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**Extended Abstract**

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

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. 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. 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". 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", and "multiethnic" to name a few.

In this thesis, the description and history of community broadcasting around the world, with a detailed focus on Austria and the Czech Republic, provide background on the subject. Also, the theoretical underpinnings 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.

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. Volunteer participants are a key component of the community broadcasting phenomenon, and could also be a critical source for understanding community broadcasting and the ideologies that comprise it. Thus, this 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 (n=340) and the Czech Republic (n=85). 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. This project offers the opportunity to separately examine 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?”

To address the first research question, respondents were 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 in the sample were cross-tabulated with the list of terms to search for interesting findings that might inform the discussion. 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”.

In Austria the findings reveal an older, well-educated, and highly-employed sample of community broadcasting participants. Concern expressed by Austrian stakeholders about the ageing population of participants was generally confirmed in the demographic findings of this study. Gender balance is another important issue that continues to resonate among stakeholders, and was also revealed in this research to be especially important to female respondents in Austria. In the Czech Republic, respondents are much younger and less experienced than their Austrian counterparts. The Czech survey organizational findings suggest also that not only are young 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-used values that scored well with participants in both countries are social/cultural representation, community development, sustainability, and multiethnic. The results emphasize the value 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 can inform important policy interventions at national and international levels. In the Czech Republic, surveying participants and testing of the proposed new policy can inform the discourse about community broadcasting, and could influence other developments in the post-authoritarian media ecosystems of the Czech Republic and Central/Eastern Europe.