/showthread.php?s=55b9571dc5aef6e88fd2ac2ce7298ed8&t=514958&page=2> [accessed 20 March 2007]

there, however these sort of links just alienate the listener. (Forum user *radiobloke2004*, posted on 21 January 2007)

A few days later, on 23 January, Programme Controller Simon Kelsey, seemed to agree with the critiques, but provided a justification:

(...) to be honest, at times even I feel like I'm sitting in on someone's private conversation (...) The problem is, however, that with one or two exceptions, most of the guys have never been on air before in their lives, and it does show. In an ideal world, they would have had far more training than they have, but there simply wasn't enough time for everybody to spend several hours a week in the studio practising last term. (Online forum)

A few minutes after this post, forum user *gheorghie* summarised what I had been asking myself when reflecting on this case: Maybe they should have delayed the start date then, another month or so would not have made a lot of difference. Nicholson also acknowledged, given that the station could now be heard all over the city, that the training process of new members of CSR had to take the contextualisation of speech content in mind:

There is a risk of self-reference and presenters need to avoid talking about things that only people living on the campuses will understand and think instead about 'the community as a whole'. In practical terms: 'give it some context, give it some geographical context and don't anticipate that everybody knows where your lecture is, or the college from where you are broadcasting'. (Nicholson, Interview, 2007)

However, on a more positive note, there were several programmes that were clearly well-thought out, well-produced and contextualised for the public, like the *Motown* show, whose credentials are well illustrated by the Station Manager,

[It] goes into so much detail, for example, this was a track by Aretha Franklin and it was remixed by... That show is a perfect example of what our structure for other shows could be. I want to know about the history of all these great artists, that's how I want all the specialist shows to be like.

This hits our educational remit, because you are telling me something I don't know. (Preston, Interview, 2007)

Another programme, *Terry's All Gold*, had very good educational elements in it as it gave context and background, without being self-referential, to the music that was played. This also included a quiz where the presenter asked the year of release of a particular song, helping the listener by giving brief clues on relevant events in history that took place that year. The music selection ranged from goldies of the 1960s to contemporary ones, with the objective to widen the listeners' choices, to make them think that there is more outside the box, with the accompanying speech content that had the aim to 'educate about music and not only play it' (Clever, Interview, 2007).<sup>51</sup> It is worth noting that the presenter of this programme, Terry Cleaver, was one of the most experienced students of CSR at that time as he had been involved in hospital radio in neighbouring Dover since 2001, and had participated in the activities of one of the predecessors of CSR, CCCU's C4Radio, since 2005.

A common characteristic of many programmes broadcast by the station was also the space given to local bands, unsigned artists and information about their forthcoming live acts in the city, a wealth of information given to a potentially very interested public and an important venue for those artists to promote their work. The popular social networking platform MySpace was used by several programmes to add a layer of information, as a follow-up to what was said on air and as a search tool, and for being contacted, about new songs, and by emerging artists. Being free from commercial imperatives, the playing of such songs was not limited only to genre-specific shows, but was often included in breakfast programmes (as on 20 March 2007) and the presenters proudly told me that one artist they had given space to three months earlier had been featured a few days earlier, on BBC Radio 1's Zane Lowe show (Longuet and Tee, Interview, 2007).

Other presenters of an indie music programme stated that they also kept in mind that the station was addressing young people who would not necessarily be students of either university, and with limited mobility, and made sure that they gave information on events that would be easily accessible in the city centre, to avoid their target community

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<sup>51</sup> Terry Cleaver, Presenter - *Terry's All Gold*, Interview, 21 March 2007.

being too limited, and to instead take care of all the potential constituencies among the young population in Canterbury (Batton and Montgomery, Interview, 2007)<sup>52</sup>

As at every radio station, there are arguably some members who are more experienced than others, but as CSR's case has demonstrated, it is crucial to plan the steps preceding the launch of a station, carefully and solidly. Broadcasting full-time and switching the emphasis from *students* to the *community* is not an easy task with regards to the programming content and its *listenability* by the audience. For the correct positioning of the station in the radio proposal for the area, Programme Controller Simon Kelsey had a clear vision for the future:

The way I would like it to be is that the daytime should be essentially playlisted, I mean between the breakfast and the end of drive-time, and the evenings will be specialist shows, when people has the time to make appointments and have time to listen to it. At that time, then introducing more specialist shows, which I think it makes sense for the shows, makes sense for us and makes sense for the audience. The other thing is, having a look at the other stations that serve Canterbury (...) The gap, as I can see it, is for an alternative type of music station. There isn't anything in Canterbury that actually serves that market. It's something that hits out a target demographic certainly, 15-25 year olds to play. The station that may sound best is a kind of 'XFM type'. There isn't that kind of choice in Canterbury at the moment. Writing something along those lines would be good and would expand the provision of services we got in Canterbury at the moment and it would help (...) We will still be giving to the listeners of CSR, to the listeners in Kent, a real sense of...you know, when they tune in to CSR, they know what kind of sound will come out, as the same as they when they tune in Invicta FM or KMfm or other radio stations. One of the criticisms I have heard from the listeners is that they don't know when to tune in, because the music is so...one day this way, another one different... They would tune in one day and it would be something and then tune in another day and it would

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<sup>52</sup> Tom Batton and Charlotte Montgomery, Presenters - *The Batman and Monty's Indie Baguette*, Interview, 21 March 2007.

be something completely different and it turns people off! That's something I would try to rectify. (Interview, 2007)

What emerges from Kelsey's overview is that there was indeed a vision of how the station could sound and how to get there. I was kindly given access to documentation of the Board of Directors' meetings and such a design for the schedule, and the division of the broadcast day in coherent streams, had indeed been planned by him prior to the launch. However, my understanding is that the decision to launch before such a vision was accomplished did not give enough time to build this up and the station went on air with what was available at the time.<sup>53</sup>

It also confirms that choosing to launch on 15 January, just to increase its visibility, was a choice that exposed the station to criticism from the public and caused frustration and high levels of stress among key members of the technical staff. Testing the station while it is live is far more problematic than doing so prior to the launch. Forest FM's start, given the experience of the larger and more matured core team, and the concern that the station 'had to sound good', pre-empted any such issues. These two outcomes, though contrasting, nevertheless confirm that careful planning is a key component for the success of a project and what was needed to give the community radio sector a successful start.

In spite of some persisting infrastructural limitations, however, the station's content proposal addressed genres and speech content not catered to by any other station in the area and gave voice to a community of interest – the students, who were under/mis-represented by the coverage of mainstream media in Canterbury. Moreover, as the next section will show, it was also more accountable and open to dialogue than its more well-resourced counterparts in the area.

### *Elections and accountability*

It was a fortunate that my fieldwork at CSR coincided with the station's elections on 19 March 2007 and that I was able to closely observe the election process. When I arrived

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<sup>53</sup> *CSR Example Schedule*, by Simon Kelsey, document presented at the CSYM Board of Directors meeting, 13 December 2006.

in Canterbury, four days before the election took place, there was a palpable sense of excitement among the station members, especially the ones standing for a position, and the presenters mentioned this event quite frequently on-air, highlighting that every member of CSR should contribute to the open discussion preceding the election, which would be held in a venue in the city centre.

Most of my interviews were held before the election night and I felt the sense of excitement among the students running for a position, all quite confident that they would be able to make it. However, there was also a sentiment that, if unsuccessful, this would not undermine their willingness to participate in the station's activities for the following year. As one member explained,

In terms of the political side of CSR, we are quite relaxed. We all know each other and a lot of people are going for the same positions. (...) No one is bothered that a lot of people are running again because this is for the best of the station. And if they are voted in, you should be happy because they are going to do a job that will benefit anyway. So, I don't mind the person running against me...well, if they get the position, that's fine because obviously they are better for the job and I don't mind. It's not like a competition in that sense. We are going to [have] some drinks and relax... It's one night that I hope we will go all together, have fun and network even more, if you haven't met someone and it's also an opportunity for the community to meet us. (...) whatever the outcomes, we still have a radio station to work for. I may have a position, and even if I am not getting it, I am close enough to all the positions to contribute still, even if I am not the Head of the Department and not in the Executive Team. (Gradidge, Interview, 2007)

In the interviews conducted during my week at the station, members who were not running for a position felt that having an elected executive body was a very good mechanism to keep the station accountable to them and that there was a possibility to have a say in the station's management, eventually being able to voice the concerns on how the station was and had to be run. It made them feel that the station was really *theirs*, run *by* students *for* students. This successfully demonstrated that the students of

the two universities could work together harmoniously on a common project, independently of which location they were based at – UoK or CCCU.

What the station, and an event like the election, was starting to make more evident was also the growing recognition among volunteers of the station that they had much more in common as students (and members of CSR) rather than only having issues that pertained solely to their own institution. In other words, CSR was instrumental in starting to create – in the 200-odd members it had by then – a sense of community among people whose interactions between each other would have been more limited without the station. As Owen Longuet remarked, ‘If it wasn’t for CSR, we probably wouldn’t know as many people as we know now from the University of Kent. In the last months, it feels [like] it has become a solid union. We now promote each other and we go to events together’ (Interview, 2007).

The venue of the election, a relatively large bar with a small stage in central Canterbury, was chosen instead of a location at one of the universities to give a sense of ‘neutrality’ of place and was seen as a better option than alternating between UoK and CCCU. Student Media Coordinator Luke Nicholson also remarked that, by being in the centre, the event was eventually open to, and potentially more reachable by, local residents who wanted to know more or have a say in the station. As Ben Hickford, Head of Marketing, explained,

We try to have as many avenues as possible where people can influence the ‘higher’ things. I mean, we had open questions and answers in the elections. Even people who are not members can ask the questions, just because they are there at the venue. And certainly, if you are running up for re-election, you are held accountable for the work you have done in the past year. (Interview, 2007)

In this way, non-members could make suggestions, criticise and ask questions in a very transparent forum. This was a unique feature among the stations studied in this research, dependent also on the nature of this station, i.e. a student-based venture with a high turnover rate as in similar student-run activities. At the 2007 election, 215 members were entitled to vote. Just more than a third turned out (75 members, 35%), reflecting a

similar figure of voting turnout for local elections in the UK the previous year (36%). This rate was much higher than the one registered for the student elections a few weeks earlier, when, as the Station Co-ordinator told me, approximately 3,000 people out of 16,000 that were entitled to vote did so (18.75%). As previously stated, the advantages of such a system is that the members have a direct say in the choice of the management, as well as the possibility to run for positions themselves, and, in the case of an unsatisfactory performance, a member of the Executive Committee risks not being re-elected after his first term. As the Station Manager Liam Preston remarked,

You are accountable for the promises you made and if you are not doing your job properly, then people will tell you. You are always in direct contact with your members and your listeners and people know who you are (...) [This means] taking our members and our listeners right up to the chain of command. You really want to change a station? You really want to make the station better? You got a really good opportunity at these elections to do it, to get this better. (Interview, 2007)

This peculiar feature of community media, where members of the target community can have a real say and power to decide on how the station is run, makes this experience much more accountable than any other local media outlets in the area and deeply democratic by any standard. However, there are some potential dangers when members of the incumbent Executive Committee stand for re-election, as this influences their decision-making in the station during the period preceding the elections.

As the Programme Controller Simon Kelsey said, ‘when it comes the part of the year and you want to be re-elected, it can influence your decisions...maybe doing something which is not good for the station... Some people have quite short memory at the end of the day and overall, it’s happening in any kind of election’ (Interview, 2007). The Station Manager described a practical example that occurred in the run-up to the 2007 election,

(...) when you are coming up to this election, I have to be very tolerant with people that I know I shouldn’t be [tolerant with] (...) during the DJ meeting, I wanted to say ‘Guys, some of you are not doing the best you can, but at the

same time, I have to bear in mind that if I do that, I'm going to lose votes (...) As a manager, it's something I (...) learnt; you have to bite your tongue for the great or good. I had to decide on the DJs now and they will be angry with me or, I think, I will be 'good' for another month with these guys. I had to decide if I could have a month to fix this or having another year doing this and I decided that it was better to have another year. (Preston, 2007)

Having a completely transparent election process does not prevent episodes like the ones described above and, in the time leading to the election day, similar episodes may happen in the future in this or other stations that use similar methods. I would argue that this is more an issue of management rather than a matter of democracy. The mechanism adopted by CSR places completely in the hands of its members, the choice of electing their management, but 'populist' and wrong decisions in strategic areas may risk influencing the station's operations negatively. Hochheimer (1993), as discussed in Chapter 2, has explored in depth these issues of praxis, and where CSR FM can claim to be a very relevant example of direct democracy in action, the high levels of turnover and the sort of 'beauty contest' and rather party-like atmosphere at the election can put the station at risk in the long term, because it lacks the historical perspective of a project, something that is in any case not uncommon in the context of student radio.

### 10.5 Conclusions

The CSR model of Community Radio discussed here emerges as a site of practices closer to the tradition of student radio in the UK, and shows the tensions of adapting such a model to the requirements of the legislation. Before the start of the transmissions on the new FM licence, the voice of the students (at least through the airwaves) could be heard just inside each campus, or only via the Internet. For example, C4Radio was broadcast only in CCCU's Student Union venue. Now, a relevant part of Canterbury's population, 'students' from two universities located at opposite ends of the city have united their voices. By adding a discussion of their own issues, in their own terms, on the FM dial, they bring their very local point of view on what has been an 'underserved' community of listeners. Moreover, these listeners have now turned into producers. However, with the as yet limited connections established with the larger community of non-students, and despite the intentions put forward in their licence application, the

station's output currently points to the risk of 'insularity', if the programme proposals listed in the application are not developed soon.

It has an operational structure that is much more accountable and democratic than the other stations available in the area. It allows its members to have a useful training ground for their future careers in the media, to express their concerns to a wider public and, more simply, to just have fun. The sample of presenters that I interviewed during fieldwork did confirm that the station allowed them to develop their broadcasting skills and to make a particular niche genre known to a wider public. Indeed, CSR FM broadcasts a number of genres far more varied than any of the stations broadcasting to Canterbury. However, what was striking at that time was the absence of any visible relationship with radio production courses based in the two universities, arguably another sign of the fact that those institutions provided only funding and in-kind support, but were not organically involved in the development of the station. This is a missed opportunity, given the tradition of many British universities to connect analogue and web radio to their courses and make them part of the students' educational experience.

What emerges here, then, is both a sense of 'individual' empowerment through the boost of self-esteem, confidence and by the gaining of skills that students believe would be useful in their future work, as well as a 'collective' sense of empowerment in the student body as a whole. This collective body is now able to present its own take on its stories and is prepared to engage in a dialogue with the local community, voicing its concerns: 'We feel it's important to target young people because there is no other way in Canterbury that you can do it' (Helly, Interview, 2007).<sup>54</sup>

Another presenter also explained why being a part of the station was important for him and the empowering effect it had achieved:

I think that everyone that has been here has fallen in love with the station...everyone does whatever they can to get it done. It's something that everyone is involved in and very passionate about and obviously if someone is not passionate, it tends to grow in them. That's because I...I have just

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<sup>54</sup> Helly, Presenter - Breakfast Show, Interview, 19 March 2007.

joined on a whim and thought that this is going to be fun! I will have just a show! When I realised what was going on, I thought this was amazing! (...) I was never a confident person at all. I can't believe that I am actually on a radio broadcasting my voice across a network that anyone can tune into, or listen to. It's amazing that anyone in the area can tune in to my voice on a Monday and Friday morning. I never imagined myself doing that kind of thing. It does shock me to think what I have learned to do since I have been a member of CSR. (Gradidge, Interview, 2007)

While many important targets have been met, there are several areas where the station has still to show progress if it wants to fulfil its promises of delivery. For example, it needs to demonstrate a more consistent involvement of the schools it has the remit to bring into the production process, and a more proactive role in involving the local community or residents in a truly two-way dialogue.

Its technical issues, which complicate the work of technical volunteers, presenters and staff and which have consequences with regards to the quality of the output of the station, need to be resolved with long-term and reliable solutions, so as to help it realise its communicative potential. It would likewise be beneficial to enhancing its training programmes, to ensure that presenters avoid being self-referential in a manner that leaves the listener with a sense of un-professionalism; this could be avoided easily and would improve the public perception of the station, now that the voice of its students can be heard across the city.

Importantly, CSR is adding to the plurality of voices among the diverse stations that can be received in Canterbury. It enjoys the singular distinction – when compared to mainstream media in the area – of allowing members of its target community to participate in the management and decision-making process. As seen in the schedule and in the analysis of the election process, the numbers and the potential to bring more voices on air and involved in the day-to-day running of the station are much more concrete than in other broadcasting outlets in the area. However, there appeared to be little effort to open up to other members of the community residing in Canterbury, like the adult population or local civil society; this creates potential risks of 'ghetto radio',

which was discussed in the context of community radio in Chapter 8 (the case of ALL FM).

With other university-based and student radio stations being licensed across the country, it will be interesting to see how this sub-group of the community radio sector will adapt itself to this framework and, crucially, to see how this kind of station will perform in terms of long-term financial sustainability to make sure that their voices keep being heard. This station does not risk much because of its reliance on project funding and social policy priorities. But, being heavily dependent on higher education institutions and student unions at UoK and CCCU – for its running costs and the salary of the only part-time paid member of staff, shifts in education policies and university funding could pose a threat to its existence.

In terms of the wider context of Community Radio in Britain in the period 1997-2007, this station is an example of how different forms of community-based radio were now starting to group together under the same legislative umbrella, even though in practice, the everyday actions of CSR differed from the other two case studies discussed in this thesis. Whilst the diversity of the sector allows a very different set of interests to be grouped together under the term Community Radio, and its successful introduction has benefited a wide range of constituencies, it is also true that in each of these localities, listeners will experience very different forms of community radio. Given the relatively short time that had elapsed from the introduction of the sector to the time of my fieldwork, it was too soon to tell if this aspect, in the longer term, would be an opportunity or a threat for the sector, in the representation of its concept to the general public and its stakeholders. This matter might be an area of research to be pursued in future studies that will aim to assess the wider impact of Community Radio in Britain.

Finally, the relationship of CSR with New Labour policies can also be described as rather weak. Apart from a will to address ‘hard to reach’ groups of young people outside higher education, and engage them in radio production, there was little connection with the major social and cultural policies of the time. The experience with which CSR identified most was obviously the long tradition of student radio broadcasting which, as has been demonstrated throughout the thesis, has historically had little connection with the main community radio movement represented by the

CRA/CMA. One may conclude that, in its operations in Canterbury, rather than relating more fully to a wider concept of localism and involvement of the community of place, CSR emphasised instead the conceptualisation of the station as a tool for identity and representation of students' issues, as well as students' access and participation in the station's operation and management, through democratic structures.

## CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has looked at the origins and development of Community Radio in Britain under New Labour, focusing on the decade that saw Tony Blair serving as Prime Minister between 2 May 1997 and 27 June 2007. I had not started with a focus on New Labour in the very early stages of my research. But when reviewing published and grey literature, attending community media events and engaging in conversations with fellow scholars and community radio advocates and practitioners, I started to realise the influence of New Labour's context, in shaping the discussions – and ultimately, the legislation and the emerging shape – of the sector.

While Gordon (2009) and McKay (2010) have raised concerns about the dependence of the sector on New Labour social policy funding and priorities and discussed briefly what its implications might be, until now, little attention has been paid to the overall environment in which the lobbying of the CMA took place and how this relates with the historical development of the sector. In a forthcoming publication, Lewis recognises that the 'two most important factors impeding the early community radio campaigners were, first the absence of a discourse within which their arguments could make sense and second the political culture of the Left in that period' (2012, forthcoming).

Indeed, for most of the years under the Conservative Governments' rule in Britain, from 1979 to 1997, community radio campaigners maintained an oppositional position, which was ideologically charged and on the left of the political spectrum. As Starkey has argued in a book released shortly before the submission of this thesis: 'Many of the applications reflected the clear ambitions of radical left-wing groups to use radio not only to support communities against adversity in hard times but also to galvanise anti-Conservative protest in ways that were impossible through traditionally-regulated broadcasting, with its rules on impartiality' (Starkey, 2011: 166).

Whilst through the years, Lewis has provided detailed analyses of why community *did not* happen (Lewis and Booth, 1989; Lewis, 2002; Lewis, 2012, forthcoming), there has been very little discussion on the reasons of why, and how, it *did* happen under New Labour. Reversing Lewis' arguments, and by bringing to the fore the web of interactions among the CMA, the policymakers and the Radio Authority, I have tried to

show how the two most important factors facilitating community radio campaigners in the period 1997-2007 have been, first the *presence* of a discourse within which their arguments could make sense and second the political culture of New Labour in the same period.

Thus, this thesis contributes to an enhanced understanding of Community Radio in Britain during this period, in two ways. First, it provides a factual contribution – namely, it places into the public domain hidden testimonies and evidence about how Community Radio developed. On the basis of a sample of stations, it used case studies to examine how, if at all, this affected actual practice on the ground. Second, it attempts to provide an intellectual argument – namely, that Community Radio in Britain today can be understood fully only in the wider context of New Labour's period in office and the policies pursued by New Labour. While Part I of the thesis focused on the *ideals* of community radio advocacy, community media theories, British local radio practice and New Labour's social and cultural policies, Part II discussed the *realities* and how the community radio sector developed its policies and practices after 1997.

By reviewing and discussing the documents sourced from CMA archives, interviewing key players in the process and connecting them with the work of governmental departments and the Radio Authority, I tried to show that the lobbying process in the period 1997 to 2004 was crucial in determining the manner in which Community Radio was established. Specifically, I argued that, in a context in which New Labour put the concept of 'community' at the centre of social policies in the wider context of regeneration, employment and training processes, the CMA was keen to highlight how the sector could play a key role in delivering the recommendations that the DCMS put forward to the Social Exclusion Unit (CMA, 1999c).

This signalled a shift from a sector that had started to define itself more as *complementary*, rather than *alternative* to public and commercial broadcasting. In this view, community media then becomes a *partner* of the government in the delivery of public policies, alongside the more general 'third sector,' which includes civil society, community and voluntary organisations. Community media, with this move, positioned themselves in a new context in which they had to compete for funds against other community and voluntary organisations, and demonstrate their ability to perform

community development functions better than them. As I will shortly explain more fully, I tried to show how this brought new opportunities for funding, but simultaneously created inherent risks.

The change was not limited to the political context, though, and on the path to the recognition of Community Radio in legislation, I showed how this journey was not only a matter of lobbying skills and the capacity to reach the ears of the MPs and DCMS officials, but also that the person in charge matters. From January 2000, Richard Hooper, the newly appointed Chair of the Radio Authority, who was more progressively-minded, appeared to be much more sympathetic to the idea of a new sector that could bring back more localness to radio broadcasting and counterbalance an increasingly networked and syndicated commercial radio sector.

The Chief Executive of the Radio Authority, Tony Stoller, who had been serving since 1995, was initially sceptical due to the legacy of a polarised and very ideological community radio movement of the 1980s. But by gaining information on the activities of the hundreds of community radio groups that had hit the airwaves through the Restricted Service Licenses scheme, he was able to see how the profile of the sector was, by the start of the millennium, very different, and much less ideologically charged. Stoller, arguably in an effort to break further away from community radio's past, therefore argued that the Radio Authority should perhaps rename it 'access radio' and therefore empty it further of its ideological baggage.

With the political support of the New Labour Government, a more sympathetic regulator, and a different position towards both of them, the CMA then engaged in what would turn out to be, in the end, a *consensus building* operation in order to get the deal for Community Radio done. Mostly stripped of its previous ideological background, and following a successful evaluation of the 'Access Radio' pilot project, Community Radio was then introduced as the third sector of radio broadcasting in the United Kingdom on 20 July 2004. Indeed, by now the CMA had managed to make 'the most of Blair government's community rhetoric' (Rennie, 2006: 151).

Whilst it is undisputable that New Labour permitted, ultimately, the introduction and consequent mushrooming of stations across Britain (235 licensed by December 2011), I

argued that this association with the New Labour policy agenda created a number of shortcomings in the system.

First, as I showed in the concluding part of Chapter 6, through an examination of the discussion leading to the final draft of the Community Radio Order 2004, Labour MPs were successfully lobbied by the Commercial Radio Companies Association (CRCA) in the final stages of the discussion on the Community Radio Order 2004, to introduce restrictions on the funding and licensing of community radio stations in areas where smaller commercial radio stations were already present. From a party and a government that allowed further relaxation of ownership rules, deregulation and networking in commercial radio, this was a rather protectionist and unnecessary measure for a decreasingly local sector of broadcasting.

Secondly, and perhaps the most dangerous of all of these in the long-term, despite recommendations and promises of a substantial Community Radio Fund, New Labour failed spectacularly to deliver on this front. As was seen in Chapter 6, whilst the Radio Authority, through Everitt's evaluation of the Access Radio pilot project, strongly suggested a fund in the order of tens of millions of pounds, the New Labour Government completely ignored this important proposal. With only £500,000 available per year for a sector that now counted over 200 stations, and kept growing, the impact that such a fund would be able to make was very, very limited. As the then CMA's Director Steve Buckley commented, this 'was either a gross exaggeration of government's real intention or there has been a serious failure of implementation' (2010: 9).

This thesis, by providing an account of the development of community radio policy in the context of New Labour, hopefully contributes to the 'awareness of the context or environment within which community media operate [that] is critical for gaining an overall appreciation of these media' (Jankowski, 2002: 368-9). I would argue that the methodological approach used for the thesis has been key in helping to appreciate the larger picture.

Then, apart from media policy and history, my research also attempts to make a modest contribution to the study of the relationship between politics and the media in Britain.

This area has historically privileged more dominant narratives involving the mainstream press and broadcasting (see Curran and Seaton, 2010: 357-369) and I would argue that my analysis shows that community broadcasting's story should now be inserted in this larger narrative. On another level, political science studies of the legacy of New Labour, as well social policy studies, have also overlooked the role of community radio in the delivery of social policy objectives, and this study aims to at least stimulate future research in this field.

However, the underachievement of community radio policy developed under New Labour should not overly cast a shadow on the fact that most of the requests that had been campaigned for, for almost three decades, had been satisfied. Community Radio, and its operational characteristics defined in the 2004 Order, has now become a distinct sector whose 'primary concern is its service to the community rather than to increase its profitability' (COMCOM, in Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting, 1977: 14.15). It is positioned in the realm of 'local, autonomous non-profit radio' to which it 'truly belongs' (Lewis, 1977: 22) and its constituent elements reflect many of the requirements listed in the 1979 *Community Broadcasting Charter* (COMCOM, 1979) and its successors, until this day. It also fulfils most of the characteristics outlined in *Community Radio Charter for Europe* (AMARC Europe, 2000), promoting local communities' right to communicate, providing access to training and production facilities, and involving and serving communities underserved by mainstream media.

Parallel to the shift in the academic literature from a normative emphasis from a concern with *product* to one with *process*, also in the lobbying and practice of Community Radio, we can see a shift in the discourse over community radio away from political-economic objections to mainstream media and towards a dominant concern with what community radio volunteers might be able to achieve through the act of participation. Campaigners in the 1980s continuously referred to the deficiencies of local media and advocated, in the absence of a distinct legislation, for a higher degree of *access* to produce programmes on mainstream media. Now, the emphasis is on what can be achieved by participating in a community radio station in terms of self-esteem, identity and representation. Tens of thousands of volunteers across Britain have been trained, their voices have now become a communication tool owned by themselves, and mandatory local ownership (community radio cannot be networked under current

regulation) is making sure that decisions are made locally, rather than in a boardroom in London or elsewhere in the country.

The emphasis on ‘community,’ though, has not had an effect merely on the community media sector. As shown in the first part, this concept has been present, with varying intensity and emphasis, in both public and commercial radio, for over half a century.

The study recently concluded by Linfoot, a precious source for scholars interested in the development of BBC local radio, shows how the corporation tried to tackle this in the period 1960-1980. He rightly argues that, already by 1966, the corporation’s aspirations ‘contained the seeds of its failure to provide community radio’ ((2011: 316) as ‘the basic purpose of a local station is (...) to give the fullest possible service to a community of people holding the maximum number of interests in common’ (in BBC, 1966: 6). Indeed, Linfoot argues, ‘that may have been possible with 150 stations, but not with 40’ (2011: 316).

In the early 2000s, a project like *Voices* was developed to obtain a wider range of people’s voices on the BBC’s airwaves, develop media literacy skills among audiences and form partnerships with groups and organisations in the community (Linfoot, 2006). Community radio advocates saw this as an ‘invasion’ of their territory and, I would argue, rightly so. This is because, in the end, this was a one-off project with no long-term aims. It was never going to be a real community-led process as the ultimate aim of *Voices* was to produce output for the BBC, facilitated by its producers. It would also contribute to its claim of building ‘public value’ and to the discussion leading to the renewal of its Royal Charter.

This brings me to say then, that indirectly, it may be argued that the BBC has contributed to a delay in the introduction of Community Radio in the UK. This is primarily because of its claim, at various points in its own history, that it is a community broadcaster itself. Such a rhetorical position helped marginalise the profile and sense of purpose in the ‘real’ community radio sector in front of the government or committee of the day. With a few exceptions, BBC local radio managers and producers have always exercised full control over the content broadcast by their stations. Further, they usually regarded with suspicion the involvement of community members in the

production process and have judged such efforts – based on a quality judgement of the production – as amateur, non-professional and incompatible with BBC standards. In other words, where BBC local radio has provided a valuable service to the local community, its main interest has never really been to aim for the direct contribution of programmes by volunteers and ordinary members. It is reasonable to conclude on the basis of my analysis that, in this respect, it has been more interested, for obvious reasons, in the product rather than the process.

As for commercial radio, the background provided in Part I showed how the early years of ILR arguably brought radio ‘closer’ to listeners across the UK by providing additional local information, forums for debate, and a wider choice of popular music genres. In the absence of separate legislation, community radio practitioners resorted to ILR licensing in the late 1970s, but ultimately failed to deliver a project that lasted in the long term. This was mainly due to the structural unsuitability of the IBA system for community broadcasters. In the 1990s, stations aimed at large ethnic communities enjoyed different degrees of success, but often also succumbed to commercial imperatives at the expense of their own community input in programming. In recent years, with the further relaxation of ownership and format rules under New Labour, commercial radio has become more networked and is increasingly losing its localness and music diversity credentials (Starkey, 2011).

However, as the findings in Chapter 7 showed, there is a notable exception to the claim that the commercial radio regime is completely unsuitable for community radio. Filling another gap in academic literature, the case of a group of stations in the Scottish Highlands and, more specifically, Two Lochs Radio, has demonstrated how community radio *is* possible, viable and thriving, even with a commercial licence. Such stations share many of their constitutive elements with full-time community stations: not for profit, staffed and run mainly by volunteers and providing a service for dispersed communities in a vast area that lacks any local broadcasting presence whatsoever. Shortly reaching its tenth year of operations (in 2013), Two Lochs Radio and its sister stations in Scotland have managed to avoid the destiny of their predecessors by preserving their ethos and remit over the years. A crucial difference, though, is the fact that, being distant from major urban centres, it has not achieved the aims of shareholders, who were looking to maximise their investment, as they see local radio as

a commercial operation. Further, the absence of any mainstream local broadcasting outlet in the area has also made it the only *truly* local source of information, debate and communication. Importantly, by being a commercial station, Two Lochs Radio can resort to more advertising, without worrying about finding a match from another source and thus avoiding having to deal with restrictions like those applicable to community radio stations.

In the final three chapters of the thesis, case studies of three very diverse stations attempted to offer an original contribution to knowledge by connecting their practices with, first, the practices of community radio's 'pre-history,' second, with the policy framework in which full-time Community Radio emerged in 2004, and, third, with the practice of British, local, public and commercial radio broadcasting.

We have seen how community radio experiences emerging from RSLs showed a decrease in the ideological baggage linked to community radio in the 1970s and the 1980s. ALL FM, Forest FM and CSR FM all share this characteristic, with the exception of a few programmes (e.g., *Under the Pavement*) at the Manchester station. All of them were passionate about giving their target communities a voice and identified themselves as the only local presence on the radio dial. They gave to the local community an opportunity to produce content that they felt was *relevant* to their local area through the access and participation in the station's output. However, there was no overt political colour attached to any of the stations. In different ways, at the local level, Labour councils and MPs in Greater Manchester and Conservative councils and MPs in East Dorset and Kent supported and endorsed their work. The possible implication of this shift might be beneficial in the longer term, as it could avoid community media being labelled a 'partisan' sector of broadcasting, and minimise the risks of negative consequences to the sector at the national and local level. Given the switch from Labour to a Conservative/Liberal-Democrat coalition on 6 May 2010, future studies could assess if at all the change of political colour in Westminster will have any effect in this sense.

The analysis of the three stations also showed how they all *compensate* for market failure in their areas, providing very local content and space for constituencies that have been neglected, historically or in recent times, by other local radio stations. ALL FM

provides a kaleidoscopic mix of languages and music genres, where Forest FM and CSR FM also have varied music schedules, overtly distinct from those of their neighbours in the local radio landscape. In line with the age groups that they target most, in Verwood, there is more space for classical hits and contemporary pop/rock genres, while in Canterbury more space is given to contemporary music. Extended information about local events, community groups and space for discussion of local matters are present, in varying degrees of depth, in all of them. In the case of refugees or smaller ethnic groups (mainly at ALL FM), this provides an important communication tool from their own peers, to learn more about the areas in which they live, its support services and its opportunities.

The sampled stations did not present any innovative formats of radio, compared with, say, the London-based community radio station Resonance FM and its emphasis on experimentation or radio art. In speech-based and music shows, the main difference was the local emphasis and the space given to describe and contextualise unsigned bands and music genres. Forest FM and ALL FM followed ‘traditional’ schedules by having drive-time shows in the morning and in the afternoon, with specialist programmes in the evenings and weekends. CSR instead followed a ‘free format’ scheme common among student and college radio stations. If not innovative, what nonetheless emerged was the *number* and *diversity* of people that these stations encompassed and kept training, allowing an unprecedented number of volunteers to hit the airwaves of local radio. Also in this respect, the thesis showed that there is a *continuum* with the ideals of early community activists and conceptual ideals of community radio in terms of localism, access and participation.

Participative governance structures, and different ways of facilitating access and participation, are present in the three case studies, making this the most *democratic* broadcasting sector among the three at the local level. CSR has an annually elected managing body, in a fashion similar to student union elections, while the other two stations have consultative bodies and steering groups that can have a voice on how the stations are run. Managing staff and the Board of Directors come from the local community and have deep knowledge of the issues characterising their own areas through their web of connections with institutions and voluntary organisations in the area. ALL FM employs a community outreach officer to connect with communities that

are present in the area but that are not represented on air, adopting a proactive approach to ensure representation. This aligns with the democratic and participative ideals of the global community radio movement and although none of the stations has clear links to AMARC, I would conclude that it would be reasonable to view them as operating – to some extent – within AMARC’s traditions.

The findings of the research also showed the empowering and bonding effect of community radio on its volunteers and confirmed what has emerged in previous studies in the sector such as that of Everitt (2003a, 2003b), Coyer (2006, 2007), Gordon (2006) and Manchester (2005, 2006, 2008). Forest FM volunteers are proud to reflect their own locality and heritage, and consider the station ‘family.’ CSR FM students feel empowered to have their own outlet in a local media environment that traditionally has represented their contribution to the city as rather negative. ALL FM members underlined the fact that they had learned to appreciate different cultures that would never have crossed their paths if they had not decided to get involved in the station. Making radio makes them feel more confident, boosts their self-esteem and gives them the possibility to speak about their cultures, their social groups and their lives, and helps to provide a local view on global issues. In this context, I would like to connect such findings with a broader contemporary debate and the arguments brought forward by David Gauntlett’s *Making is Connecting* (2011).

Gauntlett does not include community media in his book, but the reference to DIY cultures and the social meaning of creativity, I would argue, are relevant to the outcomes of this research. The thousands of volunteers that take part in community radio stations signal an increase of a ‘making and doing’ culture in full-time local radio broadcasting and indeed, ‘this orientation rejects the passivity of the “sit back model” and seeks opportunities for creativity, social connections and personal growth’ (2011: 11). I also agree with Gauntlett on the fact that the simple act of deciding to dedicate time as a volunteer to make a radio programme, or to help to run a radio station, is not just a hobby or simply amateur-ish and trivial. Such a *choice* also has wider political implications as people decide to do radio ‘themselves rather than just consume’ what is proposed to them (ibid., 19). In all of the visited stations, volunteers enjoy and get satisfaction from what they do by the *process* of doing radio and by *connecting* with other people, either at the station, on air or via a programme’s website.

In this concluding chapter, so far, I have focused on what community radio *does*, but it is crucial also to discuss my contribution to what, I believe, community radio *does not do* because it *cannot*. In other words, what are the regulatory, financial or cultural barriers to community radio fulfilling its potential? Are there things that it could do, but cannot? In short, the research showed that, yes, there are a number of barriers that prevent Community Radio from fulfilling its potential. They differ for each station and have different degrees of influence on their activities.

The regulatory barriers, as we have seen, are strongly and closely connected to the finances of a station and here I want to reiterate what, I believe, the research showed to be a major flaw in the current shape of community radio legislation. Everitt (2003a, 2003b) and Gordon (2009) have raised a concern that my contribution to their discussions confirms, especially in the case of ALL FM. Its dependence on project funding, which depends largely on the political and financial context, exposes such stations to a higher risk. Its first years as a project under the umbrella of Radio Regen, while developing the station, had a negative impact, I would say, on its *editorial independence*. The station was not able to do all that its own community would have liked it to have done, but had to adjust its content to the funding streams available at that stage. Such a model requires a station to have one or more members of staff that spend considerable time in search of funding, in a highly competitive environment with decreasing resources, then ‘tick the boxes’ and report back to the funder. Moreover, it does not help to cover the core costs of management and administration of the whole station, but just the part related to the project. So, ALL FM has indeed been influenced in dedicating a large part of its programming to fulfilling the aims of a wider regeneration agenda. On the positive side, though, this has permitted hundreds of local members to get training, learn skills and, most importantly, gain a voice. CSR FM has somewhat similar concerns, although on a very different scale. Its operational costs, at the time of the fieldwork, depended almost totally on the student unions and the two universities involved in the project. This has left the station exposed heavily to the fluctuations in another stream of public funding – higher education, with any changes on that front likely to strongly influence its survival. In this context, Forest FM is the one that emerged as the most sustainable in the long term, with very low operational costs, a good advertising base and good relationships with local councils.

On all of the above, the elephant in the room is the sheer size of the Community Radio Fund, which could have proven to be key in giving these three stations a more solid start and building firmer foundations in the years to come. New Labour introduced Community Radio, but did not commit adequate funding to enhance its sustainability. When dividing £500,000 among all the UK residents, the ‘budget for the Community Radio Fund in the UK amounts to less than 1p per head of population’ (Buckley, 2010: 11). Based on my findings, I would tend to agree with Buckley, who has argued, ‘No doubt the absence of significant core funding for the sector also means that a growing number of stations are competing more intensely for a largely static pot of other national public funding sources, such as lottery grants’ (ibid.).

The *cultural* barrier, related to the last point, is that there was little awareness, at the time of the fieldwork, on the part of governmental departments other than the DCMS, of what Community Radio actually is. However, given the very low settlement of the Community Radio Fund, and the emphasis in other instances on ‘radio’, rather than specifically ‘Community Radio,’ the CMA had to engage in several separate discussions with government officials of, for example, the Home Office, the Department of Education and Skills, or the Department of Work and Pensions. In informal talks with people involved in such negotiations, there was visible frustration with the fact that the people in these departments would say something along the lines of: ‘Radio? Then you need to talk with the DCMS. We have nothing to do with radio.’ This could be explained by the fact that community radio, until recently, has been under the radar. What happened at the national level was echoed also at the local level, with officials who were used to working with traditional community development organisations, but not familiar with the use of radio as a tool *for* development.

Under New Labour, neither the DCMS, nor other governmental departments, committed any further funds to support core costs for Community Radio. On 27 June 2007, Gordon Brown succeeded Tony Blair as Prime Minister and remained in this position until 11 May 2010. Cuts to public funding implemented in the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review, made the increase in any central/national funding for Community Radio unlikely, with regional and local funding on a decreasing trend, too.

However, some important changes were introduced in an amendment to the Community Radio Order, approved on 21 January 2010 (UK Parliament, 2010). Firstly, licence holders were given the right to apply for a one-off extension of their licence for a period of up to five years, in line with similar practice for commercial radio. Secondly, based on data collected by Ofcom (Ofcom, 2009), the amendment to the 2004 Order lifted the rule that prohibited more than 50% funding from one source, although this limit would remain in place for advertising income. Thirdly, it lifted the rule that prohibited community radio stations from being licensed if they overlapped with a local commercial service whose coverage was fewer than 50,000 adults. In the latter case, these stations would still be prohibited from taking any advertising.

Whilst all the amendments above do not tackle the crucial matter of funding, the 2010 Order helps to guarantee the continuity of operation for a fragile sector, recognises funding opportunities and restrictions across the UK, allowing further flexibility and, finally, states that the establishment of community radio stations in less populated areas would not pose a risk to incumbent commercial radio broadcasters.

A few months after the order, at the General Election of 2010, a Conservative/Liberal-Democrat coalition replaced New Labour after 13 years. The Coalition Government has not made, or announced, any changes to the current legislation on Community Radio. However, with the Spending Review 2010, it approved, among other things, cuts for £81 billion from public spending and a 7% yearly cut for local councils, to last for four years, from April 2011 (BBC News, 2010). The BBC licence fee would also be frozen until 2017, and the corporation is also required to take over responsibility to fund the BBC World Service, BBC Monitoring and the Welsh language broadcaster S4C (BBC News, 2010). Given the reliance of many community radio stations on public funding, it is likely that such measures will have a negative effect across the sector. BBC Local Radio will also have less funding available for its future operations.

Another policy that might impact the sector is the Conservative Party's vision of 'The Big Society' (Cameron, 2009). Briefly, this concept promotes less public intervention in the delivery of service and an increased role for community-based organisations, as partners, to deliver such services. Power would be devolved from central to local government, and from there to local community groups, which would become public

service providers paid ‘by results’ (Cameron, 2010). For example, policing could be part of neighbourhood watch schemes and include ‘New powers for local communities to take over the running of parks, libraries and post offices’ (ibid.). Critics such as Gauntlett have argued, and the examples in this thesis confirmed, that ‘community engagement is a good thing, and is rewarding for participants and their neighbourhoods, but it should be built *above* the baseline of necessary services – not as a money saving replacement for them’ (2011: 157-8). What effect such an approach could have on Community Radio is difficult to say at this stage, and neither sector representatives nor government officials have so far issued any statements in this respect. *Community Radio Toolkit* co-author Ally Fogg has claimed that Cameron’s proposals are nothing new: ‘that’s what we’ve been doing for years!’ (2010) He has warned that, under current proposals, the benefits of the funding scheme for Big Society projects will be far less than the consequences of cuts to public spending elsewhere. This will be an area to be explored by future researchers, after such a vision is actually implemented.

What can be done, though, is to discuss briefly how the three stations sampled for this thesis performed in the last year, the first under the Coalition Government. Ofcom’s ‘Annual Report on the Sector’ for 2010-2011 (Ofcom, 2011) was based on an analysis of the annual reports<sup>55</sup> of 161 stations submitted to the regulator. The total cost of the sector was estimated as £10 million, providing volunteering opportunities for 12,500 people (ibid., 5). Ofcom has so far licensed 235 stations over three rounds of licensing, with 196 of these now broadcasting. The regulator also reports that,

Ten stations decided not to launch and a further ten have handed their licence back after they had commenced broadcasting. Three stations have ceased to exist after the licence-holding companies were dissolved. The reasons given for a community radio service failing have in general related to funding, with groups, for example, encountering unexpected cash flow problems or difficulties in obtaining sufficient funding to launch or to maintain the service. (ibid, 7)

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<sup>55</sup> ‘Each community radio station that has been broadcasting for more than a year is required to complete an annual report; this report details how a station has performed against its ‘key commitments’ and also identifies its sources of income and expenditure, in part to ensure that the station has met the legislative requirements on funding. For the period April 2010 to March 2011 Ofcom received key commitments annual reports from 163 stations and financial annual reports from 161 stations.’ The report was published on 23 November 2011.

So far, then, 10% of the stations did not start or had concluded their broadcast, mainly for financial reasons, which should come as no surprise, given the outcomes of this research and other subsequent studies. The report also outlines an impressive range of social gains in terms of speech and music diversity, provision of services to previously underserved communities, the facilitation of discussion and expression of opinion, and training opportunities for volunteers (see *ibid.*, 34-45). Despite that, funding is still the *major* difficulty highlighted by the stations:

Not surprisingly the most common difficulty cited by community radio stations has been the lack of available funding. Stations feel stifled by the small budgets they have to work within and the majority of community radio services cannot afford to employ staff to undertake key functions. (...) For many stations, the lack of public funding means that there is an atmosphere of uncertainty (*ibid.*, 49).

Among other things, ALL FM reported in further detail, that although it has ‘successfully lobbied Manchester City Council to continue funding, this will be 33% less than the previous years’ (*ibid.*, 74). There has also been a ‘significant drop in advertising revenue’ and ‘accessing funding has become more difficult’ (*ibid.*, 104). Finally, ‘due to lack of funding we have reduced staff numbers significantly’ (*ibid.*, 111). Since July 2011, this has resulted in having four, paid, part-time staff members, down from three full-time and three part-time members present in September 2006, at the time of fieldwork. The sustainability concerns expressed at the end of that chapter seem to have taken their toll now.

The organisational fragility of CSR and its reliance on the student unions’ and universities’ funding caused a domino effect when they tackled cuts in spending at their own institutions: ‘There has been a gap without a paid part-time position to support the station. Between November and February, the station was without a student media manager and relied primarily on the work of volunteers to maintain the output and general day-to-day’ operations (*ibid.*, 111).

In the end, the only station that is performing well is the one that relies the least on national funding schemes, Forest FM. Station Manager Steve Saville stated that the national and global context have had very minor consequences to the station's operations. Funding from the local district council, given that 'the station has proven its worth,' has remained unchanged for the past five years, including 2011 (Interview, 2011).<sup>56</sup> Moreover, with the recent closure of Heart Radio's (formerly 2CR) studio in Bournemouth, with its closest studio now being in Southampton, listeners seemed to increasingly appreciate the local nature of Verwood's station.

Despite all the structural limitations and a rather mixed legacy left by New Labour, all three stations are broadcasting. They have proven to be resilient and adaptive in challenging funding circumstances, giving voice to hundreds of communities across Britain. While New Labour failed to provide solid foundations for the sector, a 'quiet revolution' has been taking place in local broadcasting across the UK. Couldry has argued that 'voice as process – giving an account of oneself and what affects one's life – is an irreducible part of what it means to be human' (2010: vi). Neoliberal discourses privilege top-down structures and increasingly commercialised models of broadcasting, and New Labour was no exception to that in the field of commercial radio. In this thesis, I hope to have demonstrated how Community Radio, despite its limitations, and far from being a 'perfect' model, has begun to offer a tool for self-expression and for making the use of one's voice meaningful.

Apart from aiming to have made a small contribution to knowledge on overlooked areas of radio studies, media policy and media history, of potential interest to academic researchers, I also hope that my findings will be of direct relevance to those working or volunteering in the community media sector, as a means of allowing them to reflect on their histories, their practices, as well as their achievements and their failures.

Clemencia Rodriguez has argued that 'academic service should be *at the service* of praxis; in other words, that the knowledge we produce within academia is most valuable if and only if it becomes useful for those in the field trying to make our societies better places to live' (2010: 133). I have been advocating such an approach since the very start

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<sup>56</sup> Steve Saville, Interview, 11 July 2011.

of my research and my first ever presentation in an academic conference, a Radio Studies Network event in Birmingham on 7 April 2005.

Six years later, I hope that the non-academic reader will also manage to find something of value and of use for his or her own station, on the pages of this text.

## APPENDICES

	Owner	Reach	Character of service	AM/FM
<b>Century 105.4<sup>1</sup></b>	GCap Media	North West region	Full-service talk and music station with 24-hour news, targeting primarily 25-54 year-olds	FM
<b>Galaxy 102<sup>2</sup></b>	Chrysalis Radio Ltd.	Greater Manchester	Rhythmic-based music-led service for 15-29 year-olds supplemented with news, information and entertainment.	FM
<b>Gold (Manchester)<sup>3</sup></b>	GCap Media	Greater Manchester	Adult oriented rock and quality easy listening station aimed primarily at over 35s	AM
<b>Key 103<sup>4</sup></b>	Emap	Greater Manchester	A contemporary and chart music and information station for 15-44 year-olds.	FM
<b>Piccadilly Magic 1152<sup>5</sup></b>	Emap	Greater Manchester	Soft pop music-led service, with local information, aimed primarily at over-30s	AM
<b>Smooth FM<sup>6</sup></b>	GMG	North West region	Easy listening station featuring easy listening music including music influenced by jazz and soul and lifestyle oriented speech, targeting an audience aged 50-plus	FM
<b>The Revolution 96.2<sup>7</sup></b>	Oldham Evening Chronicle and UKRD (50% each)	Oldham, Rochdale and Tameside boroughs of (G.Manchester)	Local 'full service' station aimed at 25-54 year olds and playing primarily a broad mix of adult contemporary and soft rock hits	FM
<b>XFM Manchester<sup>8</sup></b>	GCap Media	Greater Manchester	Alternative music format for 15-34 year olds a, playing generally guitar-led, quality modern and classic "music with attitude" created by artists who challenge the mainstream pop aesthetics	FM
<b>Asian Sound Radio<sup>9</sup></b>	Asian Sound Radio Ltd	East Lancashire	Music and information service for Asian listeners	AM

*Appendix 1-. Local commercial radio stations available on AM/FM in the Greater Manchester area.*

*Appendix 2 –ALL FM Schedule, as at September 2006 (Source: ALL FM flyer)*

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/amfm/AL220-1.htm> (accessed 1st September 2006) the station is now named *Real Radio North West*, part of the Real Radio Network and still owned by GMG

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/amfm/AL033-2.htm> (accessed 1st September 2006), the station is now named Capital 102, part of the Capital Network and is now owned by Global Radio

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/amfm/AL161-1.htm> (accessed 1st September 2006), the station is still named Gold, part of the Gold network and now owned by Global Radio

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/amfm/AL079-2.htm> (accessed 1st September 2006), the station has kept the same name and is now owned by Bauer Radio.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/formats/AL078-2.htm> (accessed 1st September 2006), the station has kept the same name and is now owned by Bauer Radio

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/amfm/AL164-1.htm> (accessed 1st September 2006), the station is now named Smooth Radio (North West), part of the national Smooth Radio service is still owned by GMG

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/amfm/AL235-1.htm> (accessed 1st September 2006), the station is now named 96.2 fm Revolution Radio, is still independently owned and not part of a network

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/amfm/AL298-1.htm> (accessed 1st September 2006) the station has kept the same name, has a sister station in London (XFM London) and is still independently owned and is now owned by Global Radio

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/amfm/AL183-1.htm> (accessed 1st September 2006) the station has kept the same name, and is still independently owned.

**ALL FM 96.9 - ALL FM 96.9**

	<b>MONDAY</b>	<b>TUESDAY</b>	<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	<b>THURSDAY</b>	<b>FRIDAY</b>	<b>SATURDAY</b>	<b>SUNDAY</b>	
8am	BREAKFAST EXPRESS with Jason Cooke	BREAKFAST EXPRESS with Jason Cooke	BREAKFAST EXPRESS with Jason Cooke	THE PHIL & PHIL BREAKFAST SHOW	THE PHIL & PHIL BREAKFAST SHOW	SATURDAY BREAKFAST with Mike George	GOSPEL SHOW with Amos	8am
9am								9am
10am	CHURCH CHAT ALL THROUGH THE YEARS	ON THE MOVE	FIRE SAFETY SHOW with Tony & Steve	CRIME & DISORDER SAFE AND SOUNDS PCT SHOW COMING SOON	ALL FM REPORTS	STANDING IN THE SHADOWS OF LEV with Mog	CULTURAL COLLAGE with Geli	10am
11am	NON STOP MUSIC HOUR	FACING THE ISSUES with Celeste McCabe	ALL FM COMMUNITY SHOW	ACCESS ALL AREAS Issues around Disabilities	LAW MATTERS Legal Advice Show	MIDMORNING FUNSTER with Ash & Friends		11am
12pm	AATISH RADIO SHOW	NON STOP MUSIC HOUR	NON STOP MUSIC HOUR	NON STOP MUSIC HOUR	AATISH RADIO SHOW	MAVIS AND ME Light entertainment	ART BEAT Arts News & Info	12pm
1pm	AATISH RADIO SHOW	NON STOP MUSIC HOUR	NON STOP MUSIC HOUR	NON STOP MUSIC HOUR	AATISH RADIO SHOW			1pm
2pm	SOUND AS A POUND with Sandra Pound New Update & Great Music	MUSIC MOVING ON with the Bridge Water Hall	THE INSPIRATION HOUR with N'ke	KHATJIA GUZUL TIME Asian Culture & Views	BAD GIRLS BASS R&B & Bhangra with Rubbia & Allia	CARIBBEAN CONNEXIONS News and views from the Caribbean	THE SUNDAY JAZZ 'N' BLUES with Gina	2pm
3pm	NON STOP MUSIC HOUR	EAST MANCHESTER SHOW in development	UNDER THE PAVEMENT Alternative	ALL FM COMMUNITY SHOW (REPEAT)	YOUTH SLOT Presented by young people from the ALLFM area	AFRICAN JAMBOREE News and Views from Africa	THE FULL IRISH Family Show with Joe Casserley	3pm
4pm	COMMUNITY SPORTS SHOW with Nabil & Co In development	ALL 80'S ALL 90'S ALLFM1 with Steve Smith	NON STOP MUSIC HOUR	R&B UNITED with Catherine Regan	NON STOP MUSIC HOUR			4pm
5pm	DRIVE TIME with Phil Coe	DRIVE TIME with Caroline Boyd	DRIVE TIME with Caroline & Geordi	DRIVE TIME with Mark Wright	DRIVE TIME with Emma	SATURDAY MELTDOWN with Chris Crates Soul, Reggae, Dancehall, Latino	BIG T'S CARIBBEAN CULTURE SHOW Reggae, Soca, plus community issues	5pm
6pm	KNOWLEDGE IS POWER THE ISLAMIC HOUR UPFRONT Live debates and call-ins	PERSIAN SEDA Music & News from Iran	IRISH COMMUNITY SHOW Traditional Irish Music	SOMALI NOMADS Music & News	SUPER CHA CHA CHA Music from Columbia with Juan Gomez	SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE Urban new releases with Julia	FAT CITY SOUL Classic & Modern Soul with Mike Stevens	6pm
7pm	THE EVERY OTHER MONDAY SHOW	BASS CULTURE Classic Reggae & Roots	BOMBAY MIX Upfront Bhangra with Nina	BLOOD UNDER THE TRACK TRACKS with Graham & Graham	ODYSSEY SHOW House & Drum'n'Bass	THE URBAN LICK (B/W) The Groove Sessions	SALAD OF MUSIC (B/W)	7pm
8pm	REAL RHYTHM with Shakeelia	RIDDIM 'N' RAAG Reggae & Raag						8pm
9pm	HOT WHERE WE'RE ON with 80's Luck and 90's Martin	THE A.C. SHOW UK Garage, R&B & Chart with Lewis Hays	DRUM & BASS SHOW with P.S.I.	THE NORTHERN WIRE Folk, Punk, Jazz/Rock	BEATS & PIECES with Meera	THE UNDERGROUND HIP HOP & R&B SHOW with Alex Scott	CAFE DEL M12 with Ally & Phil	9pm
10pm								10pm
11pm								11pm
12am	THE ROCKET CREW Classic Rock	NIGHT MOVES with Vicky Richardson		MISS JINNY SHOW Goth, Punk, Electronica		THE DAN ENGLISH Electro & House Show	THE SOUND LOUNGE with Ray Cook	12am
1am								1am
2am								2am

*Appendix 3 - Detailed outline of the quantitative findings on ALL FM, based on Ofcom, 2004b: 41-47*

**Listener profile**

- 44% Male, 56% Female
- 46% ABC1, 52% C2DE
- 65% aged 16-34, 26% aged 35-54, 9% aged 55+.

**Listening behaviour**

- 17% every day, 11% 4-6 days a week, 32% 2-3 days a week, 38% once a week or less often
- 15% 3 hours + each day (both weekday and weekend), 50% between 1 and 3 hours daily, 30% one hour or less
- 20% most of the time, but peaks between 2 and 5 pm (29%) and 5-10.30 pm (42%)
- 32% evening (weekdays and less at weekends), 17% mornings and 17% mornings and evenings.

**Listening Experience**

44% themselves and other adults, 13% with children, 45% alone.

**Favourite programmes**

- Music programmes: for 30% the favourite, with 38% typically listening
- Garage Music: 13% - with 13% typically listening
- Breakfast show: 11% - with 17% typically listening
- Community chat: 11% - with 20% typically listening
- Black Issues: 10% - with 15% typically listening
- On Eire: 8% - with 10% typically listening.

**Contact**

62% - not been in touch with ALL FM: of those that have, 23% have taken part in phone-ins, 6% have been interviewed, 6% volunteered to help and 6% have visited ALL FM.

**Non Listeners**

Non-listeners had typically never experienced the station – 87% stated that they have never listened to ALL FM. Reasons for not listening: 54% 'never heard of it', 22% did not know why they had never listened or had never thought about doing so, 7% 'not sure what it covers'

**Programme mix**

- 89%: very/good variety of music
- 84%: very/good mix of music and chat
- 81%: very/good mix of programmes
- 81%: very/good for information about local events
- 81%: presenters are very good or good
- 80%: very/good for programmes involving local people and activities
- 74%: offers programmes 'in my language'.

**Station profile**

- 88% strongly agreed or agreed: 'more relevant to my locality'
- 86% strongly agreed or agreed: is an entertaining station
- 81% strongly agreed or agreed: offers local people opportunities
- 81% strongly agreed or agreed: is professionally run
- 80% strongly agreed or agreed: offers local people more support
- 74% strongly agreed or agreed: offers 'good programmes in my language'
- 70% strongly agreed or agreed: is 'relevant to my culture'
- 68% strongly agreed or agreed: has had a 'positive impact on my community'
- 67% strongly agreed or agreed: 'encourages emotional well-being'
- 64% strongly agreed or agreed: is 'more relevant for my age group'.

**Overall satisfaction**

- style of music 75%
- variety of programmes 46%
- mix of music and chat 42%
- style of presenters 42%
- involvement in local community projects 32%
- information/news regarding local events 32%.

86% could not think of anything that they disliked about ALL FM. Overall, satisfaction high: 94% of listeners rated ALL FM as very good or good. Awareness of ALL's community status very good: 94% knew that ALL FM is a local station, 95% that it is a community station, 93% that it is run for the benefit of the local community and 90% that it is there for the community to take part in. Across entire sample: 31% knew that ALL FM is a Community Radio station - although 75% of the total sample were very supportive or supportive of the concept of Community Radio.

*Appendix 4 – Forest FM Schedule, as at March 2007*

Source : Forest FM website (<http://www.forestfm.co.uk/schedule.htm>) accessed on 1 March 2007

*Weekdays*

07:00 Breakfast Time - with Keith Sterling  
09:00 Pete Samuels - music, news and chat !  
12:00 Lunchtime Express  
14:00 Roger Mathews (Monday, Wednesday, Friday)  
14:00 Steven Long (Tuesday and Thursday)  
16:00 Drivetime - Laura Jerome (Bede Botto Mondays)  
19:00 Community Matters

20:00 Specialist:

- \* Monday: WIRED ! - Tony Warren
- \* Tuesday: Jazz - Pete Element and Chris Walker.
- \* Wednesday: Rock'n'Roll with Steve Stack o Wax
- \* Thursday: Rock Night - Paul Jerome.
- \* Friday: Forest Folk - Paul Burke

22:00 Late Night :

- \* Monday: Modern Rock - Dave Austen
- \* Tuesday: Nonstop music.
- \* Wednesday: Paul Peters - Fabulous Fifties
- \* Thursday: The Musical Box - Alan Dorey
- \* Friday: Ellie's Extravaganza

*Saturday*

07:00 Rosie Wells  
09:00 Scott Summer's Saturday  
12:00 Kieran Williams  
15:00 Steve Saville  
18:00 Dave Austen's Sixties Saturday  
20:00 Geoff Dorsett - Soul Man  
22:00 Nonstop Music Through The Night

*Sunday*

07:30 Farm Radio  
09:00 Youth Zone - Chris, Dave, Josie and Josh  
12:00 Sunday Lunch with Steve Saville  
14:00 Cruisin' with Steve Stack o Wax  
15:00 Chris Walker Jazz Hour  
16:00 Keep It Country - with Colin & Ros  
18:00 Stardust - with Ken Gladstone-Millar  
19:00 Classical Sweep - with John Stacey  
20:00 Beatles and Beyond - with Pete Dicks  
22:00 Chill Factor - with Colin Hanslip

Appendix 5 – CSR FM Schedule, as at March 2007. Source: adapted from a document provided by CSR (CSR demo schedule.xls, version 19 March 2007)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
0.00	Beats from the Basement - Bhavin Pabari	Immersed in Noise - Paul Quane & Frederico Zelaschi	PJB - Alex Cross	Bees in the Biscuit Tin - Emily Boothroyd & Tom Andrews	Dirty DJs - Neil/Ross/Bobby	Open Mic	Adam Andrews
1.00	AUTO			AUTO			
2.00				AUTO			
3.00	AUTO						
4.00							
5.00							
6.00	Early Breakfast					AUTO	
7.00							
8.00	Student Breakfast - Philippa Spurr	Student Breakfast - Paul Neal Owen Longuet/James Tee	Student Breakfast - Greg Pittard/Richard Todd/Tom O'Brien	Student Breakfast - Greg Pittard/Richard Todd/Tom O'Brien	Student Breakfast - Rebecca Haran		
8.30	News with Jules Wix	News with Sapna Woodit & Stuart Traynor	News with Charles Facey	News with Sapna Woodit & Emily Henry	News with Stuart Traynor	Weekend Breakfast	
8.35	Student Breakfast - Philippa Spurr	Student Breakfast - Paul Neal Owen Longuet/James Tee	Student Breakfast - Greg Pittard/Richard Todd/Tom O'Brien	Student Breakfast - Greg Pittard/Richard Todd/Tom O'Brien	Student Breakfast - Rebecca Haran		
9.00	News with Jules Wix	News with Sapna Woodit & Stuart Traynor	News with Charles Facey	News with Sapna Woodit & Emily Henry	News with Stuart Traynor		
9.05	Student Breakfast - Philippa Spurr	Student Breakfast - Paul Neal Owen Longuet/James Tee	Student Breakfast - Greg Pittard/Richard Todd/Tom O'Brien	Student Breakfast - Greg Pittard/Richard Todd/Tom O'Brien	Student Breakfast - Rebecca Haran	Student Breakfast - Hollin Cross & Joe Stevens	Student Breakfast - Rebecca Haran
10.00							
11.00	Motown - Stuart Nutten	Simon Kelsey	Batman and Monty's Indie Baguette				
12.00	News with Jules Wix	News with Owen Evans & Lucy Danser	News with Anne Lawton & Charles Facey	News with Anatole Lucet	News with Maxine Mattingly		
12.15	Motown - Stuart Nutten	Simon Kelsey	Batman and Monty's Indie Baguette	Between The Lines		What's On	
13.00	Speech	Speech (Covered by Simon)	Speech (covered by Batman & Monty)		The View - Philippa Spurr		One Discovery - Jon McDonald
14.00	AM at PM - Angela	The Soundcheck - Liam Smyth & Andrew Dillon	Terry's All Gold - Terry Cleaver		The Indigo Poprock Show - Thomas Foster		
15.00		Schools (Covered by Liam & Andrew)		Schools (not yet)		Back of the Net - Sports Team	Slow Motion - Adam House
16.00				Acoustic Road Rage Reliever with Lucy and Matt			
17.00	Dance Culture - Aimee Francis	Liam Preston & Dan Setford	All Out Sports - Kal, JC, Josh, Chris & Amy		The Mix		
18.00				News with Guy Griffin & Rebecca Shawyer		Richard Bonner	The Mix (Not yet)
18.30	News with Owen Evans & Jules Wix	News with Anne Lawton & Anatole Lucet	News with Owen Evans	Cultural Discussion	News with Stuart Traynor & Alice Hodgeson		
19.00	Weekly Review		Joe Roberts	That Guy In The Hat - Tom Smith	The Breakdown - Emma Gilbert	Hairbrush Hits -- Kelly Gardner/Amy Shead	
20.00	Last Man Standing - Andrew Martin	Departures - Lee Matthews	Underground - Joe Collins & Stuart Clark	Sitcom (Not yet)		House Harmonics - Dee McKeever	Girl Germs - Aideen Johnston
21.00							
22.00	Immersed in Noise - Paul Quane & Frederico Zelaschi	The Urban Basement - Tanaka Chidawanyika/Candace Wilson	Bees in the Biscuit Tin - Emily Boothroyd & Tom Andrews	Jenny Church	Deeper Underground - Ashton Le Bailly		Beats from the Basement - Bhavin Pabari
23.00						Abstract - Agnes Lech	
	Christ Church		UKC		Pre-Recorded		

The boxes with a diagonal line indicate empty spaces were planned for future programmes, and had broadcasted an automated playlist at that time. The ones with a title had been pre-assigned to those programmes, but had not started at the time of fieldwork.

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*Interviews*

Chapter 8 – ALL FM

Faye Armstrong, presenter, *Carribbean Connections*, 30 September 2006

Vanessa Baldwin, Religion and Ethics Department, BBC, 28 September 2006

Caroline Boyd, presenter afternoon *Drive time* Tuesdays, 29 September 2006

David, presenter, *Under the Pavement*, 27 September 2006

Andrew Edwards, presenter, *Art Beat*, 1 October 2006

Stevie Fly, presenter, *Carribbean Connections*, 30 September 2006

Alex Green; Station Manager, 29 September 2006

Gina Hine, Business Liaison Officer, 29 September 2006

Ian Morris (aka Mog), presenter, *Standing in the Shadows of Lev*, 30 September 2006

Nike, presenter, *The Inspiration Hour*, 27 September 2006

Danielle Porter, Volunteer Support Worker , 29 September 2006

Vicky Richardson, presenter, *Night Moves* and *Access All Areas* , 28 September 2006

Steve Smith, presenter, *ALL 80's ALL 90's ALL FM*, 26 September 2006

Chris Sumner, Scheduling and Volunteer Support Worker, 27 September 2006

Gavin White, Administrator, 29 September 2006

Chapter 9 – Forest FM

Bede Betto, Monday afternoon drivetime presenter, 12 March 2007

Matt Black, Monday afternoon drivetime presenter, 12 March 2007

Chris, Dave and Josie, presenters of the Sunday morning programme, 11 March 2007

Geoff Dorsett, presenter *Soul Man*, 10 March 2007

Laura Jerome, Tuesday/Friday afternoon drivetime presenter, 13 March 2007

Paul Jerome, presenter *Rock Night*, 12 March 2007

Roger Matthews, presenter 2pm-4pm Monday/Wednesday/Friday, 13 March 2007

Neal, presenter morning programme Monday, 12 March 2007

Colin and Ros Ray, presenters *Keep it Country*, 11 March 2007

Pete Samuels, presenter morning programme Tuesday/Friday, 13 March 2007

Diane Saville, part-time Administrator, 13 March 2007

Steve Saville, Station Manager, 13 March 2007 and 11 July 2011

John Stacey, presenter '*Classical Sweep*', 11 March 2007

Keith Sterling, presenter breakfast show weekdays, 14 March 2007

Tony Warren, presenter '*WIRED!*', 11 March 2007

Kieran Williams, Sunday 12pm-3pm presenter, 12 March 2007

## Chapter 10 – CSR FM

Tom Batton and Charlotte Montgomery, presenters *The Batman and Monty's Indie Baguette*, 21 March 2007

Simon Kelsey, Programme Controller, CSR, 22 March 2007

Terry Cleaver, presenter, *Terry's All Gold*, 21 March 2007

Matt Gradidge and Helly, Breakfast Show presenters, 19 March 2007

Guy Griffin, Head of News, 19 March 2007

Ben Hickford, Head of Marketing, 20 March 2007

Owen Longuet and James Tee, Breakfast Show presenters, 20 March 2007

Luke Nicholson, Student Media Co-ordinator, Kent Union, 21 March 2007

Liam Preston, Station Manager, 20 March 2007

Liam Smyth, Head of Music, 20 March 2007

### OTHER INTERVIEWS

Steve Buckley, former Director of the CMA and President, AMARC, 4 April 2007

Alex Gray, Station Manager, Two Lochs Radio, 8 July 2011

Phil Korbel, Director, Radio Regen, 28 September 2006

Tony Stoller, former Chief Executive, Radio Authority, 14 July 2010

## MY PUBLICATIONS

In compliance with the *Regulations for the Award of the Degrees of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy 2011/12* of the University of Westminster, point 14.5, which states

14.5 Unless specific agreements have been made to the contrary (...) the candidate shall be free to publish material in advance of the thesis but reference shall be made in the thesis to any such work. Copies of published material should either be bound in with the thesis or placed in an adequately secured pocket at the end of the thesis.

I am attaching copy of the article ‘Community Media in the context European media policies’, co-authored with Nuria Reguero i Jimenez (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) and published in 2010 by the peer-reviewed journal *Telematics and Informatics* (Elsevier).

The article contains parts of Chapter 2 of this thesis in its first three sections.

Full reference:

Community media in the context of European media policies  
Jiménez, Núria Reguero and Scifo, Salvatore (2010)  
*Community media in the context of European media policies.*  
Telematics and Informatics, 27 (2). pp. 131-140. ISSN 0736-5853

The abstract and the link to the this article are available via WestminsterResearch at <http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/7077/>