

## Scientific Report

ESF Exploratory Workshop on

# Access To Communication And Democratic Media Infrastructures In The Digital Environment: The Impact Of Convergence Digitalisation On Community Media Policy And Practice

Budapest, Hungary, 12 – 15 May 2008

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# Executive Summary

## Workshop summary

Thirty international scholars, practitioners and policy-makers met at Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, 13-15 May 2008, for the ESF Exploratory Workshop. From the workshop, key questions related to the impact of digitalization on community broadcasting emerged: How can the transition to digital audio provide new opportunities for community communication needs? What will the new platforms for delivery be? Which will be most suitable for community media purposes? Which are most cost effective for small scale, non-profit uses? What are the regulatory barriers that would need to be overcome?

## Knowledge Needs

The ability of citizens to communicate is of vital necessity for a democracy to flourish. Such communication encompasses not only the right to receive or access information, but the right to communicate, exchange ideas, and create independent and community-based media. It is important, then, to consider the creative ways citizens use both new and old technologies, and the impact of technological convergence on independent forms of media production and reception.

Community broadcasting has developed asymmetrically across Europe at different times and under different conditions, and many member states have little or no policies for community radio and television, both in Western and Eastern Europe. However, 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. 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. According to the World Association of Community Broadcasters AMARC, "the lack of proper enabling legislation is the single principal barrier to [community media's] social impact" (AMARC 2007: 5).

The lack of a cohesive policies across Europe related to community broadcasting is compounded with regards to digitalization, in large part because there has also been an uneven development of digital radio itself across Europe.

## Key findings from the workshop:

- 1) Social needs must be addressed in order for technological solutions to be meaningful.** Industry should not be the only driving force in the implementation of new platforms for delivery. Debates about the future of digital radio must include the needs and interests of communities and community broadcasters.
- 2) It remains unclear at present which digital platform for community media.** There is a need for more multi-disciplinary collaborative studies (especially those involving technologists, economists, and manufacturers). There must be greater public interest needs factored in to debates about technology-driven policies and developments. Perception of need to 'go digital' is a driving motivation rather than public interest and this must be redressed.
- 3) FM still matters and remains most flexible and cost effective platform.** However, there is a risk is that if community radio remains on FM while commercial and public service media migrate to digital services, the FM range could become a so-called "analogue backwater." Thus, there is a need for development of hybrid radio

receivers capable of receiving both analogue and digital stations, and there is a need for further studies examining possible future uses of analogue spectrum.

- 4) **There exists a growing knowledge gap around the social impact of digitalization in general.** This schism is compounded when considering the impact of digitalisation on existing and future community-based radio and television. These deficiencies are embedded in a lack of overall understanding of the technologies, economic impact, social impact and possibilities and prospects on the part of community broadcasters, policy advocates and academics.
- 5) **Migration off analogue radio to digital platforms is less close than most think** (Hungary is an exception in terms of having an actual cutoff date for analogue radio).
- 6) **Digital platforms were never intended for local broadcasting, thus are not adequate solutions in themselves** for local information and communication needs without public interest obligations. Local platforms are still needed.
- 7) **Competing standards for radio (unlike TV) pose specific regulatory difficulties** since there is not yet agreement as to what digital platforms will prevail overall, nor, which are most effective and feasible for community media needs. For example, “open spectrum” challenges the administrative system of regulation but would require ‘other’ policies in support of community media if it is to be an effective means of enabling community communication.
- 8) **There are some specific and immediate policy needs for community broadcasting to survive in a digital environment** and they include: access to spectrum, ‘must carry’ obligations for multiplex operators, sustainability and access to funding and other resources, and a general enabling and supportive policy environment.

## **Conclusions**

The transition to digital technologies offers both opportunities and challenges for community broadcasting. With more efficient use of the spectrum, more space is opened up on the radio dial. Changing technologies also opens up room for new regulatory regimes which could open the door for community radio to benefit from the so-called “digital dividend” through set asides for non-profit media. At the same time, challenges include new gate keepers, market-imperatives driving the debate, a lack of emphasis and research on public interest objectives and consequences. For community broadcasting to have a strong future, active policy intervention in support of the sector is needed. Moreover, the knowledge gap around issues and impact of digitalization must be addressed. More research is needed that is concerned with the impact of digitalization on community media. A strength of this workshop was in the bringing together of academics, policy makers, practitioners, and advocates. Following this workshop, collaborations for research proposals are underway.

# Scientific Contents

## Introduction

Little is known comparatively about the impact of digitalisation and convergence across Europe, and even less among the newest European Union member states and Central and Eastern European countries. With television advancing from analogue to digital, and radio following closely, the European broadcast landscape is currently undergoing significant change. Yet public as well as academic discussion is not keeping pace with technological change. Further, the impact of digitalization on community broadcasting, itself an emergent sector in European policy spheres, has received little attention and is in dire need of research. This topic was the focus of the two-day ESF Exploratory Workshop held at CEU in May, 2008.

The transition from analogue to digital brings with it both opportunities and challenges for community media. The rationale of this *Exploratory Workshop* is to fill this gap of policy-related knowledge within the framework of a broader perspective on convergence, communication infrastructure, social and democratic concerns. The workshop gathered emerging as well as established scholars in the field of community media, media democracy, media policy, and digital technology.

There exists a growing knowledge gap around the social impact of digitalization in general. This schism is compounded when considering the impact of digitalisation on existing and future community-based radio and television. These deficiencies are embedded in a lack of overall understanding of the technologies, economic impact, social impact and possibilities and prospects on the part of community broadcasters, policy advocates and academics. Thus, there are three main knowledge needs: a better understanding of the social impact of digitalization and the development of digital broadcasting services (specifically radio in the case of this workshop); need for a better understanding of community media needs (policy and practical); and a need for a better understanding of the impact of digitalization on community broadcasting.

At the same time, there remains primary research needs related to community media in broad terms. In particular, the areas in need of greater research include: *Enabling environment* – what are existing policies, laws, and regulations related to community media, what are ‘best practices’, and what are the obstacles and challenges; *Sustainability* – how can community media be self-sustaining both economically, socially and organizationally; and *Impact* – how does the sector make a difference, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

This report seeks to summarise the workshop proceedings, provide necessary context and background related to community media and digitalization in Europe; assess challenges and opportunities as presented by workshop participants; and conclude with a summary of findings and two emergent strands for future research collaboration, especially that which involves interdisciplinary study and involves a mix of academics, policy advocates and practitioners.

## Key questions

How can the transition to digital audio provide new opportunities for community communication needs? What will the new platforms for delivery be? Which will be most

suitable for community media purposes? Which are most cost effective for small scale, non-profit uses? What are the regulatory barriers that would need to be overcome?

### **Workshop participants: An interdisciplinary academic-practitioner dialogue**

While there exists a strong body of research on community media as well as on digitalisation, there has been little work combining the two on this pressing policy issue and with the perspective of developing policy recommendations for community and citizen access to digital communication infrastructures. At the same time, focused policy considerations need to be embedded in a broader perspective on how digital communication relates to older forms of “residual” media, how the participatory principles and practices of digital communication impacts on mediated communication in general and how digital communication will converge at both the technological and social and democratic level.

Responding to these challenges, the workshop brought together scholars with an interdisciplinary background and with specialisations and concerns in different but related academic fields: scholars with a focus on community, alternative and citizens media, connected to academic networks such as OURMedia and as a follow up to a 2008 workshop organized by the CMCS on broader issues related to community media policy and practice; those active in the Radio Studies Network; members of the academic network DRACE – Digital Radio Cultures in Europe, who are experts in the transition to digital broadcasting; and culture and communication scholars from, amongst others, the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA).

Even more significantly, these scholars met with practitioners and policy-makers for a multi-stakeholder dialogue: members (including the respective Presidents) of the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC) and the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE); community media and grassroots ICT activists; communications regulators from different European countries; and representatives of the European Commission and the UNESCO Information for All Programme (see attached list of workshop participants).

This broad dialogue ensured that the workshop theme was analysed from across relevant perspectives in order to achieve informed and reliable outcomes. It connected critical academic reflection with the realities and necessities of every-day media-making, the policy needs of practitioners and the concerns of policy-makers and regulators. Moreover, it helped establish a research agenda for a variety of needs and timelines.

The value of academic-practitioner dialogue and cooperation has increasingly been recognized by academic funding institutions, such as the Social Science Research Council (through its “Necessary Knowledge for a Democratic Society” programme) and the EU FP7 programme. The Budapest workshop served as a vital experiment for such exchange. It highlighted the difficulties of communication between participants from different academic disciplines and from different professional backgrounds – difficulties that are based on different time frames and turn-around times needed for research; and different core concerns (from immediate policy issues to broader societal developments). However it also, and more importantly, provided a forum for the engagement of a variety of complimentary perspectives even with inherent differences, and it made available a cross-section sets of expertise that would otherwise have been missing.

### **Community media as a “third sector” of broadcasting**

The ability of citizens to communicate is of vital necessity for a democracy to flourish. Such communication encompasses not only the right to receive or access information, but the right to communicate, exchange ideas, and create independent and community-based media. It is important, then, to consider the creative ways citizens use both new and old technologies, and the impact of technological convergence on independent forms of media production and reception. Questions that must be asked are: How do these community-based media, and their ways of using technologies, provide us with models for contemporary mediated communication? How can technologies be used to create and support social and democratic convergence? What kind of enabling environment is necessary for participatory forms of media to flourish?

Community media has become an increasingly important field of study in recent years. A significant amount of high-profile literature has presented a variety of debates and approaches to “citizens” media, as well as their role in strengthening democratic social and political processes. Networks such as OURMedia are linking an ever-increasing number of researchers in this field, and established academic networks such as the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) have created sections dedicated to “community communications” and “participatory communications”. The need for more localised information and for ‘media based in local communities’ has been recognised by the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) which took place in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005, and the European Union, Council of Europe and OSCE have each expressed varying degrees of interest and support in the value of community media.

Further, community media practitioners have created networks such as the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC) and the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE) that have become significant means through which civil society is impacting the policy-making process. The concerns raised have focused on the need for enabling regulatory environments for community broadcasting at both the state and European level. As community radio remains the most popular form of community-based communication, access to the airwaves remains a core demand.

### ***Emerging policy interest in community media at the European level***

The phenomenon of community media is not new to Europe – many individual countries have licensed community radio and television stations. The pressure for states and international bodies to expand, support and develop sectors for ‘citizen’ access to broadcasting continues to grow. However, as 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 a responsibility of national authorities.

A number of EU policies are concerned with aspects that are at the heart of community media practices, and thus EU regulations do acknowledge the importance of vital community media concerns. These include media pluralism, freedom of expression and cultural diversity. Within EU telecommunications regulation, for example, Directive 2002/20/EC ensures non-discriminatory spectrum allocation, and Directive 2002/22/EC strengthens universal service and ‘must-carry’ rules. EU audiovisual regulation emphasises the importance of media

pluralism and diversity<sup>1</sup> and the European Parliament has called for access to the media for all societal groups (EP resolution 2003/2237(INI)). EU policies on freedom of speech and on 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).<sup>2</sup>

Yet community media have rarely been explicitly recognised. 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 that “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”<sup>3</sup>.

However, further interest in community media amongst European policy-makers is starting to emerge. In 2007, the European Parliament, published a study on “The State of Community Media in the European Union” (European Parliament 2007), in which the authors confirm the characteristics of community media identified by academic observers (see above) and highlighting 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 they note that “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, iv). 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 licences in both analogue and digital environments, and financial support for the sector.

A further 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 marginalised 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 2008, 3), but also for the broader public by linking up diverse parts of the population, and through its media literacy and training effects. It urges European policy-makers “to create legislative infrastructure without which community media cannot develop” (ibid.) and to “ensure that community media are not disadvantaged in the digital environment” (ibid.). The report underlines the current momentum both in the development of community media and in the interest of European policy-makers.

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1 The EU Commission has commissioned a study on media pluralism which is to be finalised in spring 2009 and which is to develop indicators on media pluralism.

2 More detailed references to relevant EU policies can be found in European Parliament 2007)

3 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

## **Digital radio in Europe**

These reports highlight the need for appropriate policies that enable community media's transition to digital environments. On one hand, digitalization frees media from the burdens of spectrum scarcity. Indeed, the Internet and other digital platforms have opened new channels for 'citizens' media and participatory media production. However, these channels have emerged complementary to 'older' media platforms, rather than as substitutes, and there is no automatic mechanism for broad access to emerge if that access does not exist in the analogue present. Space must still be created on analogue platforms, such as FM radio, to ensure that community media are part of both the analogue and digital worlds. Experiences from 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.

The question of spectrum allocation has equally been of central concern for communication regulators and policy-makers. The emerging transition from analogue to digital broadcasting has led to particularly complex challenges, both for regulators and for community media practitioners. For the former, the proliferation of technological standards and of public policy implications has created a difficult matrix of choices; while the latter have expressed anxieties that access to spectrum would be restricted in the new digital environment. Concerns for regulation in the public interest have included the need to ensure that due prominence is given to a diversity of programme services rather than preferential treatment to certain services.

In the European Union, there exists a great body of study and policies related to the transition for television, including mandatory cutoff dates for analogue television services, while policies related to radio remain up to member states. In general, the EU has chosen to monitor rather than actively intervene and in principle, there exists a commitment to a digital radio future but nothing concrete. Commercial incentives are greater for television, thus that is the site of policy focus. The difficulty for community media is while it is acknowledged in some debates, there is no remedy offered for enhancing or developing the sector. The Council of Europe agrees that there is a severe lack of information on digital radio at the member state level, and community media needs are not addressed. As early as 1992, concerns were raised to the Council of Europe regarding the impact of DAB on small area and community broadcasters. Further, in 2000, the European Broadcasting Union proposed some possible solutions for small area radios but none were given field trials.

There is an uneven development of digital radio technologies across Europe, with the UK and Denmark being the most advanced. Yet even in the UK there are only five million DAB receivers as compared with one hundred million analogue receivers. While there have been some trials in Ireland and Hungary (but with insufficient results), countries like Finland, Sweden, France, and Germany have actually stopped DAB development. Although Germany was an early initiator, there lacked receiver penetration and public interest. The Netherlands and Norway are moving forward with DAB, but digital radio is not being actively developed across most of Central & Eastern Europe (for example, trials are on hold now in Macedonia).

### ***Opportunities and challenges***

The workshop focussed on particular regulatory challenges related to the transition to digital spectrum and explored the need for studies that address public interest implications. Challenges include the implications of the recent trend towards market pricing mechanisms and trading of spectrum access; the proliferation of different technical standards; new gate-



keeping roles for digital platform operators; transmission infrastructure costs; and particular challenges for small-scale community radio services as well as for developing countries. Based on an informed debate and capacity-building, workshop participants will develop policy proposals. Such proposals may be based on the vision that community media should benefit from the transition and be assigned due space in new digital environments. They may include suggestions for existing programme services to be guaranteed a migration route to the digital platform at an affordable cost; for part of the spectrum to be set aside for public service and community use; and for network operators to provide access on the basis of fair and non-discriminatory terms.

Opportunities presented by the digital divide center around what of the “digital dividend”? More efficient use of spectrum opens up space for more radio stations and questions have yet to be answered regarding what newly available spectrum might be used for. Community media advocates have suggested it could be set-aside for non-profit use, although others fear the result may be an “analogue backwater” for community radio. Changing technologies also open up room for new regulatory regimes which in turn could open up space for new set-asides (examples of the transition from AM to FM in US and resulting set-aside for non-commercial radio in the newly created FM band, and later, the introduction of cable television beget the requirement for carriers to provide spectrum and funding for public access television.) In short, these changes open up space for dialogue regarding the relationship between public interest obligations/needs and regulation/policies.

### **Workshop debates: “A puzzle of policies”**

Taking stock of the European policies and debates around digital broadcasting, participants observed a puzzle of digital policies. Whereas some countries are moving ahead with developing the main technological platform DAB (e.g., Netherlands, Norway), others are recognising the latter's limitations and have stopped their involvement (Sweden, France, Germany, Finland). In Central and Eastern Europe digital radio is not an imminent issue yet. According to the Council of Europe there is a severe lack of information on digital radio in many member state governments. Outside Europe and North America, FM is the only option and many new radios are still emerging on analogue platforms.

### *Fragmentation & industry pressure*

Participants observed a fragmentation into competing digital systems and an industry-based (and government revenue-based) push towards digitalisation. Research is often not oriented towards public interest objectives and focuses on ex-post implications and consequences rather than ex-ante choices. Particularly with the recent changes in administrative models (from government to market models and, in some cases, to open spectrum) and with recent technological convergence, there is a need for new assessments of technological options that consider the changing context.

### *FM remains significant*

While there is, in principle, a commitment amongst European policy-makers to an all-digital future, few concrete policy steps have been taken. Participants concluded that the imminence of the digital switch-over is less close in radio than is generally believed, and they noted that research suggests FM will continue to play a major role in the radio landscape as the most flexible and most cost-effective platform. They agreed that the FM analogue band should remain, at least until there is a reasonable road towards inclusive digitalisation. Some argued for a hybrid approach that includes FM as well as several digital standards. As for digital platforms, demands should be formulated to reserve part of all spectrum for CM.

### *Hype v. reality*

As this more nuanced and sceptical position is in conflict with the dominant discourse to “go digital”, participants spent time to analyse the perceived need for an imminent digital switch-over. They observed a discrepancy between a digital hype and the practical weaknesses of digital radio which include a high cost of receivers and poor sound quality. Commercial criteria, rather than quality improvements, were identified as prime drivers of digitalisation.

### *Policies must address social needs not just technologies*

For administrations, the digital discourse has repeatedly and in many different countries been an excuse not to progress on analogue licensing for community broadcasters and to declare the access problem as “solved”. However workshop participants emphasized that new technologies do not take away the need for appropriate policy. In this regard, they also noted that the technology-focused discourse around citizen journalism, which supposedly allows all people to participate in media production but is easily incorporated into mainstream media, does not take away the need for civil society-/citizen-/community-based media that are organized and run in a participatory way.

### *Need to track newest technologies & assess viability for community needs*

While the workshop served to question several official policies and discourses, participants did recognise interesting innovations in using new technologies and combinations of technological platforms by citizens and community groups. Participants learnt about projects such as Mikro FM which links digital and analogue distribution of radio programmes through the use of community wireless networks and microtransmitters, and about the integrated use of satellite, Internet and mobile phones by community radios in Congo, Africa. Also, the potential of Internet TV and the acceleration of the mobile phone as a media receiver attained significant attention.

### *Shortcomings related to community media awareness in general*

The need to engage policy-makers in digitalisation debates and to make them reflect on the shortcomings of current approaches emerged repeatedly through the discussion. Participants identified the predominant understanding of the media sector as a dual media system (including commercial and public service media) as a core hurdle and advocated recognition of a three-tier system that includes community media. Whereas in practice, community media are already a third media sector in many parts of the world, this remains to be acknowledged in policy terms. As regulators and policy-makers present at the workshop confirmed, knowledge and understanding of community media by policy-makers is low, there is a need to educate politicians, but there is also a need for clear definitions and terminologies that appeal to policy-makers. Community media, as was widely acknowledged, have a “branding” and “framing” problem.

### *Lack of common experience & status across Europe*

Participants reported that in some EU member states community media have been acknowledged as a third tier, in others they have been recognised as a complementary type of Public Service Broadcasting that provides certain forms of public service that traditional PSB does not provide (e.g., multi-lingual programming), and thus as part of the public service media landscape. There was common concern about the situation in Central/Eastern Europe (CEE) where free media are usually equated with commercial media and civil society is not broadly developed. Apart from a few promising cases (Hungary, in particular, where 25% of

all broadcasters are community broadcasters), community media are under-developed in the region.

#### *An opportunity and a threat*

Overall, workshop participants identified digital transition as both an opportunity and a threat for community media. Potential problems for community media emerge from financial and administrative implications (such as the emergence of new gatekeepers). As digital platforms were never intended to deliver local broadcasting but large-scale national services, a platform for local services is still needed.

#### *Need or “must carry obligations” for new multiplex operators*

Participants agreed that access to spectrum and must-carry obligations are crucial for making sure that community media will survive and prosper in the era of digitalisation. Furthermore, part of the spectrum should be set aside for civil society use, in order to demonstrate that self-organised spectrum management by civil society is a viable option. Must-carry rules should include guidelines for pricing to alleviate financial burdens, some suggested that community media should be carried on multiplexes free of charge. In general, participants agreed that public funding should be made available to support non-profit citizen-run public-interest media.

#### *Future opportunities for policy intervention*

The workshop thus served to develop a normative catalogue of demands for inclusive digital policies, but participants also learnt about current policy advocacy processes in which some of these demands are put into practice. The CMFE recently started to participate in the Group of Specialists on Media Diversity in the Council of Europe (CoE) and has thus put community media on the policy agenda in Europe. Community media will be one of the main topics at the next CoE ministerial conference in Reykjavik in May 2009. Further promising developments include explicit mention of community media in a recent UN declaration on world press freedom; the latest annual declaration of the four UN freedom of expression mandates which highlighted the need to provide for community media's transition into the digital environment; and the follow-up process of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) which includes a subgroup on community media. Follow up should also include the European Commission.

#### *Upcoming academic conferences*

Workshop participants also appreciated these processes as useful for research to raise knowledge and understanding for the issues that community media face. Upcoming academic events to further discuss these issues include the annual conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) in Stockholm in July 2009, and the OURMedia conference in Ghana in August 2009.

## Assessment of results, contribution to the future direction of the field

### *Key findings from the workshop:*

- 1) **Social needs must be addressed in order for technological solutions to be meaningful.** Industry should not be the only driving force in the implementation of new platforms for delivery. Debates about the future of digital radio must include the needs and interests of communities and community broadcasters.
- 2) **It remains unclear at present which digital platform for community media.** There is a need for more multi-disciplinary collaborative studies (especially those involving technologists, economists, and manufacturers). There must be greater public interest needs factored in to debates about technology-driven policies and developments. Perception of need to ‘go digital’ is a driving motivation rather than public interest and this must be redressed.
- 3) **FM still matters and remains most flexible and cost effective platform.** However, there is a risk is that if community radio remains on FM while commercial and public service media migrate to digital services, the FM range could become a so-called “analogue backwater.” Thus, there is a need for development of hybrid radio receivers capable of receiving both analogue and digital stations, and there is a need for further studies examining possible future uses of analogue spectrum.
- 4) **There exists a growing knowledge gap around the social impact of digitalization in general.** This schism is compounded when considering the impact of digitalisation on existing and future community-based radio and television. These deficiencies are embedded in a lack of overall understanding of the technologies, economic impact, social impact and possibilities and prospects on the part of community broadcasters, policy advocates and academics.
- 5) **Migration off analogue radio to digital platforms is less close than most think** (Hungary is an exception in terms of having an actual cutoff date for analogue radio).
- 6) **Digital platforms were never intended for local broadcasting, thus are not adequate solutions in themselves** for local information and communication needs without public interest obligations. Local platforms are still needed.
- 7) **Competing standards for radio (unlike TV) pose specific regulatory difficulties** since there is not yet agreement as to what digital platforms will prevail overall, nor, which are most effective and feasible for community media needs. For example, “open spectrum” challenges the administrative system of regulation but would require ‘other’ policies in support of community media if it is to be an effective means of enabling community communication.
- 8) **There are some specific and immediate policy needs for community broadcasting to survive in a digital environment** and they include: access to spectrum, ‘must carry’ obligations for multiplex operators, sustainability and access to funding and other resources, and a general enabling and supportive policy environment.

## **Research needs**

One of the significant outcomes of the workshop was consensus that there is not enough collaboration between technical research and media studies. There is a strong need for more cross-disciplinary, collaborative studies that link technologies, policy, economic impact and social implications, and that such studies can be best accomplished through collaborations and comparative research. Studies investigating the relationship between technological development and community needs must be done in collaboration with experts from across a range of fields. Typically, these studies have been conducted by media researchers but there is a need for greater collaborations across field. Such multi-discipline approaches would benefit both social science research and technological-centred research. In particular, there is a strong need to work with manufacturers and economists, especially related to mobile telephony and possible uses and developments.

There was also consensus that while investigations related to new technologies are needed, policy advocacy must still focus on protection of the FM dial for community media and recognition that 'one size does not fit all' when it comes to technological solutions. Additionally, the need for international comparative research is strong. What are some models or struggles where lessons could be learnt in Latin America or Asia, for example?

Overall, the greatest research needs related to the development of community media remain: comparative policy studies; models for sustainability; and methods and measurements for assessing the impact of community media.

Although the workshop was focussed on questions pertaining to digital transition, inevitably, key questions addressing broad themes related to community media also emerged, especially in connection with establishing priorities for research needs. To this end, two strands of research needs emerged. Each requires different knowledge needs and methodologies, and each present different opportunities for intervention at the academic and advocacy levels.

### **Strand I**

Strand I focuses on the relationship between technological innovation and social needs. Key questions / areas of future research include:

1. How can the transition to digital audio provide new opportunities for community communication needs?
2. What will the new platforms for delivery be? Which will be most suitable for community media purposes?
3. Which are most cost effective for small scale, not for profit uses? Are these new platforms economically viable and sustainable?
4. What are the regulatory barriers that would need to be overcome?
5. What are the social implications of emerging digital delivery systems?

Specifically, research addressing these questions would require studies such as:

- Comparative studies examining country-level policy and developments including monitoring policy developments, especially for smaller countries where debates have often been 'captured' by one side of the issue
- Test cases tracking introduction of new technologies and their take up and what impact this has on community media

- Study of country-level adoption / comparative studies looking at technical specifications, standards and policies
- Role of telecommunication industry in the international and European framing of debates around digitalization / study of who is driving the debate and with what impact
- Who are the new gatekeepers? Need for studies examining the political economy of media ownership under new regimes of convergence and digital technologies?
- Relationship between community media needs and copyright law / creative commons movement
- Investigations that examine future uses of transmitter sites, especially with regard to development of wifi. How did the property structure of transmitters migrate from the public to the private sector and what is the impact of this migration on policy debates today?
- Identify key debates around spectrum usage
- Explore possible proposals for community uses of the ‚digital dividend‘, ie what is the future of the FM band. Should the existing FM band eventually be reserved for community purposes? Would this instead create an “analogue ghetto”?
- ‚Beyond DAB‘ – investigation of other technical possibilities for community radio and televisions
- Investigate economic impact of technological development, especially as it impacts local and community needs
- Explore future of internet radio as related to community needs and investigate why community organizations at present resist the internet as the solution for their independent media needs
- Focus on shortlist of future possible broadcasting technologies and explore the impact and uses of each for community media needs with the aim of developing ‚best future practices‘ to advocate for
- What are the practical tools needed by individuals to access digital networks? What are the practical research needs for technical applications?
- How is radio different from television and what are different policy needs related to community media and digitalization?
- What is the impact of “open spectrum” technologies? What kind of enabling environment would be required for open spectrum models to support sustainable community media? Is there cause to challenge the utopia of open spectrum as a solution for community media needs?
- What are the implications of mobile telephony on community media? Are there any public interest obligations on mobile providers? What are the opportunities for inclusion of such?
- What are the impacts of digitalization on minority media?

## ***Strand II***

The second strand is focussed around core issues related to community media: sustainability, supportive policy environments and impact assessment, in addition to a focus on the role and value for community media in relation to social gain objectives and minority media needs.

- Impact of minority media
- Comparative study of community broadcasting policy and practice across Europe
- Country-level comparisons and monitoring of policy developments and funding

- Content analysis, particularly in relation to social gain objectives
- Value of community media for localism / local information needs (could also include content analysis)
- Models of community media as participatory forms of media with high levels of volunteerism & sustainability
- Economic contribution of community media towards social gain, community redevelopment, regeneration, etc.

A list of possible funding to be explored and existing resources was compiled. Groups were formed to follow up on some of the key research needs and match with appropriate bodies to apply for project support.

### **Conclusions**

The transition to digital technologies offers both opportunities and challenges for community broadcasting. With more efficient use of the spectrum, more space is opened up on the radio dial. Changing technologies also opens up room for new regulatory regimes which could open the door for community radio to benefit from the so-called “digital dividend” through set asides for non-profit media. At the same time, challenges include new gate keepers, market-imperatives driving the debate, a lack of emphasis and research on public interest objectives and consequences

For community broadcasting to have a strong future, active policy intervention in support of the sector is needed. Moreover, the knowledge gap around issues and impact of digitalization must be addressed. More research is needed that is concerned with the impact of digitalization on community media. A strength of this workshop was in the bringing together of academics, policy makers, practitioners, and advocates. Following this workshop, collaborations for research proposals are underway.

## Final Workshop Schedule

**European Science Foundation (ESF) Exploratory Workshop, organised by the Center for Media and Communication Studies (CMCS), Central European University (CEU), Budapest, May, 2008**

*Access to communication and democratic media infrastructures in the digital environment: The impact of convergence and digitisation on community media policy and practice*

The aim of the workshop is to identify key policy debates at the state and European level and to provide a forum for focused exchange amongst academics and practitioners on the issue of convergence and transition to digital spectrum and related social and democratic concerns leading to the development of agendas for further research and publications and concrete policy suggestions. To this end, a few participants have been asked to introduce core issues in each session. The focus of the workshop, however, will be on open debate and exchange. All participants have considerable knowledge in the field and are encouraged to contribute their expertise throughout the workshop.

### **Day 1            Tuesday, 13 May**

9:00- 9:30      Coffee & juice

9:30-9:45      Welcome remarks from CEU *Kate Coyer, Arne Hintz*

9:45-10:00    Welcome and introductory remarks on behalf of the ESF

10-11:30      **Community media and policy concerns: What's on the agenda?**  
Introductory session to the debates and needs of community media advocates and researchers: Important research has emerged documenting the impact and value of community-based media; however it is yet unclear where the democratic and social interests converge with the technical and regulatory frameworks.

*Peter Lewis, London Metropolitan University*

*Steve Buckley, AMARC*

*Helmut Peissl, CMFE*

11:30-12:00    Coffee Break

12:00-13:30    **Overview of digital broadcasting policies in Europe**  
Discussion and information session: What are the key policy issues related to the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting at the state and European level? How are decisions made regarding the allocation of spectrum and policy implementation? Where might the most useful places for policy interventions be?

*Stephen Lax, University of Leeds*

*Lawrie Hallett, University of Westminster & Ofcom*



- 13:30-15:00 Lunch
- 15:00-17:45 **Understanding the technology: What are some options?**
- 15:00-15:45 **DAB: What is it and what's in it for community media?**  
*John Sykes, QUAM Technology, UK (\*)*  
*John Anderson, University of Illinois, Champaign Urbana*
- 15:45-16:30 **DRM: What is it and what's in it for community media?**  
*John Sykes, QUAM Technology, UK (\*)*  
*Pieter de Wit, OLON, Netherlands*

16:30 – 16:45 Coffee Break

16:45-18:00 **'Open spectrum' and spectrum commons**  
*Kevin Werbach, University of Pennsylvania*

20:00 **Dinner at Kiskakuk Etterem**  
 Meet at restaurant. Directions provided in info packet.

**Day 2            Wednesday, 14 May**

9:00 – 9:30 Coffee and Juice

9:30-11:00 **Digital communication infrastructures**  
 How can the transition to digital spectrum be put in the context of other digital communication infrastructures, such as local WiFi networks, webcasting etc? What are innovative ways to connect 'old' and 'new' media? What about the future of smart radio or cognitive radio? And what does all this tell us about a) possible alternatives to dominant approaches in spectrum policy, and b) access to digital infrastructure?

*Stefan Tenner, Radio Corax, Berlin, Germany*  
*Christoph Lindenmaier, Radio FRO, Austria*  
*Francesco Diasio, AMIS, Italy*

11:00-11:30 Coffee break

11:30-13:00 **Political, social and democratic convergence: Participation in policy debates**  
 How does technological convergence and digitalisation relate to current social and political developments? How can policy-making be democratised? What are the public interest debates that inform current (and potential future) policy? Should communication infrastructure be understood as public good and as part of the global commons?

*Nico Carpentier, Vrije Universiteit, Brussels*  
*Lars Nyre, University Bergen, Norway*

13:00-14:30 Lunch

14:30-16:00 **Challenges and remedies of the digital transition: The perspective of policy makers**

Regulators and policy-makers will present their view on problematic as well as promising aspects of digital transition, with regards to citizens access. They will address questions such as: What are the costs and technical infrastructure required for upgrading to digital, and what can be done to ease transition? What are policies for rural areas and marginalised populations? What is the impact of privatization and market pressures? What are the new gate-keeping roles for digital platform operators? How do these interests conflict or reinforce the interests of community-based broadcasters?

*Representative from the, National Communications Authority Hungary*

*Pierre-Yves Andrau, European Commission, Brussels*

*Snezana Trpevska, Broadcasting Council of the Republic of Macedonia*

*(Moderator: Kristina Irion, CEU)*

16:00 – 16:30 Coffee break

16:30-18:00 **Intervening into policy processes**

Where is relevant policy being made? What are the most important policy processes in the near future? What about EU, ITU, private associations? How do community media intervene into policy-making? How do community media organise and advocate? What role can / should research play? What research is needed?

*Nadia Bellardi, Radio LoRa, Zurich*

*Gergely Gosztonyi, ELTE, Budapest*

*Gustavo Gomez, AMARC Latin American (\*\*)*

20:00 Dinner at Koleves

**Day 3 Thursday, 15 May**

9:30 Coffee and Juice

10:00-13:00 **Looking towards the future**

The final day will be committed to the planning of follow-up activities. The session will be divided into four parts:

1. Formulation of policy proposals

Participants will draw together key concerns discussed during the previous two days, develop a policy advice paper, and explore possibilities for influencing policy processes.

2. Academic publication

Participants will a common publication on the themes of the workshop, such as an edited volume or a dedicated issue of a relevant journal.

### 3. Development of a broader research project

The core themes of the workshop and, particularly, the results from the working group discussions will serve as the basis for a brainstorming session on common future research projects and for the initial planning process. Such a project may, for example, revolve around citizens' access to communication infrastructures and the development of citizen-centered policy frameworks.

### 4. Infrastructure for continued collaboration

An Email list will be set up, meetings at future conferences will be arranged.

13:00 Lunch at Sus Etterem

*\* John Sykes was unable to participate due to unforeseen circumstances but provided valuable information presented by Lawrie Hallett and Steve Lax.*

*\*\* Gustavo Gomez was unable to participate due to unforeseen circumstances but provided two reports that were distributed to participants.*

## Statistical information on participants

**Total number of participants present: 28**

### Geographical distribution by country of work:

AT	1	NL	1
BE	2	NO	1
CH	2	PL	1
DE	1	RO	1
FI	1	SE	1
HR	1	SI	1
HU	5	UK	5
IT	1	US	2
MK	1		

### Gender repartition:

Male	21	Female	7
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## List of Workshop Participants

### Organisers:

Kate Coyer

Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

Arne Hintz

Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

Mojca Plansak

University Maribor, Slovenia

### Participants:

Marko Ala-Fossi

University of Tampere, Finland

John Anderson

University of Illinois, Champaign Urbana, United States

Pierre-Yves Andrau

European Commission, Brussels

Ioana Avadani

Center of Independent Journalism, Bucharest, Romania

Nadia Bellardi

Radio LoRa, Zurich, Switzerland

Steve Buckley

World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC),  
Sheffield, UK

Nico Carpentier

Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Pieter de Wit

Organisatie van Lokale Omroepen in Nederland (OLON), Netherlands

Francesco Diasio

AMIS, Rome, Italy

*Gustavo Gomez*

AMARC, Latin America (\*)

Gergely Gosztanyi

Eotvos Lorand University Budapest (ELTE), Budapest, Hungary

Lawrie Hallett

University of Westminster and Ofcom, London, UK

Christer Hederstrom  
Media Adviser to the Swedish government, Community Media Forum Europe, Sweden

Kristina Irion  
Central European University (CEU), Budapest, Hungary

Karol Jakubowicz  
former Chairman of the Steering Committee on the Media and New  
Communication Services, Council of Europe, working group leader, COST A30, Poland

Agata Juniku  
Nemeza - Association for the development of non-profit media, Croatia

Stephen Lax  
University of Leeds, UK

Peter Lewis  
London Metropolitan University, UK

Christoph Lindenmaier  
Radio FRO, Austria

Helmut Peissl  
Verband Freier Radios Oesterreich (VFRO) and Community Forum Europe, Austria

Krisztina Rozgonyi  
National Communications Authority Hungary (NCAH), Budapest, Hungary

Salvatore Scifo  
London Metropolitan University, UK

*John Sykes*  
QUAM Technology, UK (\*)

Stefan Tenner  
Radio Corax, Berlin, Germany

Snezana Trpevska  
Broadcasting Council of the Republic of Macedonia

Kevin Werbach  
The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, United States

(\*) unable to attend at last minute due to unforeseen circumstances, but provided useful reports and material presented during the workshop in absentia.