Chapter 14. Developing the “Third sector”: Community Media Policies in Europe

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14.1. Introduction

The phenomenon of community media is not new to Europe. But recognition of community media as a formal “third sector” of broadcasting is emerging on the policy radar, as pressure for states and international bodies to expand, support, and develop sectors for “citizen” access to broadcasting continues to grow. Though specific definitions of community media vary, the concept generally refers to self-organized, participatory, not-for-profit media that address local geographic communities and/or communities of interest. Community media challenge traditional conceptions of a dual media system, suggesting instead a three-tier media landscape that includes public service, commercial, and community media.

Communicative rights, including access to information and freedom of expression, are at the heart of democratic societies. An essential component of these rights is the ability to create one’s own media independent of government or commercial pressures. Alternative forms of media, whether political or culturally radical, or modes of contesting dominant media paradigms and ownership structures, are necessary ingredients for media democracy (Coyer, Dowmunt, and Fountain 2007). Community media are one such alternative mode of communication, whose mission lies in its independent and participatory nature.

Community media are responding to several media-related as well as political challenges:

1) Media pluralism. Community media are one of many responses to concerns over increasing concentration of media ownership, economic and political control over vital communication
resources and infrastructures, and the need for diversity of content and opinions in the media. Commercialization and lingering state influence and control have also placed pressures on public service broadcasting. Complementing public and commercial media systems, community media have sought to create spaces to broaden public debate, inject a local and neighborhood voice that is often neglected in an increasingly nationalized and globalized media landscape, and offer an alternative to what is often criticized as homogenized, commercial culture. By ensuring that media production does not remain solely in the hands of large-scale institutions, community media remind us that media pluralism is not just about plurality of content but plurality of content producers and of owners.

2) Active citizenship. A decline in trust, confidence, and participation in the political system has led to concerns over the necessary renewal of democracy and citizenship. Community media have a long history of activating citizens and facilitating participation. The founding principles of these projects are typically based on openness and participation, as well as the direct involvement of local communities and marginalized groups such as migrants and young people. Community media organizations are thus spaces where the very issues and principles that compose a democratic society are being played out, explored, and experienced.

3) Media policy advocacy. Community media advocates are emerging as significant actors in media reform movements and efforts to orient policy environments towards more democratic normative and legal frameworks. Networks of cooperation are increasing, designed to facilitate cross-border linkages between community media projects. Activists and civil-society organizers are partnering with academics and sympathetic policymakers with the aim of intervening in policy processes.

The European policy agenda increasingly recognizes the role of these media, and debates have begun within the Council of Europe and the European Parliament on how to develop enabling regulatory frameworks. However, the policy environment for community media in Europe remains sketchy and inconsistent. While some countries have developed promising regulations as well as a sophisticated understanding
of the policy needs for sustainable community media, others continue to disregard their very existence. According to AMARC, the World Association of Community Broadcasters, “the lack of proper enabling legislation is the single principal barrier to [community media’s] social impact” (AMARC, 2007, p. 5). In this chapter we wish to outline the European regulatory context as it concerns community media, and specifically community broadcasting. We will analyze the further trajectory of the developing policy environment in Europe. First we will seek to define community media and explain their role in the media system, then we will look at policy processes on the EU level, and finally we will point to several different national regulations.

14.2. Defining community media

A recent study commissioned by the European Parliament defines community media as “media that are non profit and owned by or accountable to the community that they seek to serve. They are open to participation in programme making and management by members of the community” (European Parliament, 2008, pp. 9/14). Other definitions link the emergence of such media to an alternative media framework. Howley (2005, p. 2) describes “grassroots or locally oriented media access initiatives predicated on a profound sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content, dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy, and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity.”

Community media are a broad category of media structures across different technological platforms (print, radio, television, Web-based or mixed media), operated for and by (and/or accountable to) a community (which can be a community of interest, a geographical community, or a cultural community) and are characterized by the effective participation of that community in all processes of the organization. They have been described using a variety of concepts, including citizens media, alternative media, free media, autonomous media, radical media, and civil society media. The formal policy sectors themselves go by different names, including associative media, open media, access media, and local public media. However, the term “community media” is generally accepted as a way to conceptualize and develop policy
frameworks in support of participatory citizen-based media projects. Each of these concepts emerges from different political, cultural, and social orientations and thus reflects the specific landscape in which it is situated. Community media is hybrid in its forms and is “shaped by its environment and the distinct culture, history and reality of the community it serves” (Buckley et al., 2008, p. 207).

Over the past decade, research interest in the subject has grown. Several publications address the value of community media from different conceptual backgrounds, including Downing, 2001 (radical media); Rodriguez, 2001 (citizen media); Atton, 2002, and Couldry and Curran, 2003 (alternative media); Howley, 2005; Jankowski and Prehn, 2002; Rennie, 2006; Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpenter, 2007; and Coyer, Dowmunt, and Fountain, 2007. Global academic networks (such as OURMedia) and associations (International Association for Media and Communication Research IAMCR) increasingly offer recognition to these entities and spaces for relevant discussion.

Across these studies, certain core characteristics of community media have emerged:

- civil society ownership: ownership and control are ultimately in the hands of self-organized and independent citizens’ groups, associations, or organizations; non-profit entities;
- participation: access for individuals who are not professional media makers to get involved in media production and organization, thus breaking the boundaries between active producers and passive consumers;
- democratic structures: transparent and open decision-making; governing bodies are representative of the community they serve; collective decision-making is often favored over hierarchical structures;
- volunteer-driven: skill-sharing, individual and collective empowerment, and capacity-building play a central role in the mission and purpose; training is seen as key to both sustainability and personal development of volunteers;
- “alternative” content: community media give voice to groups, ideas, and cultures not always represented in mainstream media; they facilitate community-level debate and information sharing, and support the participation of marginalized communities in political, social, and cultural processes.
These characteristics may be evidenced to different degrees, depending on the specific project. But they best represent the overall motivations (and in some cases aspirations) of locally owned and operated, small-scale community media projects. Community media “are located in isolated rural villages but also in the heart of the largest cities, and the communities they represent and serve may be geographically defined as the residents of a given town, or they may be defined by shared cultural, linguistic, or other interests” (Buckley et al., 2008, p. 207).

The “social gain” value that is derived from community media activity and identified in a number of empirical studies includes social cohesion, the strengthening of community identities and inter-community exchange, media pluralism and media literacy, provision of crucial information such as on health and the environment, promotion of local cultures, and cross-cultural dialogue. Community media offer platforms for civic engagement and for citizens to play an active role in community life, as they act as a catalyst for a diversity of activists, artists, and civil society organizations. They have been called a “significant component of participatory democracy” (European Parliament, Directorate General Internal Policies of the Union, 2007, p. 5).

However, as citizen initiatives without large-scale institutional support, they face serious challenges with regards to financial sustainability, access to communication infrastructure (such as spectrum allocation, positioning in the transition to digital broadcasting), and national legal frameworks. Community media are often not recognized as distinct media. More qualitative and quantitative research is needed to assess the impact of community media, including evaluation criteria and the development of research methodologies, and comparative policy studies that explore community media’s access to, for example, the radio spectrum and other infrastructural resources.

14.3. Why all the fuss about a few small neighborhood radio stations?

In an era characterized by digital media, some would argue that there is no need for enabling legislation in support of policies and infrastructures for community media. Many see the Internet as a viable alternative for spectrum scarcity that has left many would-be projects devoid
of access to the airwaves necessary for traditional analog broadcast on FM, medium-wave radio or television. However, community media advocates argue that we cannot expect our digital futures to automatically offer access to media forms that are not adequately given space in the analog present (Tridish and Coyer, 2005). Thus, space must still be created and fought for on analog platforms, such as FM radio, to ensure that community media are part of the digital transition. Experiences in the United States have shown that the transition to digital radio will not bring opportunities for new entrants to the market. Rather, incumbent broadcasters gain access to increased spectrum and new channels within the same ownership regime. Participants at a European Science Foundation exploratory workshop on the impact of digitalization on community broadcasting held at Central European University in 2008 concluded that, besides exploring inclusive and enabling digital platforms, focus should remain on gaining access to the FM bandwidth. One-hundred-year-old technology continues to matter and continues to be a viable and necessary space for local, grassroots media production and reception.

However, incumbent broadcasters have repeatedly resisted the entry of new “non-aligned” stations into broadcast markets (Coyer, 2006). In the United States, both the commercial broadcast lobby and National Public Radio continue to fight the expansion of low-power FM radio that would make existing space on the dial available for non-commercial, independent voices. Their arguments center on claims of broadcast interference—concerns that have been rejected by the Federal Communications Commission and by a congressionally mandated study (the MITRE Report). In Britain, incumbent resistance also came from local commercial radio operators and initially from the BBC as well. The BBC has since offered support for the sector, and there are numerous examples of program partnerships between local BBC Radio stations and their neighboring community radio station. The commercial radio lobby, however, was successful in convincing the national communications regulator Ofcom to enact some advertising limitations on community stations in small markets.

Resistance to small-scale neighborhood radio stations betrays more than just technological considerations related to allocation of frequency or financial resources. Rather, it speaks to concerns over the decentralization of national media systems; market-driven priorities
taking precedence over community needs; a focus on privatization and economic liberalization at the expense of not-for-profit sectors; and the inherent difficulties of developing truly independent and meaningful public service broadcasting. Other reasons for states not to make the development of community media a priority include the view that community needs can be taken care of through existing private channels and local programming obligations; the concern that there is no audience for these media; and a lack of pressure from grassroots organizations and would-be community broadcasters. (The latter is especially evident in the former communist countries, where there may not be models for sustainability or volunteerism related to running a radio station.)

The development of community broadcasting has been most successful where pressure has been strongest from both grassroots activists and pirate (“unlicensed”) radio broadcasters who used strategies of direct action to push for access to the airwaves. Pirates have also been instrumental in breaking apart national monopolies, be they state or public service. Evidence of this can be seen in Britain, France, Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Hungary, to name only a few European examples. Development of community media is thus linked with measures to decentralize media systems in general.

14.4. Policy at the European level
14.4.1. A puzzle of policies

Because state-level regulation varies widely throughout the European Union (EU), a concerted effort to create an enabling regulatory environment is largely missing. Media policy remains the responsibility of national authorities. However, a number of EU regulations acknowledge the importance of vital community media concerns, such as media pluralism, freedom of expression, and cultural diversity, and they relate directly or indirectly to the existence and potential development of community media across Europe.

Within EU telecommunications regulation, for example, there are directives to ensure non-discriminatory spectrum allocation (Directive 2002/20/EC) and to strengthen universal service and “must-carry” rules (Directive 2002/22/EC). EU audiovisual regulation emphasizes
the importance of media pluralism and diversity,\textsuperscript{4} and the European Parliament has called for access to the media for all societal groups (EP resolution 2003/2237(INI)).\textsuperscript{5} EU policies on freedom of speech and culture highlight local creativity, local culture, and the opportunity for everyone to participate in public discourse. EC Communications also stress cross-cultural dialogue and the protection of minorities (Communication COM [95] 653).\textsuperscript{6}

Thus a number of EU policies are concerned with aspects that are at the heart of community media practices, yet community media have rarely been explicitly recognized. Amongst the relevant European policy institutions, only the Council of Europe has, so far, acknowledged that community media constitute “a third sector, supplementing the national public service and the private broadcasting sector.” The Council recommends, “Member States should encourage the development of other media capable of making a contribution to pluralism and diversity and providing a space for dialogue. These media could, for example, take the form of community, local, minority or social media.”\textsuperscript{7}

### 14.4.2 Emerging policy interest

However, further interest in community media among European policymakers is starting to emerge. In 2007, the European Parliament published a study entitled *The State of Community Media in the European Union* (European Parliament, Directorate General Internal Policies of the Union, 2007). In it the authors confirm the characteristics of community media identified by academic observers (mentioned above) and highlight community media’s contribution to core European objectives such as social cohesion, media pluralism, and cross-cultural dialogue. They emphasize community media’s democratic role, which enhances civic engagement, and note: “If society’s future relies on the active involvement of informed, media literate citizens community media can play a definitive role in facilitating such a future” (ibid., p. iv).

The report further recognizes that EU institutions increasingly wish to enter into a dialogue with local and regional communities regarding European affairs and stresses that the local nature of community media provides an excellent opportunity to generate this conversation.\textsuperscript{8} Overall, community media are presented as a “dynamic and
highly diverse part of the European Union’s media landscape” (ibid., iii). The report thus calls for legal recognition of community media in media law, access to licenses in both analog and digital environments, and financial support for the sector.

Another report was recently commissioned by the Group of Specialists on Media Diversity within the Council of Europe. The study *The Role of the Media in Promoting Social Cohesion with Particular Reference to Community, Local, Minority and Social Media* notes that public service and commercial media are increasingly unable to meet the needs of marginalized and disadvantaged social groups in Europe. The report concludes that community media are an “important factor in social cohesion and citizenship, particularly for minority ethnic communities and refugee and migrant communities” (Lewis, 2007, p. 3), and are equally important for the broader public by linking up diverse parts of the population, and the long-term impact of media literacy and training efforts. The report urges European policymakers “to create legislative infrastructure without which community media cannot develop” (ibid.), to “ensure that community media are not disadvantaged in the digital environment” (ibid.), to commit funds to support the sector, and to establish a community media observatory for policy monitoring. And the report underlines the current momentum both in the development of community media and in the interest of European policymakers.

14.4.3. Community media as policy actors

This momentum is underlined by the emergence of European advocacy networks by and for community media. The Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE) was created in 2005 as a network of experts and practitioners to coordinate policy advocacy for community media. In 2007 it was officially established as a non-governmental organization and has developed into a broad European network with membership of many national community media federations. It first appeared publicly at the 7th European Ministerial Conference on Mass Media Policy, a conference organized by the Council of Europe and taking place in March 2005. Since then it has engaged in consultations with the European Commission, and it enjoys an observer status with the Group of Specialists on Media Diversity within the Council of Europe.
The CMFE has thus emerged as the voice of community media in the European policy space.

In addition, AMARC Europe—the European chapter of the World Association of Community Broadcasters—was re-created in 2006 and has joined the CMFE as a representative of community media. Both associations collaborate closely and have overlapping membership. AMARC also engages in consultations with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) on policy that concerns broadcast infrastructure.

Through efforts like these, community media increasingly participate in so-called multi-stakeholder approaches to policymaking, i.e. the involvement of different stakeholders in policy deliberations, including business and civil society (Hemmati, 2002). This approach has become increasingly prominent in the negotiation processes towards the WSIS and also in follow-up policy fora, such as the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).

14.5. Policy snapshots

14.5.1. Comparative frameworks

The strongest policy focus with regards to community media has been on community broadcasting. While community media (broadly speaking) require an enabling environment to flourish, community broadcasting requires actual allocation of broadcast spectrum and a licensing regime that offers the opportunity for community-based groups to gain access to the airwaves. Though examples of well-established community television sectors exist in countries like the Netherlands, and that sector has grown in the United Kingdom, this section will focus on licensing for community radio.

Community broadcasting has developed asymmetrically across Europe at different times and under different conditions. Community radio is typically identified with Western European countries, where policies are most favorable for it (Ireland, France, the Netherlands). However, despite Britain’s rich tradition of public broadcasting, it did not implement a community radio policy until 2004. In Germany community radio remains underdeveloped because responsibility over the organization of broadcasting lies with the states (Länder)—the
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federal government regulates only international broadcasting. In Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary remains an exception, boasting the most widespread and developed community radio sector in the region. A more typical case is Slovenia, which lacks an enabling environment for community broadcasting per se. There two university radio stations serve as de facto community stations in terms of content, even though they have traditional organizational structures. Bosnia has a framework for licensing community radio, but the policy does not allow for any sustainable form of financial support (no advertising, no public support); thus, no one has taken advantage of the licensing opportunity. And in Croatia, a new civil society organization has been created to advocate the development of community radio there.

Across Europe, community radio stations fall roughly under one of the following frames:

1) well-established sectors with supportive policies, sustainable models that include strong state financial support (France, Netherlands);
2) well-established sectors with supportive policies, but minimal state financial support (the United Kingdom, Ireland, Hungary);
3) medium-developed sectors with some supportive policies but no state financing (Italy, Spain, Sweden);
4) under- or undeveloped sectors where there are limited or non-supportive policies and funding (Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovakia, Greece).

Where there are not any frameworks for licensing of community radio, stations with community-oriented sensibilities emerge either as pirates, community-minded commercial stations, student radio, or online media projects. History has shown, however, that community stations operating on commercial licenses tend eventually to be co-opted due to the economic value of the license. Thus, without protection or spectrum set-asides for not-for-profit community radio, the sector is not sustainable.

14.5.2 Policy snapshots

In this section, we focus on a non-representative selection of examples of community media policies and legislation from across Europe. Each
case focuses on a different policy aspect, such as funding (France, the Netherlands), social gain criteria (the United Kingdom), development of full power and low power sectors (Hungary), strong support for civil society representation (the Netherlands) and as distinctive “third sector” (the United Kingdom, Ireland), particularities of legislating community media in decentralized regulatory systems (Belgium, Germany), and systems lacking sufficient supportive legislation (Slovenia).

14.5.2.1. The United Kingdom

In Britain, following the success of a pilot project and twenty years of pressure from the Community Media Association (CMA), communications regulator Ofcom has issued 180 (at the time of writing) five-year renewable licenses for local non-profit organizations in a newly created sector for community radio.\textsuperscript{10} The legislation, as set forth in the 2003 Communications Act, has more to say about social policy than it does about broadcasting, as the sector has consciously been established as much more than “just” radio (Coyer, 2006). Vocal proponents included the then-Minister for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport; the Ministry for Lifelong Learning from the perspective of community radio’s potential for skill building, adult education, and esteem-building; and the All Party Community Media Group, whose chair argued that community radio is an integral part of community regeneration efforts.

Regarding licensing criteria, Ofcom outlined four required elements for consideration of long-term community radio licensing: social gain and access, programming, evaluation and measurement, and finance and ownership.\textsuperscript{11} Specifically, applicants have to provide evidence of social gain and/or public service broadcasting; not-for-profit status; accessibility for people living within the area; training and community participation; and engagement with disadvantaged and underserved people and communities. Internet broadcasting was not deemed to be a priority, and the danger of obsolescence from digital radio was seen as far in the future, since digital radio still lacked a sizable audience, especially among the more economically disadvantaged and minority communities, who would likely be the last to gain universal access to new technologies.

The legislation takes an expansive view of community radio, providing for both communities of interest and of geography. For
example, there is Forest of Dean Community Radio, the only local station broadcasting throughout the Forest, a remote region in the west of Britain. There are also stations like Takeover Radio in Leicester, the first children’s station in the UK, and Chorley Radio in Chorley, Leicester, serving gay, lesbian, and transgendered people there. In London alone, there is a licensed community station in West London serving the Punjabi-speaking population (Desi Radio); an experimental sound, art, and culture station in central London (Resonance FM); a station in East London seeking to provide access for many of the ethnic and minority-language-speaking people in the borough of Hackney, broadcasting in over fifteen languages (Sound Radio); and another East London station serving diaspora Africans (Voice of Africa Radio). Some stations also emerged from long-running community organizations, such as New Style Radio in Winston Green, Birmingham. New Style Radio is a project of the Afro-Caribbean Resources Centre (ACRC), itself formed in the 1970s as a cooperative for black youth that has grown into a significant community resource center. In his evaluation report of an earlier pilot project, Professor Anthony Everitt sites this broad approach as one of the strengths of the British model: “The growth of individualisation and ‘active consumption’ means that we tend to make opportunistic use of multiple communities to construct a confident, customised sense of ourselves, as distinct from defining ourselves in terms of a fixed community of which we are full paid up members” (Everitt, 2003a, p. 30).

These non-profit community radio licenses have a broadcast range of five kilometers (with wider reach for those applying for AM licenses). Stations may not be owned by individuals and must be held or incorporated as not-for-profit organizations. Community radio stations are allowed to receive up to 50 percent of their funding through advertising, and another 50 percent from sponsorship, in addition to grants, listener sponsorships, and other fundraising activities. Additionally, the government has created a Community Radio Fund with 500,000 pounds per annum that stations can apply for. The fund is administered by a separate body created expressly for this purpose, including representatives from Ofcom, commercial broadcasters, and civil society.

In short, community radio (although late in coming) has been successfully established as a “third tier” of broadcasting, alongside public service and commercial media.
14.5.2.2. Hungary

Non-profit radio was formally created in the 1996 Radio and Television Act in Hungary. The movement for community radio began shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain (Gosztonyi, 2007). Under communist rule, only the then-state broadcaster, Magyar Radio, had the legal right to broadcast. After the political transformation, the newly elected government and newly formed political parties promised to create media laws that would open up broadcasting to new entrants. However, the change did not happen as quickly as promised, and some radio activists decided to take matters into their own hands. These new pirate radio stations took to the air with the hope of breathing new life into the radio waves while fighting for a democratic landscape through direct action (ibid.). The first of these stations, Tilos Rádió (Forbidden Radio) in Budapest, went on air in 1991; it was soon followed by others. The following year, an association was set up to organize efforts and push for inclusion of community-based media in the debates around new legislation (Hungarian Federation of Free Radios, or HFFR). In 1996, the community broadcasters succeeded: the long-awaited Media Act included a provision legally recognizing non-profit-oriented broadcasters, defined as “a broadcaster who/which agrees to serve national, ethnic or other minority goals, cultural aims or a disadvantaged group, or intends to serve as the public life forum of a community provided it uses the financial profit generated by the broadcasting, as recorded separately, solely for the maintenance and development of the broadcasting” (Act I of 1996, Article 2).

Under the Act, stations can broadcast up to three minutes of advertising in any given hour (as compared with twelve minutes for commercial and six minutes for public service radio) and are exempt from license or broadcasting fees. Significantly, the Hungarian legislation includes provisions for between half a percent to one percent of the annual revenues from the Broadcasting Fund to be allocated to support non-profit broadcasters. This generates approximately 500,000–1 million for the sector per annum. Individual stations are allowed to apply for these funds to support annual operating costs (including transmission costs); technical development and studio equipment costs; and the creation of news, sports or magazine-style programs. However,
stations are required to contribute from 15 to 50 percent in matching funds (self-financing) at the time of application, a figure prohibitively high for many stations. That, plus a demanding application process, has resulted in an estimated 15 to 25 percent of these funds going unallocated each year. To be eligible for a license application, stations should first achieve non-profit status, and no less than 50 percent of airtime must be committed to serving the specific community interests the station is seeking to serve (for example, at least half of the content on Roma station Radio C is in one of the Roma languages and/or consists of Gypsy music and cultural programming).

A significant limitation of the Hungarian legislation was the shortage of frequencies available for community-oriented stations. In 1997 the three best-known stations in Budapest shared a single frequency (ibid.). Subsequently, after the reallocation of non-profit frequencies from underperforming stations to primarily commercial operators, the number of community radios actually decreased for a time (ibid.). In 2002, however, changes to the legislation allowed for the licensing of small or low-power community radio stations. These stations are much narrower in reach. They are designed for small local communities such as villages, schools, neighborhoods, festivals, and hospitals, in areas where full power radio stations would be commercially unsustainable or frequencies unavailable. The application process was greatly simplified for these small-station applicants; approximately thirty to forty apply for such licenses each year, 60–70 percent of whom are approved (ibid.). Stations need only broadcast for a minimum of fourteen hours per week, and the overall design of the scheme reflects the local, community-driven value and mission of these small stations.

There are also concerns that the regulatory agency is interested in issuing licenses for small radio stations at the expense of developing opportunities for growth of the full-power non-profit sector. That sector remains somewhat stagnant at twelve non-profit radio stations (compared with forty-eight small radio stations granted licenses since 2004).

However, the future of community radio in Hungary also presents a number of threats. Concerns have been expressed regarding the lack of consideration for the future of community radio in plans for digital switchover. Despite the challenges, the Hungarian system of licensing and supporting non-profit radio remains the strongest in the region.
14.5.2.3. France

France has among the most local radio stations per capita in the world, including numerous community-oriented stations, the diversity and number of which testify to a balanced regulation that ensures variety in programming. There are an estimated 600 “associative” or community radio stations in France, many of which are Catholic radio stations, licensed under a framework for non-commercial radio.

What is most striking in the French legislation is the level of state support offered to associative radio stations. As in most European states, community stations are allowed to receive a percentage of their annual revenue from commercial advertising (capped at 20 percent in France). However, a substantial amount of funding is provided by the Fond de soutien à l’expression radiophonique (Support Fund for Radio Expression), created in 1982. The source of the Fund is a tax on advertising revenue of commercial broadcast media that is then redistributed to associative radio stations. Funds may be used to support start-up costs, equipment upgrades, and operational costs related to general overhead. Preference is given to stations with demonstrable training programs for station employees and volunteers. Other criteria include cultural and educational initiatives undertaken, collective program-making activities, total hours of local programming, measures to promote social integration and fight discrimination, and measures to promote environmental and local development issues. In 2004–2005, the Fund provided 676 grants averaging €35,000 each, for a total of €21 million in grants to community radio stations.

14.5.2.4. Netherlands

There are 296 community stations, or local public service broadcasters (“lokale omroepen”), in the Netherlands, with average yearly budgets of €40,000. These stations are represented by the Organisatie van Lokale Omroepen in Nederland (Olon), which is itself partially financed from the state’s national media budget. In 1997, local governments were granted authorization to introduce a local radio license fee. This was replaced in 2007 by a national license fee, of which €7.7 million will be distributed to community stations (or €1 per household) by
the Dutch Media Commission (Stevenson, 2006). Olon is active in efforts to increase the amount of funding and ensure debates around digital transition. In 1981, when Olon was created, there were only fifteen community stations. By 2008, almost all of the nearly 300 stations were members, and the organization has, at various times, between seven and ten full-time employees. Olon is recognized in Dutch media law as the representative body for the sector. There is an annual budget of €470,000: half is provided from the state’s public service broadcasting budget, with the other half coming from member fees and third-party fees for services.

14.5.2.5. Ireland

The Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) supports a strong policy for community radio, viewing the sector as a distinct strand in Irish broadcasting, alongside commercial and public broadcasting.\(^{18}\)

Irish community radio policy states that stations must be owned and operated by not-for-profit organizations, and that stations should provide for their membership, management, and operation by the community served. Under this model the station is accountable to the community, and the community is in control of, and therefore responsible for, the station.

Experience in Ireland has shown that while community broadcasting is viable, funding individual stations remains an ongoing challenge. Similar to the British policy, the BCI places a cap of 50 percent on any source of a station’s income. A variety of funding approaches have been adopted that include membership fees, fee-for-services, community donations, general fund-raising and on-air commercial activity, and sponsorship. Although advertising has been difficult for some stations to secure, the BCI considers access to on-air commercial activity an essential funding source for community radio.

Among criteria the BCI must consider when reviewing applications are the quality, range, and type of programs proposed, particularly those in the Irish language; the opportunities the applicant will create for Irish talent in music, drama, and entertainment; the desirability of having diversity of services in the area specified; the desirability of allowing a person or group of persons control or a substantial interest in an undue number of sound broadcasting services and
communications media; and the extent to which the service proposed serves recognizable local communities and supports various interests in the community or serves communities of interest (BCI). Funding schemes include support for station evaluations such as listener surveys and audience studies, feedback, monitoring, Board of Director development, etc.

14.5.2.6. Germany and Belgium

The situation for community broadcasting in Belgium and Germany reflects the particularities of each country’s decentralized regulatory regimes, which have resulted in very uneven developments of community media in both.

The Belgian media system is affected by the country’s specific regional divisions that underlie political, ideological, and linguistic divides (Saey and Coppens, 2007). The system serves as an example of complex regional negotiations hindering the development of independent community radio. The state broadcast monopoly was undermined by the introduction of local pirate radio stations in 1978–1979. Local independent broadcasting was introduced in 1981 and 1982 in the French and Flemish regions of Belgium, respectively. However, the local radio market was largely subsumed by commercially driven groups who eventually took over a majority of the “amateur” stations. The French Community’s Decree on Radio Transmission in 2003 (“French Broadcasting Decree”) does not explicitly refer to community radio as a concept, nor to any particular provisions relating to the structure, funding, or operational rules of community broadcasters. This apparent lack of a community radio framework means that stations who wish to operate as a not-for-profit, community-oriented station are subject to the same rules governing commercial broadcasters. While some public funding is available to radio broadcasters through a grant from the Fonds d’aide à la Creation Radiophonique (a public body created according to the 2003 Decree), its remit is very broad and seeks to promote innovative cultural radio programming in general terms without any explicit reference to the promotion of community radio as a sector.

The community radio sector in Germany—usually called “free radio”—has a long tradition, going back to the establishment of
Freiburg’s Radio Dreyeckland in 1977 by anti-nuclear activists. However, as the authority for media policy in Germany lies with the Länder, i.e. the sixteen states, rather than the federal government, the policy environment is fragmented. Some regions recognize community media explicitly and even offer financial support. Others allow for free radio stations to be set up within established frameworks for local media. Still other regions (such as Berlin) are unsupportive or hostile towards non-commercial, self-organized citizens media.

Several regions have created forms of local non-commercial public access radio called “Open Channels.” Open channels are administered and controlled by the regional radio authorities and allow limited forms of access for different groups in the area. In contrast to “free” radio stations, the degree of self-organization is limited, and thus the core characteristics of community media are compromised. Critics argue that open channels are controlled too heavily by the authorities.

14.5.2.7. Slovenia

Broadcasting policy in Slovenia has yet to recognize the importance of community media. Slovene media has recently been fraught with conflicts over (re)nationalization and commercialization (Planšak, 2008). Here the function of community media is performed primarily by student and ethnic radio stations: Radio Student in Ljubljana, Radio Mars in Maribor, and Radio Romic in Murska Sobota, broadcasting for the Roma community in Slovene and Roma languages. A review of broadcast licenses issued from 1995 to 2001 shows that the majority of new stations have been subsumed by larger radio networks and have lost much of their local sensibilities. This means that “too many frequencies were allocated, although the majority of small commercial radio stations can hardly survive unless they join some radio network. And, since the setting up of these networks is not based on any clear strategy and was not subjected to supervision or regulation, the whole sector is now in disarray” (Hrvatin and Kucič, 2004, p. 481). With changes in the media law since enacted, there are some limited provisions for non-profit media and subsidies for “special purpose programming” distributed through the license fee, and non-profit stations must broadcast and produce at least 30 percent of informative, artistic, educational, and cultural content. However, there remains no explicit
support for the development of community-based broadcasters, despite calls for greater media pluralism.

14.6. Future outlook—an enabling environment for community media

As case studies of state policies and European initiatives show, technological solutions for community media are only part of what is required for such media to flourish. Social needs must also be addressed in order for technological solutions to be meaningful, and sustainable environments are needed for community-driven media to develop. For community radio and (increasingly) television sectors to flourish, there must be enabling legislation—support for, and a mechanism of, licensing. Having a policy on paper does not mean much if there is not a supportive environment behind it. A survey of policies across Europe finds that best practices include recognition of community media as a formal “third sector”; criteria that ensure participatory, open, and community-driven stations emerge; mixed models of funding that include some form of ongoing and renewable government subsidy; flexibility that allows for communities to self-identify and define their own area of service coverage; recognition of the social gain and value community media can provide; and support for research, impact measurement, and audience studies to improve community service.

The necessary components for a supportive environment for community media relate broadly to greater societal needs for democratic media, including strong civil society, a basic constitutional and legal framework safeguarding freedom of expression and journalistic independence, and regulatory independence and transparency of decision-making in the overall policy process (Buckley et al. 2008). Regarding the legal environment, there must be fair and equitable principles guiding the distribution of frequencies among public, commercial, and community radio sectors; a portion of the radio spectrum reserved for not-for-profit broadcasting; affordable licensing fees; clarity and transparency in licensing processes; relevant but non-excessive eligibility requirements that emphasize responsiveness to the community being served (“social gain criteria”) and non-profit character (even with limited advertising revenue, station profits must be reinvested in
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Specifically, the licensing process itself should be fair, open, transparent, and clearly defined by law, with criteria developed in consultation with civil society (ibid.). Community broadcasting should be recognized in the law as a distinct type of broadcasting, and supported and encouraged through specific licensing arrangements that guarantee access to the radio spectrum and to economic resources that can foster sustainability.

Of particular concern is the transition to digital broadcasting. Though neither the European Union nor most Member States have regulations on switchover to digital for radio (with the exception of Hungary), there are decisions and debates taking place that do not yet adequately address the needs of community broadcasters. There is a growing knowledge gap related to broad questions about how the transition to digital audio provides both new opportunities and new challenges for community communication. Questions include: What will the new platforms for delivery be? Which will be the most suitable for community media uses? Which are the most cost-effective for small-scale, non-profit uses? What regulatory barriers need to be overcome? (Buckley, 2007). Opportunities in the digital transition include greater frequency availability, as more efficient uses of the spectrum offer new potential spaces on the radio dial—the so-called “digital dividend.” Changing technologies necessitate new policy regimes, which have often created space for new priorities and non-profit media. Thus the dialogue is being opened up regarding the relationship between public-interest obligations and needs and media regulations and policies.

The challenges that must be addressed include new gatekeepers in the form of digital multiplex operators without must-carry obligations for community media; fragmentation of competing digital systems and the lack of global standards; the fact that digital radio development is being driven by industry interests, not consumer needs; market-based spectrum allocation strategies such as spectrum auctions that privilege the highest bidder rather than the public interest; research oriented towards industry rather than public interest objectives and consequences; and the overall concern that digital audio services may address national and transnational needs, and therefore may not be the most efficient means of organizing local broadcasting (Buckley, 2007).

In short, it is unclear at present what the best digital platform for community media is. More research is needed on the subject, as well
as close consideration of different digital technologies (DAB, DRM, etc.) to “open spectrum” and “smart” or “cognitive radio.” At the same time, the analog present continues to be a crucial site for policy interventions and community media access, since it reflects where the vast majority of radio listeners are and will likely remain for the foreseeable future (ESF Report 2008). Community media advocates seek access to spectrum; must-carry obligations for new multiplex operators; means of sustainability—both financial and structural/organizational; a broad enabling environment within which to function; and more research and research funding that looks comparatively at policies, models of sustainability, and assessment of the impact of community media. Debates about the future of radio (whether digital or analog) must include the needs and interests of local communities and small-scale, not-for-profit media before a truly pluralistic media environment can flourish.

Not coincidentally, at a time when the Internet and other digital means of delivery address the problem of airwave scarcity, an increasing amount of grassroots pressure and regulatory progress has been made towards the development of analog, low-power community radio sectors around the globe. Globalization necessitates a simultaneous borderless sensibility and a “revitalization of the local” (Martin-Barbero, 1993). At the same time national and regional regulatory frames continue to be crucial sites for media policy intervention.

NOTES

4 The EU Commission has commissioned a study on media pluralism that is to be finalized in spring 2009 and that is to develop indicators on media pluralism.
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7 See Recommendation 173 (2005) on regional media and transfrontier cooperation by the congress of regional and local authorities in the Council of Europe; and Recommendation Rec (2007)2 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on media pluralism and diversity of media content.

8 The project Europaradio, organized by the German community radio Corax and funded by the EU, constituted a practical example for this dialogue in 2006–2007.


10 For more on London community radio, see Coyer (2005) and Coyer, Dowmunt, and Fountain (2007). For a detailed history of the development of community radio in the United Kingdom, see Lewis and Booth (1989) and Coyer (2005).


12 Controversially, separate restrictions on advertising apply to community stations located in areas with populations below 50,000 people where there also exists a local commercial radio station (Independent Local Radio).

13 This section was compiled primarily from Gosztonyi (2007) plus source material, documentation, and interviews.

14 This follows the so-called “Media Wars” in Hungary, during which political parties lobbied for control of the public broadcasting stations (Gosztonyi, 2007).

15 The Fund is created by law and funded by government subsidy to support public service broadcasting, non-profit broadcasting, and cultural broadcasting that is administered by the National Radio and Television Board (ORTT).

16 These figures are based on calculations published by Gosztonyi (2007).
