

## **Community media – an overview**

Community media, taking the form of broadcasting and/or other electronic media projects, as well as print format, may share to a greater or lesser extent some of the following characteristics: independence from government, commercial and religious institutions and political parties; a not-for-profit nature; voluntary participation of members of civil society in the devising and management of programmes; activities aiming at social gain and community benefit; ownership by and accountability to the communities of place and/or of interest which they serve; commitment to inclusive and intercultural practices. Also referred to as “Third Media Sector”, the community media sector has a clearly distinct identity alongside the national public service sector and private commercial media.

## **Participation**

As alternative channels of media production and distribution, community media have facilitated active citizenship and political participation long before social media/ Internet existed. According to Berrigan<sup>1</sup>, access by the community and the participation of the community should be considered key defining factors for alternative media, they “*are media to which members of the community have access, for information, education, entertainment, when they want access. 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.*”

The communities concerned may be geographically defined, or communities of interest, linked for example by language and ethnic origin, by gender or sexual orientation, by political ties, by lifestyle or by artistic and musical tastes<sup>2</sup>. Community media organizations are an important part of the fabric of democratic societies. They are civil society organizations, usually legal entities, and they offer and encourage participation at different levels of the structure of their organizations. These organizations are usually very local, and instill and nurture a sense of active engagement in a locality. They create physical (as well as virtual) spaces for participation and collective action<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Berrigan, F.J. (1979) *Community Communications: The Role of Community Media in Development*, Reports and Papers on Mass Communication no. 90. Paris: UNESCO.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, P. (2013)

<sup>3</sup> Carpentier, N., (2011) *Media and Participation*, Bristol: Intellect.

## **Media literacy and training**

Community media train citizens, particularly communities and individuals often not represented by the mainstream media. They enable them to become active media-producers and multipliers within their communities and beyond. Media literacy is a core competence on the way to become an active citizen and participate fully in society and democracy. One of its goals is to build critical awareness and knowledge of issues of personal and social life linked to media communication.

Community media are often accessible centers of communications and technology in their communities. Community media are the places where all citizens, regardless of their skills, can learn about new media tools and developments. They have pioneered the use of new technologies for creative media production and can use social media to enhance promotion and distribution of their media content.

Moving forward, community media will continue to combine the use of online and traditional broadcasting platforms, providing media and Internet literacy for a variety of age, language and minority groups, people with special needs, etc. In the large field of organizations active in adult education, they are among the rare ones delivering media skills to a diverse audience.

## **Ownership and empowerment**

Community media are owned by the communities they serve. They are usually owned and controlled by people who would otherwise never get to own or direct media – ordinary citizens, disadvantaged people, groups without access to high-speed Internet, older, poorer, less educated, non-mothertounge speakers. Community media have a recognized name and established network of active citizens, experience in promoting social justice, integration and social change.

As Donald Browne<sup>4</sup> underlines there is a strong preference for locally produced and oriented materials among community media stations because they believe that it reinforces a 'sense of community'. They understand that it is important from the audiences' point of view and make them reliable. The close relation with their audience is also possible because an open, participatory character and the relatively small scale of such media. Members of the community have a chance to participate in the functioning of the stations in different fields: in programming, management, ownership and funding. That is why community media may not only be called the media closest to their audience, but also the most democratic ones.

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<sup>4</sup> Browne, D. (2012). *What is 'community' in community Radio? A consideration of the meaning, nature and importance of a concept.* In J. Gordon (ed.), *Community radio in the twenty first century.* Oxford: Peter Lang Publications.

## European recognition

Community media have been recognized not only by the United Nations and UNESCO but also by European institutions as a distinct and complementary third media sector next to public and commercial media. The **European Parliament Resolution 2008/2011 (INI)** and the **2009 Declaration of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe**<sup>5</sup> on the role of community media both acknowledge the social value of community media as a source of local content, cultural and linguistic diversity, media pluralism, inclusion and intercultural dialogue and **recommend to member states to give legal recognition, access to spectrum (analogue and digital) and funding to the sector**. In particular, the EP Resolution 2008/2011 (INI) “16. Calls on the Commission to take into account community media as an alternative, bottom-up solution for increasing media pluralism when designing indicators for media pluralism.”

## Mapping

According to the CMFE 2012 mapping **a total of 2237 community radio stations and 521 community television stations are active across Europe**<sup>6</sup>. Correlations between democratic structures and the status of community media can be seen in an attempt not only to count community radio and TV stations but also to compare rankings on the quality of media policy environment with rankings as published by ‘Reporters Sans Frontieres’ and the ‘Economist Index’<sup>7</sup>. In several European countries this sector can be characterized as very vivid with such leaders as France with as many as 600 community broadcasters and Great Britain with more than 200 such stations. But still in a lot of European countries - mostly in Eastern Europe - community based media do not exist or are still regarded as part of the private commercial media sector.

## Policy

Despite the recognition of the role and value of community media in the expression of pluralism and social diversity in the media sphere, many European states still have not met the recommendations and resolutions of European and international institutions on community broadcasting. In particular, access for community media still has to be guaranteed on all available broadcasting platforms, ensuring that the

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<sup>5</sup> European Parliament resolution of 25 September 2008 on Community Media in Europe; Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 February 2009).

<sup>6</sup> In 2012 CMFE conducted a mapping and rating project in collaboration with EPRA, the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/pub?key=0AvZa5iTe\\_EmWdGNiRFhgRnJaa2c3NXRhNXpSZUhkQmc&single=true&gid=0&output=html](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/pub?key=0AvZa5iTe_EmWdGNiRFhgRnJaa2c3NXRhNXpSZUhkQmc&single=true&gid=0&output=html)

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.cmfe.eu/60-uncategorised/206-first-country-ranking-of-community-media>

shift from analogue to digital technologies becomes an opportunity for more media pluralism rather than for further media concentration. **Proper legislative regulation, greater structural support and funding for the community media sector also support lifelong learning, social cohesion and intercultural dialogue.**

## **Representation**

**AMARC Europe** and the **Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE)** represent community media and cooperate at the European level.

Founded in 2004, **CMFE** links various members of the Third Media Sector at the European level. The CMFE is a common platform for networks, national federations and projects active within this sector. It has an observer status with the Steering Committee on the Media and Information Society (CDMSI) of the Council of Europe and is part of the CoE International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO) Conference. Currently, CMFE has 118 members (of which 27 are National Federations) from 26 European countries. Among its affiliate members it counts also individuals and organisations from Africa, Asia and North America. See also [www.cmfe.eu](http://www.cmfe.eu)

**AMARC**, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, is the international non-governmental organisation for the promotion, support and development of community radio world-wide. The international headquarters is located in Montreal, Canada following the founding Assembly held in 1988. **AMARC-Europe** is the European regional section of AMARC grouping together radios and their national federations from 23 European countries, a network of 250 community broadcasting services. The headquarters of AMARC-Europe were established in Brussels, Belgium, in 2008. The principal activities of AMARC-Europe are policy, research and advocacy; training and exchange of personnel; programme exchange and co-productions; solidarity and co-operation between East, Central and Western Europe and with community radio broadcasters in other regions of the world. See also <http://www.amarceurope.eu>

The Community Radio Charter for Europe was adopted on 18 September 1994 in Ljubljana, Slovenia at the first AMARC Pan-European Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters. [http://europe.amarc.org/index.php?p=Community\\_Radio\\_Charter\\_for\\_Europe](http://europe.amarc.org/index.php?p=Community_Radio_Charter_for_Europe)