COMMUNITY RADIO AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY:

COMMERCIALISM VS. COMMUNITY POWER

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Abstract

This article charts the historical development of community radio in the United States, and makes comparisons with the development of stations in Europe. Parallels are noted and illustrated from both the author's personal experience and academic analysis. Two typologies are proposed for understanding this development in which key aspects of stations are used for comparing stations in the mid-1970s to those in the late 1990s. The article ends with formulation of a number of issues which should be placed high on the research agenda, and a plea for consideration of the US model of listener-sponsorship as a viable "third way" for community radio initiatives in the 21st century.

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Introduction

In 1978, I was asked to describe working in community radio, at a Media Alliance forum in San Francisco, I said it was something like being in the bottom of a giant blender, when you never knew who was pushing the buttons. Today many buttons are being pressed in community radio internationally, and not just on the control panel. The most prominent of these in the United States is growth. In the last decade, community/public radio listenership has more than doubled in the US, according to statistics compiled by the *New York Times*: from 9.8 million listeners in 1985 to 19.7 million, in 1995 (cumulative weekly listenership). Growth occurs in virtually any dimension studied: business financing (up approximately 110% across the same period); listener support (up 100%) number of stations (doubled, up to 627) (Schatz 1996).[1]

Meanwhile, federal support has dropped steadily and significantly. The more popular community/public radio becomes, the fewer governmental dollars are thought to be needed for its sustenance. At least that seems to be the attitude in Washington, where legislators have rescinded $100 million dollars in funds over the last five years — in addition to deep cuts in the institutions which fund programming, such as the Corporation of Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Today, US funding accounts for 14% of community/public radio's dollars, down from 31% in 1980. According to one observer, manager of WXPN-FM in Philadelphia, "I believe in a few years there will be little or no public funding. That's what I'm using as a planning scenario" (Schatz 1996, C8).

Internet discussion groups devoted to public radio are filled with laments about staff laid off, stations threatened with going dark, and independent producers leaving the business in droves.

What then is the future of community/public radio in the US and Europe - where a similar trend is occurring, from a different starting point? Questions range from audience to technology: Will community stations be able to build audiences and stable funding with high-quality national programming, while serving local needs? Will digital technology for production and transmission create stratification between the technological have and have-not stations?

In Europe, where public broadcasting preceded commercial transmissions, will similar trends prevail, now that commercial radio licensing has opened up? Will community and university-based stations — previously the only alternative to a paternalistic tradition of public broadcasting — remain non-commercial? Will they adopt the North American "gourmet radio" model of speciality shows and niche marketing to survive?

Community Radio in the US

Like radio itself, the beginnings of the non-commercial spirit in North American radio are difficult to delineate precisely. Does it begin with the first experimental broadcasts at the end of World War I, such as Professor Terry's at WHA in Madison? With the time-sharing provisions of ethnic broadcasters in the 1940s (Barlow 1989, 91)? With the campaign for public frequencies, which resulted in the 1945 decision for a 20% set-aside of FM frequencies? Or outside of governmental institutions, in 1949, at KPFA-FM in Berkeley?

The Carnegie Foundation's survey of public broadcasting prompted the creation of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in 1967, and National Public Radio in 1970. A new era began of channelled public expenditures in non-commercial radio: stations mushroomed into existence.

The CPB and the more technologically-oriented National Telecommunications Information Act (NTIA) opened up first service in remote areas and set up mechanisms for certification and standardisation of stations. To qualify for an operating grant from the CPB, stations had to have four, then five full-time staff. Most stations used the resulting Community Service Grants (CSGs) to affiliate with National Public Radio and receive its highly acclaimed public affairs/news programming, such as *All Things Considered*. Production values of radio programming were ratcheted up by the national services, including the addition of American Public Radio in 1982 (later called Public Radio International). A rudimentary tape exchange of the National Federation of Community Broadcaster (NFCB) found larger audiences. A fourth and fiercely independent service, the Pacifica Programming Service, balanced the highly centrist ideological bent of National Public Radio, particularly following battles under the conservative Reagan-Bush administrations.

From the mid-1970s on, the distinction between community and public stations became clearer: on the one hand there were ex-college, now public, stations with ambitions to serve an ever-larger area with a professional staff and national programming. On the other hand, there were community stations such as those founded by ex-Pacifica volunteer Lorenz Milan which distinguished community from public radio by their degree of local origination, their anti-institutional orientation, and their anarcho-syndicalist governance (Katz 1989).[2]

The founder of Pacifica, Lewis Hill, centred community radio on four characteristics:
- the active participation of volunteers;
- that, with regard to listeners, quality rather than numbers was paramount;
- that listeners should listen selectively rather than around the clock which suggested the patchwork quilt of speciality shows still dominant in community radio;
- that volunteer staff does not constitute cheap labour, but an extension of the listening community itself.

"By suppressing the individual, the unique, the industry reduces the risk of failure and assures itself a standard product for mass consumption," Hill wrote in words still true today (quoted in Lewis and Booth 1987, 117). These key insights of Hill were disregarded by those planning the rationalisation of public/college/community radio in the US. Many 10-watt college stations, forced to upgrade their power or go dark in the late 1970s, made a transition into community stations, only to find themselves then pressured (and invited) to join NPR's national network.

With alternative funding schemes explored — such as a tax on use of the broadcast spectrum, or on the sale of radios and televisions — the funding balance of US community radio evolved in the 1980s: approximately one-third from local institutional support, one-third from listener and business support and the final portion from federal monies.

The professionalisation drive, which affected hundreds of community/public stations from the 1980s to the 1990s, was a layering rather than a replacement of one era of broadcasting for another. The result was a vast palimpsest, resembling those clay tablets of antiquity, where the traces of a previous message were faintly legible

underneath the new. Memories of the college station, freewheeling and self-indulgent, answering to no one, underlay the community radio model — with many of the same programmers, as students became alumni in their local community. Community radio was indelibly influenced by the times — particularly the Baby Boomer resistance to the war in Vietnam.

One epoch trailed into another. As the counter-cultural impetus of the 1970s dwindled, many who entered public/community radio as social activists, with issues-oriented agendas, began to replace this with professionalism: if they couldn't make the revolution through radio, at least they could make good radio in search of a cause.

So, ironically, as a vast network of CPB-qualified stations emerged in the 1970s, with professional equipment and staffs, it was dominated by the grown-up survivors of college and community radio, both as staff and committed volunteers. In the program guides of community radio you can trace earlier eras: in speciality shows, offering in-depth treatments of musical genres; in the slivers of "free-form" or eclectic music mixes, a format derived from the anything-goes days of college and early community radio; in social-issues-oriented public affairs shows and documentaries. Community radio came of age just as its first generation of talent did.

In 1979, the second Carnegie Commission Report on public broadcasting appeared, *The Public Trust*, with its ebulliently liberal vision of public/community stations. By this time definitions of community radio were counter-normative: programming that is alternative, non-mainstream, and not found elsewhere — programming "for the rest of us," as the Left magazine *New Dimensions* (later, *Mother Jones*) called itself.

Community radio was in the counter-programming game. Accused of being Leftist, it claimed its programming was the true journalistic balance to the rest of the dial, where greed went unchallenged. Do we as a society need *every* channel balanced; or does it make more sense to seek a balance from diverse opinions on *different* frequencies?[3]

Starting in the Reagan years — alongside the frontal attack on broadcast regulations by the powerful broadcast lobby (media deregulation movement) — federal funding for public broadcasting was attacked by conservatives with a zeal previously reserved for the United Nations. This tendency within the Republican party and its right-wing supporters dates from Richard Nixon's attacks on public broadcasting in the early 1970s. By the 1980s this had produced budget cuts; pressure on NPR to cut its expenses; and in the increased licensing of non-commercial religious stations by conservative groups. These strictures were promulgated by the same lobby successfully gutting the Federal Communications Act of 1934's standard of broadcast licensing in the public interest, convenience and necessity.

If the 1980s were a decade of professionalisation, the 1990s in public broadcasting saw a rationalisation in community/public radio: channelling federal dollars toward larger stations at the expense of the smaller ones. Smaller stations were swallowed by consortia of larger ones — such as KBUT-FM in Crested Butte, Colorado, taken over by a large Denver station calling itself Colorado Public Radio. Requirements for CPB qualification led to a quiet consolidation and the elimination of the smallest community stations (Barlow 1988, 61). Typically, stations most affected by this trend were those serving minority communities: African-American, Hispanic, and Native Americans. Rural stations allied in state networks suffered: Alaska Public Radio, which provided weather, disaster, and other crucial public service, saw its budget halved in 1994. Smaller

community stations faced off against large metropolitan stations employing professional fund-raisers and remote translators (repeaters) which encroached on their signal area.

At the 1995 Public Radio Conference, where stations gather to lobby their representatives in Congress and discuss the future of the system, conversations focused on the "dis(respect) list" of a taskforce of the Corporation of Public Broadcasting, designed to defund smaller stations based on audience size. Unsurprisingly, stations to be deselected for federal funding were ones with a reputation for independence and local origination. NFCB stations compete for listeners and subscriptions with far larger entities. One example was WFUV-FM in New York City, which is overshadowed by WNYC-FM, a powerhouse formerly owned by municipal government. With so many European community stations funded municipally, the move foretold parallel developments in Europe.

Given that Congress succeeded in slicing nearly 40% of its funds that year, CPB proposed either (1) casting out smaller stations (judged by audience share, regardless of mission) or (2) agreeing to share the decrease evenly throughout the system. Stations voted to share the pain — but only after an impassioned plea from small stations, and only by a narrow vote. The overall goal of the most powerful lobby in Washington, The National Association of Broadcasters, was to cut public stations loose from all support from government and slow competition with private stations.

In the 1990s, the US audience for non-commercial radio grew so fast that estimates of its size must be constantly updated. Today, community radio reaches perhaps 100 million listeners on a regular basis. And as the tide has risen, both smaller, community stations and their larger NPR counterparts have benefited. Yet from 1995-97, Republican legislators sought to defund the CPB completely, leaving public television and radio to founder, after which commercial broadcasters expect to join ranks and seize their frequencies. By 2000, roughly 60 stations (1/8 of those receiving CSG grants) must increase their measured listenership or their local fund-raising base, to continue to receive CPB grants (Schatz 1996, C8).

To avoid this fate, many stations are changing their discourse, speaking of markets rather than audiences, and consumers rather than listeners. Non-commercial stations are still barred from running advertisements; they have been allowed only underwriting, which during the late 1980s became known as "enhanced announcements." Ironically, stations are being annihilated by their own success: community public radio has the highest percentage of college-educated listeners, 25-54, who often have the disposable income hungered for by sellers of cars, professional services, and luxury goods. Decline in government support is expected to speed the introduction of ads, reducing this radio's distinctiveness and perhaps causing listenership to fall.

The most immediate effect of pressures for audience and financial independence can be seen in the hardening of formats into proven money-makers. Three major formats dominate: all-classical, which woos the upscale listener shamelessly; all-information/talk, which works best in large urban areas, such as for KPBS-FM in San Diego; and Fine Arts/Jazz, which brings in the African-American middle class and encourages suburban, education-oriented listeners. To retool for these formats, the diversity of non-commercial radio has been shunted to the smaller stations which feature a yeasty patch-work of programming: musical speciality shows, local public affairs, and eclectic, free-form musical mixes.

If non-commercial radio survives in the US, it will be in the teeth of its own government. Public and community radio in the US must contend with a commercialism which undermines its mission. The marketplace has not proven an effective protector of America's air, its water, and its land; what it will do to the airways and to community broadcasting is worthy of dread. Today, at the end of the century, public and community stations are at loggerheads over their future and their constituencies: rural vs. urban, professionalist vs. amateur, local vs. national programming. It is to these contradictory tendencies, and the widening possibilities for community radio broadcasting in Western Europe that I now turn.

Community Radio in Western Europe

Probably the most significant difference in context for non-commercial radio in Europe is that here public service radio preceded, not followed, commercial broadcasting. The BBC model set the tone and ambitions for Europe's national services: conceived of as a social glue, holding together society and excluding no segment, the system soon evolved into a paternalistic one, favouring the capital cities in which such services were centred, with events and culture portrayed as it affected London or Stockholm: broadcasting from the centre of power to the rest of the country (Poulson 1997).

By the 1950s, public radio in Scandinavia and the UK began to diversify, a movement galvanised by the radio pirates of the 1950s and early 1960s — most notably the 1958 Radio Mercury, in the Sound separating Denmark and Sweden, and the offshore Rock'n'roll ships which cruised outside of Britain's national limits. Pirate stations offered what the national serves had resisted: popular entertainment, centred on music, with brief news bulletins and — gasp! — commercials, rarely heard on Europe's airways except for stations like Radio Luxembourg. Though pirate stations were sunk by legislative action, there was no way to shut off demand for the format they originated. The basic presumption of uniformity in audience — one nation, one broadcasting service — was challenged.

Another challenge was in the creation of regional stations, with some degree of autonomy. This in turn led to the emergence of individual local radio stations, particularly those licensed to universities and local education authorities, many of them cablecast (Gray and Lewis 1992, 161). In Britain, seven stations were licensed in 1976, and 23 more in 1989. Because of under capitalisation and lack of forward-planning, the majority of licenses fell into commercial hands. Yet the Broadcasting Act of the 1990s Radio Authority offers hope that community radio may be tried again (Scannel 1996, 36).

By the 1990s, this diversification of the principal broadcast stream exploded in two directions: the creation of commercial channels, at first local, then national; and the establishment of community radio, as experiments in the 1970s and 1980s; and then on a more widespread licensed basis in the 1990s. Still, the percentage of permanent local radio which was community-oriented varied greatly, from 100% in the Netherlands to 0% in Britain (Prehn 1992).

In the period of institutionalisation of community radio in Europe, lobbying groups formed such as the Community Radio Association and the Association Nationales de Radio Libres. In 1986, many joined into the Federation Européenne des Radio Libres. Most were municipal- or party-funded, though in France and Norway, they drew funds from a national levy.

What most distinguishes the European model from the North American is its exploration simultaneously of three roads to localism in broadcasting. First came the decentralist thrust, which challenged the hegemony of national broadcasting services; this resulted in a regionalisation of service, such as Radio Sussex and Radio York. Unfortunately, these often siphoned resources from the national institutions, without providing comparable quality.

The second effort was to license commercial radio locally, an experiment which, ironically, furthered pressures for new national commercial channels. In large cities, the results were a new vitality to radio alongside slickness and gimmickry; soon afterwards, disaffection with the commercial model would often set in. Commercial stations provide a slick though insubstantial style of presentation. These are quickly shedding their mantle of localism, as they form networks for ad sales and cross-ownership with newspapers and television stations — the Bertelsmannisation of European communications.

The third effort was the development of genuine community-oriented stations, largely funded by municipalities and political parties. Suggested from the 1950s and 1970s, experimental in the 1980s, by the 1990s community radio had become survivors in the hard-scrabble battle for funds, victim of tax-cutting disaffection with the social democratic/welfare state.

One of the central tensions in European community radio was governance which evolved in ways similar to the history of the US movement, from a freewheeling-participatory model to one dominated by professionalism. One camp, devoted to progressive political change, built on the auto-gestion model of the 1960s European New Left, where groups within the station formed into collectives rather than hierarchical production groups; others were drawn to a less self-contained "access" model where constituency groups outside the station shared time or contributed programming, with technical help from professionals.

The effect of community stations dotted across Europe — or, in the case of the UK, as temporary or "festival" licenses — has been studied in works by Lewis and Booth (1989), Drijvers (1992), Prehn (1992) and others. These community stations received regular financial support from a municipality or an institution charged with serving this population. This meant stations rarely, if ever, tested audience loyalty by requesting donations over the air. The fundamental strategy of American community radio — offering specialised, programming to those willing to donate for its support, and building group identification based on this community of special-interest listeners — joined by a love of music or information programming — went largely unexplored.

In a conference among community broadcasters in Belgium in 1991, for example, station managers polled had not considered the North American approach. The idea that a segment of the population might contribute for programming was dismissed, in favour of improved ties to organised elements in their listenership (unions, professionals and social associations) presumed to have sway over potential listeners. Yet radio has increasingly become a media of individual identity, used in secondary fashion as a background to other activities. Expecting that teachers will listen to a specific station because society has allotted their guild a frequency ignores most of what we know about how people consume radio in a format-driven age.

Community radio never had a full-scale test run in England. By the time the lobbying power of the Community Radio Association had reached critical mass,

legislators wee already succumbing to pressure to open up local commercial stations. Still, efforts at a radio which targeted a particular segment of the population — such as feminists (FEM-FM in Bristol in 1991 and 1992, and Brazen radio in London in 1994) — helped launch a commercial "women's channel" on a permanent basis in 1995.

The concept of national commercial broadcasting is relatively new in Western Europe: England launched its first national commercial channel in 1995, Norway in 1992, and Denmark in 1997. The effect of such listenership on public radio has been at times dramatic: between 1992-95 radio listenership of the Norwegian Broadcasting Service fell 25% — an enormous decline for three years (Poulson 1997).

For Europe, the trend toward community radio has been part of a steady movement toward a more branched model of broadcasting. Still supported by national and local government, the approaches to radio devised in the 1970s targeted segments of society previously under served by national broadcasting: a community-oriented programming service aimed at youth, at immigrants, an overall movement toward diverse, formatted, and pluralistic radio (Lewis 1976; Council of Europe 1984). This movement may have peaked in the late 1980s. Declining government interest in the experimental models of the earlier period has moved community radio towards "large-scale pragmatism" (Prehn 1992).

Today, as more community stations accept ads, they turn into competitors for the local "state" broadcasters and the audience-winning, profit-driver formats of commercial broadcasters. The national state broadcasting services have inherited public service obligations; local commercial stations cream the easily pleased sectors of society; and community stations are finally stabilising, proving their worth to government sponsors, while experimenting with ads.

Let's examine what this latter development means in practice. Visiting Roskilde University in Denmark, in 1997, I also consulted with the management of the student station in Lund, licensed to a major Swedish university. The station was part of the Neighbourhood Radio group created in 1978 by Sweden's Parliament (Hedman 1992). The Lund station had been — like the earlier generation of pirate stations — the only alternative where listeners heard contemporary music formats. The station served as a training ground for careers in the national broadcasting service, sold ads, and provided direct services to the local population.

Then, in 1996, a local commercial station was licensed. It played many of the same pop tunes (albeit in a commercial rotation) and provided local news; in short, it did what the student station had, only more slickly. The student station foundered. It had to regenerate its identity as an alternative: not to state broadcasting, but to local commercialism.

This period of reconceptualisation will probably lead to experiments in North American-style community radio, with on-air fund-raising and nights of specialised programming, targeted toward discrete audience segments. In other words, a format geared toward winning listeners by programming and not by an overall, alternative, identification with the station. When I left, they were discussing film clubs, off-air fund-raising events, even direct listener-sponsorship, an idea which historically has met resistance in northern Europe, where higher taxes lead listeners to suspect community radio will be paid for by state funds. A similar gathering of a half-dozen community stations in Albertslund, Denmark, in May, 1997, found Denmark's community stations reappraising format and structure because of cut-backs in funding from their local governments. Similar strategies were discussed with enthusiasm. This

could represent a fresh direction for European community radio. Of course, with these North American techniques may come new struggles within community radio, as detailed below.

Modern Trends in Community Radio

At the end of the century, crucial contradictions have surfaced in community radio in the US and Europe. These are not new; but the increasing penetration of European broadcasting by commercial chains, and the relentless pressure to defund and commercialise North American radio and the campaign have had profound effect. A hybrid of grassroots community radio has emerged, "Community-public radio." Figure 1 contrasts mid-1970s community radio, when the NFCB was formed, and its situation a quarter century later.

Figure 1. Community Radio, Then and Now

	Community Radio (1974)	Community-Public Radio (1999)
Governance	Anarchosyndicalism (Those who work a station controlling its direction)	Hierarchy (professionals supervising professionals)
Origination	Largely local	Largely national/international
Format	Eclectic, patchwork folk/jazz/ freeform radical/free speech	Consistent, streamed programs classical/jazz/information liberal/unexceptionable
Funding	Local, grassroots donations local institutions	National, local underwriting declining federal/state funds
Audience	Constituency-based model diverse, minority-oriented students/alumni/community inclusive (all demographics) age range: 19-35	Rating-based model lowest-common-denominator white, upper/middle class exclusive demographics age range: 30-65
Identity	Local, responsive freewheeling, amateur station loyalty access	Regional (via translators) marketable, professionalist program loyalty production values

The figure parallels that of Hans Enzensberger's (1972) distinction between emancipatory and repressive use of the media, particularly concerning programming (decentralised/centrally controlled), production (by collaboration with the community vs. by specialists), and governance (auto-gestion vs. Bureaucracy).

Consider, for example, Tucson, Arizona, a city of 2/3 million people in the top fifty US broadcast markets. KXCI is the community station (NFCB-affiliated), funded by local listeners and businesses and a CSG grant; KUAT/KUAZ is the university-based NPR/PRI station which receives alongside listener support, donated space, salaries, and equipment from its host institution. KXCI has approximately 80% local origination; KUAT, probably 25%. KUAT/KUAZ have strict formats: classical and information,

respectively, on its two frequencies, with repeaters in major urban areas. KXCI has an eclectic format, with non-classical music and public affairs. KXCI sees its audience as made of groups needing access and alternative information and music; KUAT conceives of its listeners as a market. KUAT takes pride in its professionalism; on-air staff is paid; KXCI relies on community volunteers, unpaid. KXCI broadcasts primarily to students and alumni: Hispanic, black, and white; the university-based KUAT/KUAZ, ironically, aims at the middle-aged professional audience, overwhelmingly white. Yet both boast of community service; and on rare occasions, both might air the same national programming. At KXCI, programming decisions are made by a program director, in association with volunteers in a non-hierarchical environment; at KUAT, such decisions are made by the program director, in a hierarchical manner.

Contradictions of Modern Community Radio Practice

Another way to interpret Figure 1 is by exploring modern contradictions in community radio broadcasting in the US and Europe.[4] These contradictions could be expressed in the form of bilateral symmetries on four major axes.

FINANCE: Access vs. Audience-building
FORMAT: Local, eclectic vs. National, standardised
STRUCTURE: Participatory vs. Hierarchical
MISSION: Amateurish, activist vs. Professionalist

Finance

Today community radio is caught between two perspectives: open access, which fulfils the original aesthetic and moral imperative of community radio's founding generation; and audience-building, referring to both size, character, and financial resources. These two factors appear to work in opposition.

As long as access remains high for the local community — particularly groups of little appeal to commercial broadcasters — and as these produce programs relevant for that locality, audience size, paradoxically, is limited. To broadcast professionals, the explanation is production values: the more that inexperienced civilians are given airtime to air their concerns, the less listener interest. Amateurs may make heartfelt radio, but it is not necessarily audience-building. This is primarily true because of their rudimentary knowledge of radio's grammar and technique, and their limited access to professional audio equipment.[5]

Access. Access is an ideal which only communitarians seem to value. To those supporting the idea, it goes back to radio's first and crowning moments: to that windy tent atop a building in Pittsburgh's KDKA, where lines formed for first-come, first-serve radio. The odd collection of violin suites, animal imitations, and arias were pure access radio. Many community stations still rely on such mixes to preserve spontaneous access, such as WORT-FM's "Breakfast Cafe" in Madison Wisconsin, where patrons comment on issues of the day over their coffees. Such dedicated amateurism raises the hair on the neck of broadcast managers, for it offers a radio which is uncensored (and potentially obscene), uncontrollable, and inconsistent and very possibly boring. Advocates for such a format - long vanished from commercial radio, with the possible exception of remote advertising broadcasts from car lots - point to its spontaneity, its challenge, its representative democracy.

Audience-building. Yet in a financial environment where the majority of budget dollars are raised by marathon on-air funding campaigns, access-oriented programs don't dial for dollars. In terms of listener subscriptions, national programs of high profile usually bring the greatest return: the "Prarie Home Companions." There are good reasons for this: the quality of radio is a product of the resources invested, and programs like these have a staff of ten to fifteen. Can a local programmer realistically compete in production values? The appeal of the lone radiowolf, like the hero of the film *Pump Up The Volume*, is undeniable; but in the real world, someone must maintain the transmitter and the board, someone must keep track of bills, for the phone lines to keep ringing.

Community radio has long distrusted audience measurement, though there are signs that this luxury, like the windy tent radio, is vanishing (Stavitsky 1995; Ledbetter l997). As stations are forced into the arms of underwriters by cut-backs in federal funding, they must conduct scientific audience surveys, to justify their rates. And as they depend increasingly on underwriting in their budgeting, there emerges an equally inexorable tendency to program on the basis of fund-raising. The more listeners, the more resources, in two ways: (1) in the number of subscriptions and (2) in the building of the station's fund-raising database. The more resources, the more professional salaries and working conditions; which in turn breeds a professional sound best complemented by the highly produced networked material.

Many a community station has spiralled up (or down, depending on your point of view) in its listenership in this fashion. Many have transitioned from college to community to NPR/PRI affiliate, as they built (in some cases "chased") ever-larger audiences. The staff is usually well served in such campaigns, for it is their immediate circumstances which are most improved. This often leads to a growing tension between the staff's careerist aspirations and the amateurish orientation of volunteers arriving from the access model; one example of this is the KPFA-FM strikes of the early and late 1970s — and again in 1995 — pitting professional against volunteer staff, both unionised (Ledbetter 1997).

In the 1990s, audience size is a matter of station survival. "The Guys in Suits with Charts" as one scholar has tagged community/public attitudes toward professional audience researchers, are now welcome most everywhere they go (Ledbetter 1997, 122). And thanks to initiatives such as the l998 Future Fund of the CPB, they are arriving at distant outposts of public broadcasting with increasing regularity, as the system tests audience response strategies and prepares demographic profiles for national underwriting (CPB 1998; NPR 1997).

Format

Matters of audience and listener-sponsorship are inevitably connected to format, structure, and mission; each affects the other. The format selected by a station obviously determines its appeal to listeners; though format is chosen by listeners only indirectly, via elected board members and by the size of donations (and the latter tendency is treated with distrust by many community radio volunteers). Decisions about format are made for purely business considerations in commercial radio; it is not unusual for a station to try Adult Contemporary format for a year and then switch to Oldies, if ad revenue and ratings are not robust. In community radio, programming decisions can be labyrinthine, divorced as they often are from any single organising principle, other than putting on the air what cannot be heard elsewhere.

Local/Eclectic Formats. In stations depending primarily on local volunteers for programming, these volunteers have a significant, sometimes definitive, say in decisions; for they are the ones who will produce the programs. Seemingly, anyone can do a shift in a freeform or eclectic format; and to sum, this will be superior to national programming, because it is rooted in local taste.

Herein lies a dangerous tendency: for volunteer producers to urge programming decisions which suit their own tastes, as reinforced by friends and fans who call in. This is a form of hobby radio, where devotees of African or Andean music find others through the airways and form a mutual admiration society. Which is certainly consonant with the goals of community/access radio — except when the frequent assumption is made that serving one's own tastes is the same as serving the listening community's. There's a kind of "They like what I play/ why can't I play more of it" mentality to community radio, matched by what might be called "alternativitis," the "It's not available anywhere else so we must play it here" syndrome. Some things may be unavailable on the airways for good reason. Any reader here can fill in the blanks in the equation: "sexual and racial supremacists aren't welcome on _____," which belies the term "free speech" radio. Programming continues to be the most visible side of community radio. For how long can stations favouring local origination resist the tendency to make programming decisions on what will yield the highest-supporting audience?

National Format. In l990, "A Prairie Home Companion," distributed by Public Radio International, became the first program to require that US stations airing the show did so at a uniform time. The significance of this was that community and public stations were formed into a single network, perhaps for the first time. One could drive across the US and hear the same program continuously, much as listeners to the BBC do on its various frequencies. The point of this standardisation may well have been a commercial one: for this program promotes items via direct mail to listeners (Abelson 1998).

If prominent network programs yield the greatest financial returns, professional broadcasters would wonder at a station which chose not to run them. Yet radio is a zero-sum game: to add a program another must be pulled off the air. The system, in a non-commercial context, acquires a circularity. From Day One of a specialised program, it will have some fans; the more daring and audacious, particularly at community stations, the more ardent its fans. Once it develops fans, these will resent any change: of host, time slot, or orientation. Those responsible for programming choices find themselves on the hot seat; to add something they must offend or displease some portion of their audience. How do they choose who to alienate: by their pledged dollars? By their influence in the station? By their underwriting potential ? By listener surveys?

However they decide, community radio in the 1990s increasingly relies on national programming, for reasons stated; occasionally, in the larger stations, such national programming is actually local programming, where the producers live and work in their signal area. The decision to accept national programming has significant implications for the identification of local listeners: is the station's local programming limited to weather forecasts, as in many commercial satellite repeater stations? If so, what will help such stations compete with other stations with the same programming? Our community identity is partly determined by our identification with its local broadcasters; we may be citizens of a country but we are residents of a locality (Barreiss forthcoming). Stations balance these multiple identities in their programming choices.

Governance

Decisions on programming may be the most highly charged ones for listeners, but radio management necessitates other decisions. There is no single structure for community radio decision-making, though in the US many stations have evolved their governance from the formerly CPB-mandated Community Advisory Boards. Some stations have boards primarily for programming, leaving day-to-day decisions in the hands of managers. Others have boards charged with hiring and firing only, with programming in internal station hands. Yet over the last quarter century of community radio, there has been a steady shift, corresponding to its professionalisation, towards the hierarchical from the freewheeling, consensus approach formerly employed by a station such COOP radio in Vancouver (Lewis and Booth 1989; Raboy 1996).

Participatory structure. Though rarely acknowledged, the overarching orientation of the participatory station could be termed anarcho-syndicalist: those who contribute the most to the station's workload determine its policies. This tradition, found in the writings of Charles Fourier and Henri de Saint Simon, appeals to those who are volunteering their time and effort. It appeals less to the professional staff of community radio, except as they themselves were or are volunteers. A number of community stations - but few public ones - have a general meeting where key decisions are made: sometimes by whoever shows up that day to vote. The problems with participatory management in community radio are principally three-fold:

- those who vote on policies are rarely the ones to carry them out;
- those who vote often lack the background to complex issues, sometimes being swayed by oratory;
- voting by majority is often an unrealistic and impractical way to make necessary decisions; when such meetings take place only annually, or with complete freedom of participation, they are untimely and subject to meeting-packing.

A manager of a station could find that his format is revised because of a visiting contingent not associated with the station in any way, not even subscribers and listeners. Just as access is an ideal more than a practice, so participatory management styles in community radio are often more of a shell than a reality.

Hierarchical structure. One of the surest ways of distinguishing the community station from a public one is via its visible hierarchy, such as the masthead on its program guide. Because community radio reaches a smaller audience, and has fewer resources, its staff will be forced into multiple roles and must share out responsibility.

Community radio volunteers are oppositional: opposed to lobbyists for the wealthy, canned formats, government propaganda (Barlow 1989, 101). Thus a central challenge is the anti-authority bent of many involved in community broadcasting. After all, if they had wanted to take orders, they might have gotten a job at a commercial station, assuming they had the desire and credentials. Because they are volunteers, they cannot really be fired; nor can they be disciplined, except by removing them from the air - a decision which could easily backfire if they are popular with listeners. There are no statistics available, but I would speculate that there is a direct ratio between stations which have moved from primarily local to national program sources and those which have reduced the power of its volunteer staff, or have eliminated them completely from programming. On the other hand, hierarchical decision making is often more efficient of limited station resources. Its instrumentality attracts staff who will burn

out less frequently, and it allows outsiders, such as national producers, to find audiences for their projects.

Process

Most volunteers drift into their community station either because they like what they hear and want to help, or to get the word out on some topic of great importance to them, whether environmental justice or the virtues of cats. Without these volunteers of good heart and diverse experience, community radio would be out of business, from Sidney to Homer Alaska. Yet rarely can any group of people agree on common objectives; and when this is complicated by the haze of the spotlight or the intimacy of the microphone, a station's mission can get lost in celebrity and self-aggrandisement.

When this is still further complicated by those using broadcasting, the media glue of our time, to unhinge the very social structure which the medium holds together a station's mission can grow complex. Determining what to broadcast can be as contradictory as an anti-smoking documentary underwritten by a tobacco company. In Denmark in the 1950s, a social democratic prime minister spoke of "dangerous radio," challenging what people take for granted. One such program featured portraits of abortion-providers; it would be still controversial today. The last decades have seen pirate radio opening up popular formats — such as Radio Mercury — or how in Poland, Radio Solidarity used transmitters hidden in treetops to communicate between activists and their audience. No survey can fail to explore the differences between radio with intent to challenge formats or society through amateurism and activism; from radio which upholds the status quo, via professionalism and avoidance of controversy.

Amateur/activist commitment. One of the first developments as a community station spirals up its audience and financial resources is the assertion of professional hegemony over volunteer staff. Never mind that some volunteers may possess more broadcast experience than the staff; with the job title comes an expectation of decision-making authority. Staff sees itself as the professionals in the crowd, educated and experienced, making more informed decisions than volunteers. Volunteers expect the staff to match their idealism and are often disappointed.

Those who arrive at a station with a cause requiring publicity have little patience for required training programs and paperwork for scheduling equipment and airtime. They are there to get the word out; not to add new skills or a profession. Radio is one way for them to reach out. Issue-oriented, their patience for process may be limited; they might just as easily write an op-ed piece for the newspaper. Such attitudes often frustrate those making a career in broadcasting, to whom such esoterica as microphone placement, consistent recording levels, and digital editing are important signatures of quality. It is a thankless task to try and convince a new producer that even if the words are brilliant but the sound quality poor, a program should not be aired.

Professional commitment. The offbeat, dissident energy of community radio has sent legions of budding radio administrators away from non-commercial broadcasting over the years.6 Even a strict commercial hierarchy, and dress codes, might be preferable for some to the hurly-burly of community stations where boards and meetings of non-professionals can suddenly swing policy or format.

Most community radio professionals emerged from the ranks of volunteers; many obtained additional training or education, to enhance their jobworthiness and skills. Thus they are tied to the volunteer ethos but have left volunteerism behind. Their

sympathies may have changed, the way a worker promoted to foreman feels ambivalent about his status. Those who find the enforced flexibility of work arrangements most disturbing are often from commercial broadcasting. Some look down their noses at the continuous training of volunteers, whom they sometimes suspect are there only to play their favourite discs or impress their girlfriend. Professionals are irritated at the casualness with which a few volunteers treat their shifts, arriving late and ill-prepared, or ignoring logging requirements. Some, such as at WXPN in Philadelphia, decided in 1988 that they would rather have the community offended by volunteer layoffs than tolerate unorthodox behaviour. They tossed them all out. Such anti-democratic decisions have prompted frustrated community radio volunteers to a new wave of radio piracy across the US (Blanding and Thompson 1998).

So one of the central contradictions of community radio becomes who calls the shots: "seasoned professionals or dedicated" amateurs. Is the mission to provide top quality programming, regardless of where it's produced, a logical professional approach; or allow as many on the air as want to, from various constituencies. What are the relative worth of high production values versus spontaneous, exciting but sloppy programming? There are no easy answers.

In explaining a parallel shift in Europe, toward a more professionalist pragmatic mood in the 1990s, European theorists have suggested a number of factors: stations overestimated a community's participatory interest and response; stations found their efforts focusing on survival and less on missions of social change; stations increasingly relied on a core of professional staff, with less substantial role for community input; stations' need for financial survival led to compromises and a stable programming; stations lost their unique status as alternatives once commercial licensing began; and, at the same time, stations holding counter-cultural ideals and Left perspectives were relegated to an "outer fringe" which reduced their effectiveness and audience (Prehn 1992, 261). Many of these trends also explain the professionalist shift in US community radio.

Conclusion

North American stations founded on a philosophy of open access, amateurism, and direct service are today retooling themselves to serve larger audiences by beefing up their marketing skills and staff. In Europe, community stations seem to be exploring the North American community radio model at the moment when many US stations are forced to abandon it for more commercial formats. Yet some issues never change: Belgian Radio still debates whether public service broadcasting "provide the education and culture private stations can't (or won't) undertake . . . or serve the largest audience, regardless of taste" (Caufriez 1991,11).

The future holds serious challenges: what will the advent of technology-intensive digital production and transmission bring? Have and have-not stations? Stations which concentrate on music, with no digital capability, and those offering a mixed music-information format, with satellite-fed national programming? Will Internet radio program a "Global Village," in McLuhan's phrase?

How will community stations cope with the dilemma of building and maintaining their *local* base, while maximising audience through *national* programming? Will the audience identification at the heart of local broadcasting be compromised by this shift? What will massive commercial licensing bring to Europe, particularly when digital broadcasting doubles the number of such licenses? Will stations jump into head to head competition?

These are issues researchers in community radio may wish to explore in the coming years. As one scholar suggested, however, "The danger is that future research will only be financed on the condition that hard data are produced on audience ratings" (Prehn 1992, 265). A more productive research agenda is found in Raboy's searing essay which precedes *Public Broadcasting in the 21st Century*; a fresh look at a central fallacy: "As the alternative to the state becomes the market, the alternative to public-service broadcasting is constructed as private-sector broadcasting" (Raboy 1996, 5). When both sectors accept advertising, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish one from the other. Perhaps returning to community radio's origins in the US — listener-sponsorship offers a "third way," neither commercial nor state broadcasting.

Notes:

1. By comparison, public television viewership has been relatively flat (3%), with business support growing 15%, listener support, 13%.

2. There are interesting parallels between Milan's work and those of later European theorists. In Europe stations began with a belief in community radio's mobilizing force and a conviction that its alternative information and format would alter society (Jankowski 1988) and a challenge to state monopolies for not actively asserting their social responsibilities (Jakubowicz 1988).

3. A fascinating and parallel development occurred in Peru, when its liberal junta nationalized Lima's dailies to divide them among key sectors in society: one paper for unions, one for agriculture, etc. See Dunaway and Birge (1976).

4. Some of these also apply to community radio in developing nations, as discussed by AMARC (Girard 1992).

5. Such a rationale conveniently reaffirms professionalism.

6. At Pacifica stations, there was a sardonic saying, Old Pacificats don't die, they just fade away and join NPR.

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