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Publics, Participants and Policies: Examining Community

Broadcasting in Austria and the Czech Republic

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Abstract

Publics, Participants and Policies: Examining Community Broadcasting in Austria and the Czech Republic

This research project deploys online surveys to volunteer participants in separate case studies of community broadcasting in Austria (n=340) and the Czech Republic (n=85), first to measure the importance of community broadcasting values, and second to evaluate the alignment of community broadcasting policy to the views of those participants. While the values of community broadcasting can be found in a rich mix of scholarly theories, advocacy interventions, organizational charters, and regulatory guidelines, research about the importance of these values to participants is quite limited. This project revealed that many of the widely-recognized values commonly attributed to community broadcasting are also highly-important (with notable exceptions) to the survey respondents in Austria and the Czech Republic. In addition, the selected policy documents from Austria and the Czech Republic show generally positive alignment with the views of the respective nation's survey respondents. The findings and conclusions add to the understanding of community broadcasting, and are applicable to the practice, advocacy, and regulation in the sector.

Anotace

Veřejnost, účastníci a politika: Zkoumání komunitního vysílání v Rakousku a v České republice

Tento výzkumný projekt využívá online dotazníky distribuované dobrovolným účastníkům v samostatných případových studiích v Rakousku (n=340) a v České republice (n=85), a to jednak ke změření důležitosti hodnot komunitního vysílání, a jednak k vyhodnocení toho, jestli politika v oblasti komunitního vysílání koresponduje s názory účastníků. Výzkumy věnované fenoménu komunitního vysílání často citují experty, zastánce a provozovatele, zatímco objem výzkumu, který jako zdroje využívá samotné účastníky, je poměrně omezený. Tento projekt odhalil, že mnohé všeobecně uznávané hodnoty běžně přisuzované komunitnímu vysílání jsou důležité (s několika význačnými výjimkami) i pro respondenty průzkumů v Rakousku a v České republice. Kromě toho vybrané politické dokumenty z Rakouska i České republiky ukazují na obecnou pozitivní shodu politiky s postoji respondentů z dané země. Výsledky a závěry práce rozšiřují dostupné znalosti o komunitním vysílání a mají význam jak pro jeho zastánce a provozovatele, tak pro regulaci sektoru.

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1. Introduction

Community broadcasting is an established worldwide phenomenon, with community radio and television channels operating alongside their commercial and public service counterparts on every continent. The international association of community radios *L'Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires* (AMARC) claims nearly 4,000 members from 110 countries[1]. Europe is an especially robust environment for community broadcasting, as the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE), estimated in a survey of media regulators that there are more than 2,000 community radios and 500 community televisions currently broadcasting[2]. The rich history and multi-faceted development of community broadcasting form the background for this project, and a foundation for the examination of its publics, participants and policies.

Community broadcasting shares many of the same philosophies and attributes of other community media forms, but for this project is defined as a unique linear audio-visual broadcast service using electronic technology to deliver programs via terrestrial, cable, and online technologies for mass audiences to consume via receiving devices. For stakeholders, community broadcasting comes in many forms, titles and descriptions, including "community, alternative, radical, social, citizens', activist, grassroots, civic, participatory, social movement-oriented, development-oriented, and civil society-based media" (Hintz 2016). The values, philosophies and attributes of community broadcasting are also varied and widely-recognized, including "non-discriminatory", "respectful of human rights", "political representation", "experimental", 'independent", sustainable, local and "multiethnic" to name a few (Jankowski 2002, Lewis 2008, VFRÖ 2014, RTR 2015).

In this thesis, the history of community broadcasting and its current state around the world, with a detailed focus on Austria and the Czech Republic, provide background on the subject. Also, theoretical underpinnings are examined to help explain the community broadcasting phenomenon, including discussions of civil society, the public sphere, and the concept of community. Additionally, a review of scholarly texts and research specific to community broadcasting publics, participants and policies provides a further foundation for examining the phenomenon.

2. Aim of the Research

While the values, philosophies and attributes of community broadcasting can be found in a rich mix of scholarly theories, advocacy interventions, organizational charters, and regulatory guidelines, research about the importance of these values to participants is quite limited (Howley 2010). Volunteer participants are a key component of the community

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[1] For more information on this claim, see About AMARC at: http://www.amarc.org/?q=node/5.
[2] To view the report and methodology, see CMFE Community Media Mapping Project at: http://cmfe.eu/?p=864.

broadcasting phenomenon, and could also be a critical source for understanding community broadcasting and the ideologies that comprise it. Thus, the project aims to learn more about the views of these participants who populate the publics and produce the content of community broadcasting - by deploying online surveys in Austria and the Czech Republic. The first research question asks:

- "What values of community broadcasting are important to participants?"

The secondary aim of this project - to examine the alignment of policy to the views of participants - addresses a major issue for the community broadcasting sector. The project separately examines Austria and the Czech Republic; two nations with shared geopolitical and historical experiences, yet different paths to their current media environments that have led to completely different broadcasting paradigms, participation, and policies. In both these environments, participants could provide valuable insight into the efficacy of community broadcasting policy. The secondary research questions to facilitate that research aim are:

- "To what extent does Austrian community media policy, often cited as among the world's best, align with the values important to Austrian participants?"

- "To what extent does the proposed new Czech Republic community broadcasting policy and plan align with the values important to Czech community broadcast participants?"

The overall design and methods of this research project present numerous challenges and possible limitations. While the views of volunteer participants have been studied in several research projects, previous research comparing policy terms to participants' views in the study of community broadcasting could not be found. In addition, issues such as data collection methodology, language translations, and relatively small populations of participants (especially in the Czech Republic) also pose challenges for the successful execution of the project. Despite those challenges, the research pursues its aim to gain a better understanding of community broadcasting, which then can be applied to its study, practice, advocacy, and regulatory development.

3. Methodology

To address the research questions, online surveys were deployed in Austria (n=340) and the Czech Republic (n=85) measuring the importance of community broadcasting values according to volunteer participants. Pilot interviews with stakeholders organized and facilitated the delivery of solicitation emails to the internal email lists of participant producers at community broadcasting organizations in each country. Respondents then accessed the online survey in a choice of four languages, and were offered 17 questions with 92 variables. The surveys collected demographic and organizational data, and then to address the first research question, respondents were asked to judge the "importance" of a

group of widely-used terms representing the values of community broadcasting. Those terms were then ranked according to the number of respondents answering "important" for each. Variables representing the demographic/organizational cohorts were cross-tabulated with the list of terms to search for interesting findings that might inform the discussion. Then single terms representing a value or attribute of community broadcasting were cross-tabulated, also to investigate findings from that statistical point of view.

To address the secondary policy-related research questions, terms from a policy document related to each country were overlaid onto the ranking of importance of values to present a picture of the relative alignment of policy to participants' views. In the Austrian case, the terms were extracted from the "Funding Guidelines for Non-Commercial Broadcasting", and in the Czech Republic, the terms were extracted from the "Proposed Community Broadcasting Policy and Plan". The relative alignment of policy to participants' views is judged by the researcher based on the ranking of terms present in policy in relation to the entire list. To wit: a chart showing the policy-based terms in the top of the rankings would indicate a positive alignment with participants' views. Conversely, terms from policy ranked below other terms could be judged as poorly aligned.

4.   Findings

In Austria the distribution of frequencies reveals an older, well-educated, and highly-employed sample of community broadcasting participants. The age distribution is heavily skewed to cohorts above 26 years old, and shows a lack of young people in the sample. Several pilot interviews of this project revealed a concern among Austrian stakeholders about the ageing population of participants, and what strategies they might employ to address the issue (Moser 2013, Schwarzwald 2014). In the Czech Republic, respondents are much younger and less experienced than their Austrian counterparts. The age range of 19-39 comprises 90% of the respondents, with 65% participating less than two years, indicating that not only are young respondents adopting community broadcasting, they are continuing to participate beyond their first year.

Addressing the primary research question regarding what values are important, in the total sample of respondents in Austria (figure 4.1), the top of the chart clearly indicates strong support above 80% among respondents for 13 of the terms, with fully ten of those terms scoring 90% or greater. These terms populating the top of the rankings represent a range of philosophies in community that are well-known to stakeholders, and regularly found in broadcasting theory, advocacy, and practice throughout the world. Thus, from an overall perspective, it appears that Austrian community broadcasting participants in this research survey assign high importance to these widely-recognized values.
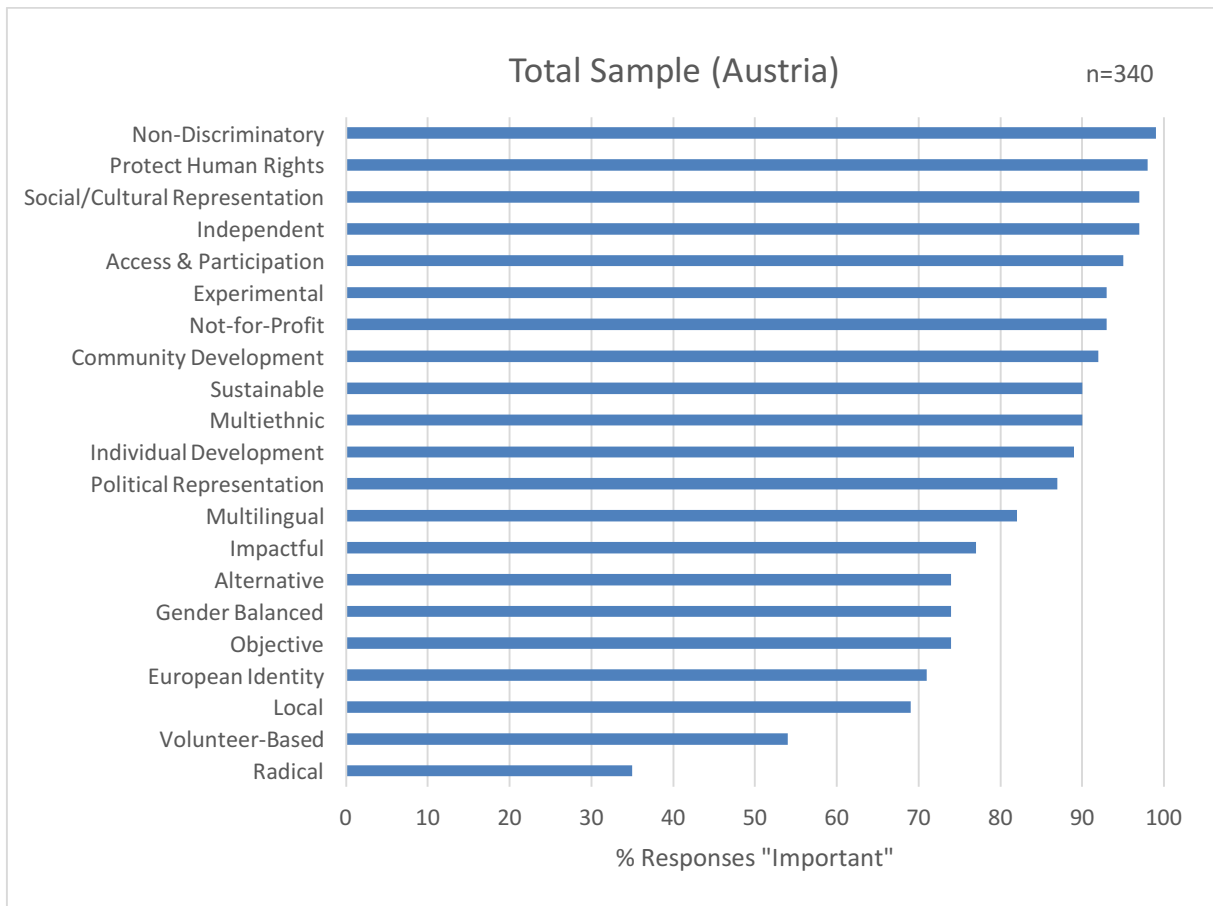
Figure 4.1 Ranking of Importance by "Total Sample" Group of Austrian Respondents

In the Czech Republic, the total sample of respondents judged seven terms as important at or above the 90% level, with an additional four terms exceeding the 80% level, totaling 12 terms in the first two tiers of the ranking (see Figure 4.2). While somewhat lower than the Austrian scores, the findings still suggest that Czech respondents highly value a group of widely-recognized community broadcasting values. That was followed by a ten terms in the 50%-80% range, and four terms that did not eclipse the 50% threshold for importance.

Total Sample (Czech Republic)   n=85
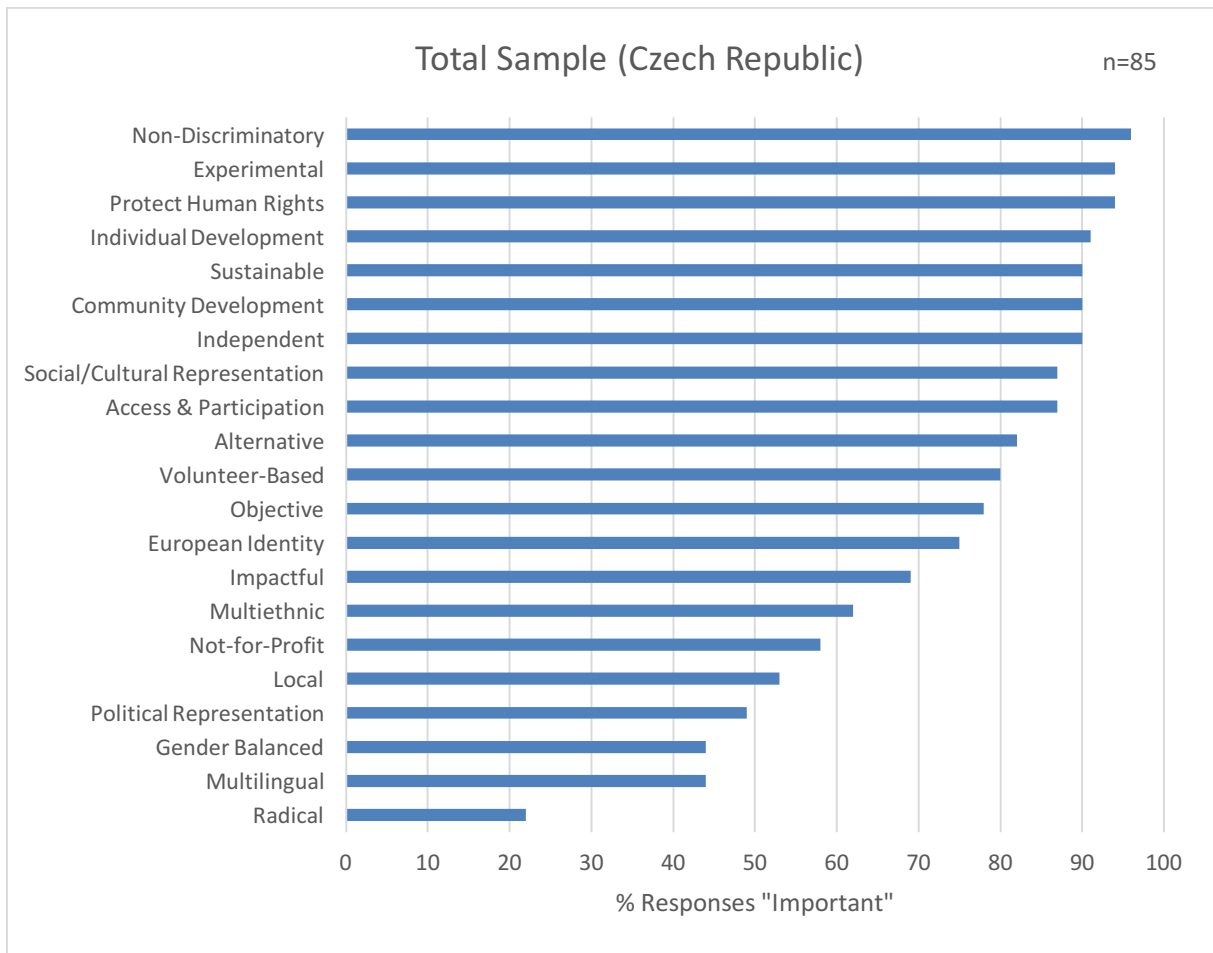
% Responses "Important"

Figure 4.2 Ranking of Importance by Total Sample of Czech Respondents

Additional cross-tabulations for both the Austrian and Czech samples revealed significant findings regarding the influence of age, gender, politics and language upon the rankings, including some notably low scores for the values of gender balance and multilingualism. In addition, the often-found tension between the values of politics and culture in community broadcasting also was revealed in the findings of this project.

Addressing the secondary research question about policy alignment, the total sample in Austria (figure 4.3) shows the top of the rankings are well-represented by a group of terms extracted from Austrian community broadcasting policy, suggesting a strong alignment with pariticpants' views. In addition, every Austrian policy term was judged as important by at least 68% of participants in the survey, also indicating a positive alignment in the overall evaluation. However, the relatively low scores for the policy terms "Multilingual", "Objective", and "European Identity", plus the presence of five terms not found in Austrian policy appearing higher in the rankings, suggests some weakness in the alignment of the policy document.
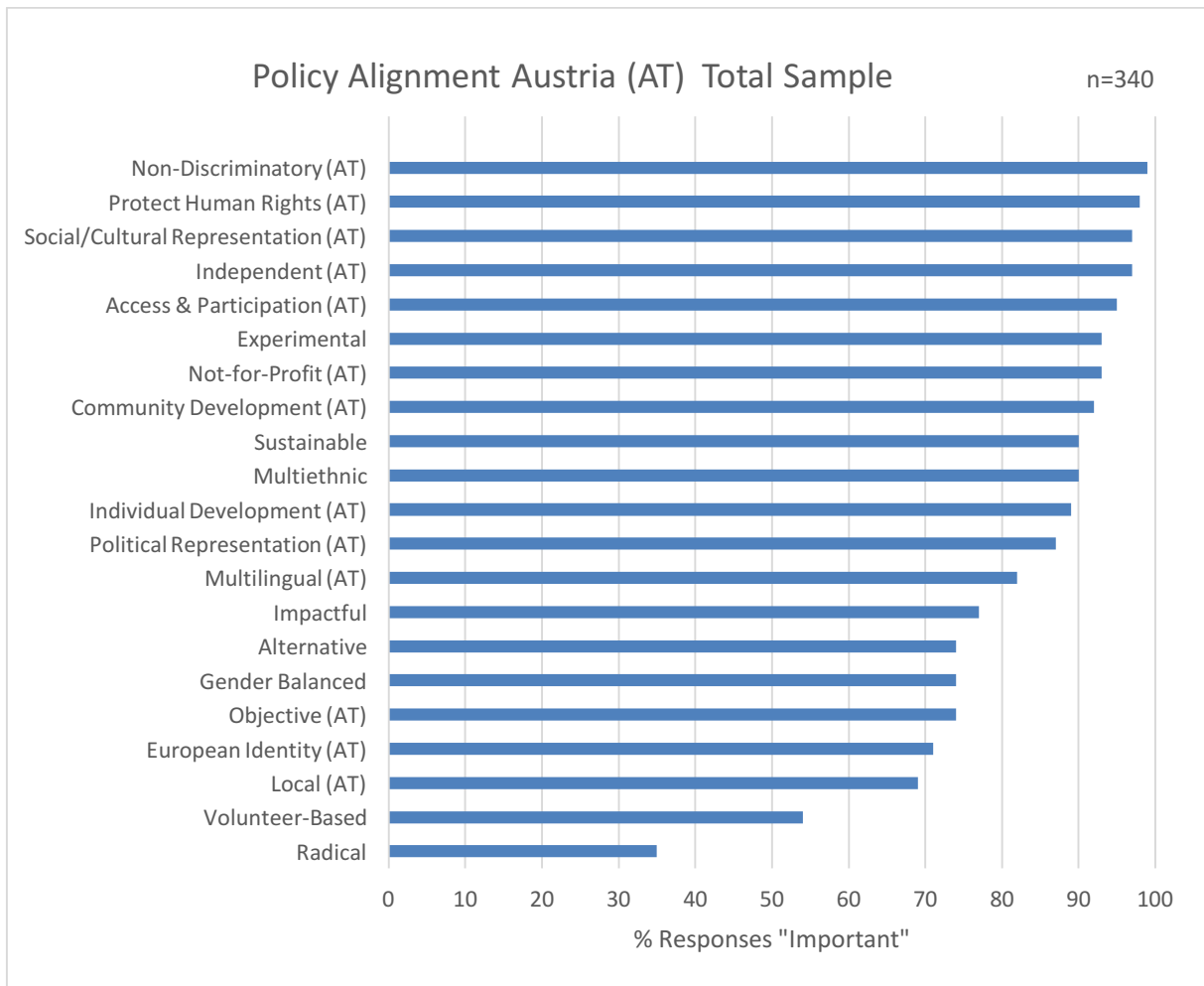
Policy Alignment Austria (AT) Total Sample

n=340

Policy Term	% Responses "Important"
Non-Discriminatory (AT)	99
Protect Human Rights (AT)	98
Social/Cultural Representation (AT)	97
Independent (AT)	97
Access & Participation (AT)	95
Experimental	93
Not-for-Profit (AT)	93
Community Development (AT)	92
Sustainable	90
Multiethnic	90
Individual Development (AT)	89
Political Representation (AT)	87
Multilingual (AT)	82
Impactful	77
Alternative	74
Gender Balanced	74
Objective (AT)	74
European Identity (AT)	71
Local (AT)	69
Volunteer-Based	54
Radical	35

% Responses "Important"

Figure 4.3 Ranking of Policy Terms by Total Sample of Austrian Respondents

The examination of Czech Republic policy alignment in the total sample of all respondents shown in figure 4.4 reveals the ranking of nine policy terms in the top 11 places on the list, indicating strong alignment with participants' views. That finding however, is countered by a group of policy four terms ranked among the bottom seven of the list, all with less than 60% of the sample seeing them as important, and suggesting some weakness in the alignment.
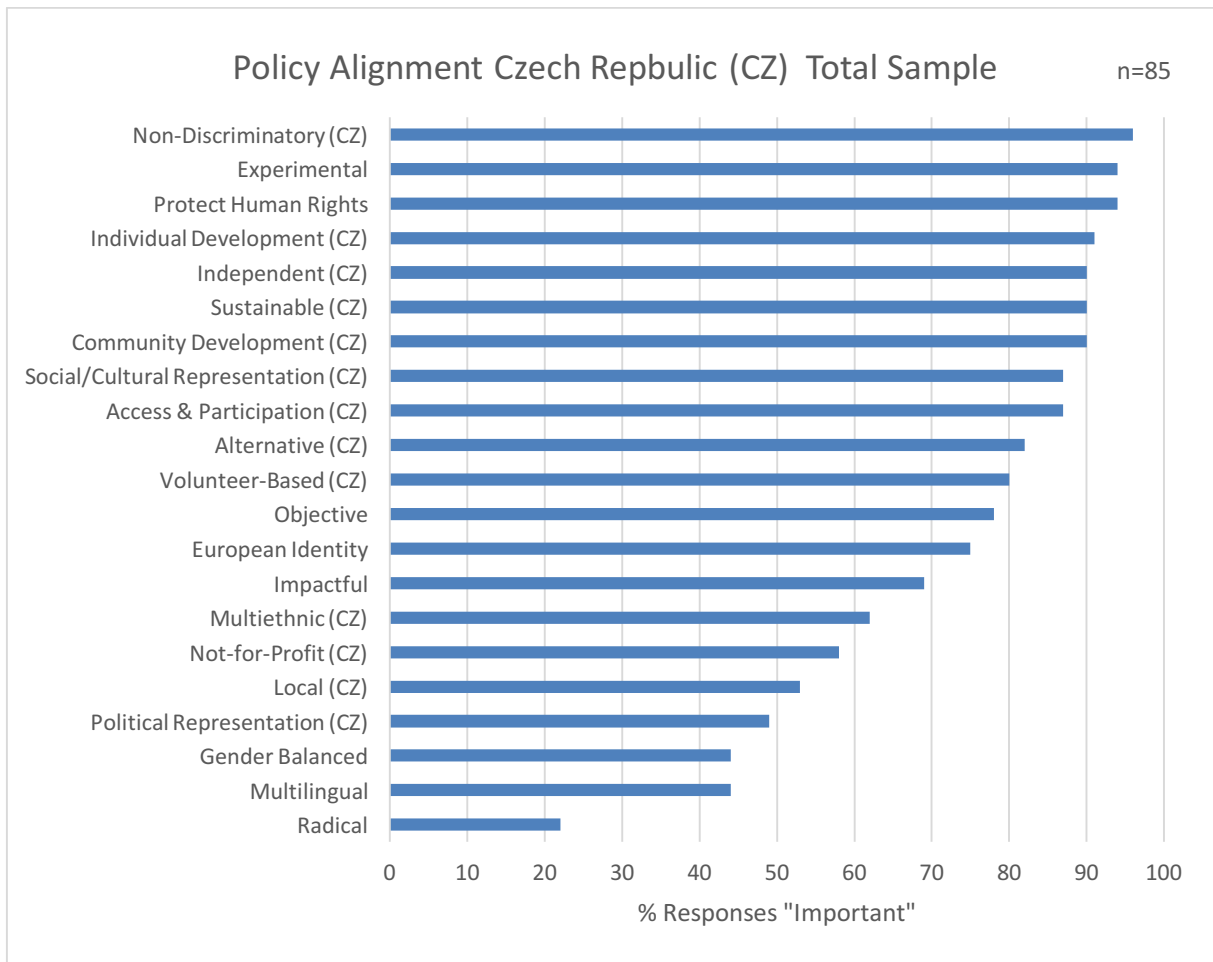
Policy Alignment Czech Repbulic (CZ) Total Sample n=85

% Responses "Important"

Figure 4.4 Ranking of Policy Terms by Total Sample of Czech Respondents

5. Conclusions

This research project deployed survey methodology in Austria and the Czech Republic, first to measure participants' perceptions the importance of community broadcasting values, and second to evaluate the alignment of their rankings of importance with stated community broadcasting policy.

In Austria the findings reveal an older, well-educated, and highly-employed sample of community broadcasting participants. Concern among Austrian stakeholders about the ageing population of participants was generally confirmed in the demographic findings of this study. In the Czech Republic, respondents are much younger and less experienced than their Austrian counterparts. The organizational findings suggest that not only are young Czech respondents adopting community broadcasting, they are continuing to participate beyond their first year.

From an overall perspective, it appears that both Austrian and Czech community broadcasting participants in this research view as important a group of widely-recognized values in community broadcasting. These values such as non-discriminatory, access and

participation, human rights, independent, and experimental represent a range of philosophies in community broadcasting that are well-known to stakeholders, and regularly found in theory, advocacy, and practice throughout the world. Additional widely-recognized values that scored well with participants in both countries are social/cultural representation, community development, sustainability, and multiethnic. The results emphasize the importance participants place on the role of community broadcasting as a unique communicative space with a legitimate position in the public sphere. This positioning supports the matrix of theoretical approaches from Carpenter *et al* (2008) who contend that community broadcasters supplement mainstream media content, contest pre-conceived popular representations, and resist dominant paradigms.

Addressing the secondary research question about policy alignment, in Austria, the findings overall suggest that the policy document "Funding Guidelines for Non-Commercial Broadcasters" is positively aligned (with notable exceptions) with the views of respondents to the survey. In the Czech Republic, the overall findings suggest that the policy document "Proposed Community Broadcasting Policy and Plan for the Czech Republic" exhibits a positive, but mixed picture of alignment with the views of respondents to the Czech survey.

The aim of this research is to present empirical evidence that adds to the body of knowledge about community broadcasting, and can be applied to the practice, advocacy, and regulation in the sector. Accordingly, the findings about values important to participants in the project can contribute to the understanding of the community broadcasting phenomenon, especially relating to the issues of age, new technologies and gender. For Austria, the evaluation of policy alignment to participants' views informs important policy interventions at national and international levels. In the Czech Republic, surveying participants and testing of the proposed new policy informs the current discourse about community broadcasting, and might apply to further developments in the post-authoritarian media ecosystems of the Czech Republic and Central/Eastern Europe.

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7. Appendix

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