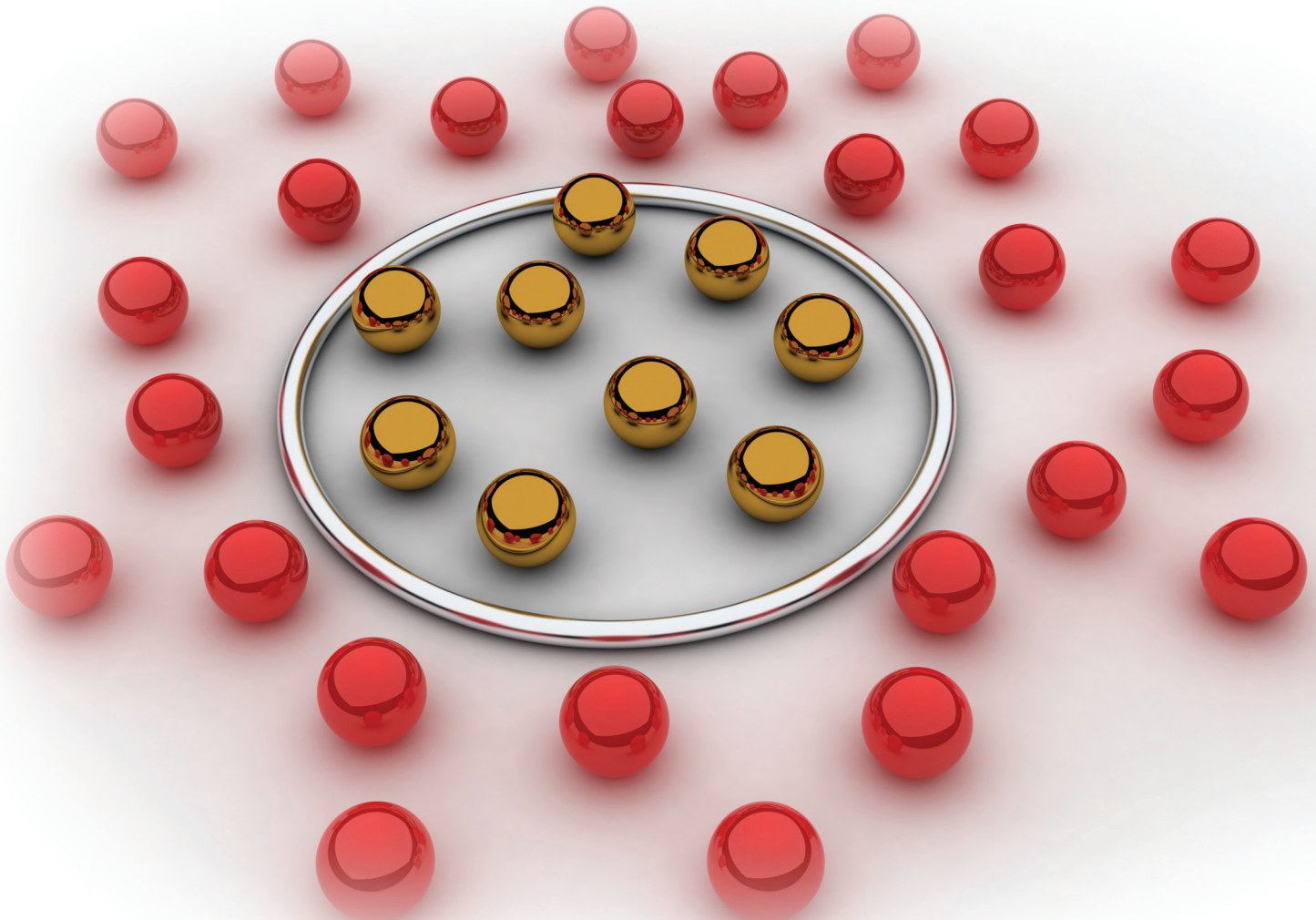


# Drivers of Change? Community Radio in Ireland



*“What I like about community radio  
is that it can change people’s lives and get people thinking.  
That’s what I get out of this, plus I like being on radio.”*

Volunteer, Life FM.



This research was made possible by the funding support  
of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland

**Niamh Gaynor  
& Anne O’Brien**

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As with all independent research, the content and views expressed are our own, except where this is otherwise stated.

Dr. Niamh Gaynor  
Dr. Anne O'Brien  
June 2010

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While technology is sometimes blamed for the increasing atomisation in society, technology also offers a valuable tool in bringing communities closer together. Community radio, in place in Ireland since 1995, has a specific mandate in fulfilling this function in its commitment to work to strengthen communities, promote popular education and community dialogue in a move towards social justice and progressive social change. At a time of growing socio-economic challenges, stress and increasing isolation and marginalisation within and across communities in Ireland, this study aims at reviewing and assessing the multiple benefits provided by community radio to both the communities they serve, and more widely. Through an in-depth study of four community stations across the country<sup>1</sup>, the study documents and analyses the experiences, analyses and aspirations of a range of community practitioners on the role and potential of community radio in building their communities in an era of change.

The research is guided by the following three research questions:

- How are the social benefits of community radio defined by its practitioners?
- To what extent do the membership, operation, broadcasting and management of community radio stations promote these social benefits and reflect the plurality and diversity of the community they serve?
- To what extent do the operation and broadcasting of community stations promote dialogue and debate on issues of concern to their membership, acting as a driver for social change within their communities?

Field research was carried out over the period October 2009 to March 2010. This included an initial workshop at the CRAOL annual conference in October exploring meanings of the concept of social benefit with participants from community stations across the country, interviews with three community radio activists during the months of November-December exploring the key issues and testing the interview schedule, visits to all four stations during the months January – March where interviews were conducted with 25 staff and volunteers across these four stations, together interviews with eight community groups in the four transmission areas to explore their links with the respective stations. Findings were collated into a draft report in April and this was sent to the four participating stations for comment and feedback in May. The resultant report was finalised and submitted to the BAI in June, 2010. The principle findings of the research are as follows:

**Chapter One** notes that the media institution in most western societies over the last few decades has undergone significant processes of commercialisation and privatisation which have led to what one commentator describes as a 'refeudalisation of the public sphere' (Habermas, 1996). While the liberalisation of communications technologies has enhanced the democratic process, the simultaneous and continued vertical and horizontal integration of mass media has undermined the status of media as a 'fourth estate' or protector of the public good. Moreover, the traditional model, in the form of public service, has been undermined by challenges to its financial model and governance structures as well as by the definition of a singular public sphere, which it claims to represent. As a result of these forces and processes, the challenge to achieve media democratisation still remains. Much of the endeavour of community radio as a social movement attempts to act as an agent for democratisation and social change, to act as a counterpoint to processes of commercialisation and depoliticisation. In this way community radio aims to become the 'expression of the population' (Servaes, 1999:260) by adopting unique ownership and programming structures, which provide for management, membership and content to be generated by the community while simultaneously meeting its needs.

In a closer examination of the nature of community radio in an Irish context, **Chapter Two** argues that community radio stations constitute a distinctive form of media engagement, with strong connections to the geographic community or community of interest that the stations are licensed to serve. The stations participating in the research all agree that community radio aims to reflect the agendas and views of the community represented. This objective is implemented by the stations at a number of levels: by promoting ideas and issues that are important to their communities; by emphasising the localised focus and local na-

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<sup>1</sup>Four relatively 'new' community radio stations, one licensed as a 'community of interest' station (Life FM) and three as 'geographic communities' (Liffey Sound FM, Ros FM and Tipperary Mid West) under the 2004 licensing scheme, participated in the research.

ture of the community radio project; by identifying the importance of developing skills among community members; and by maintaining an ambition not just to mediate local views and issues but to act as a conduit for community self-expression. A second characteristic that distinguishes community radio, as articulated by the stations studied, is that they are owned and controlled by not-for-profit organisations. The stations also recognise the uniqueness of the fact that community radio is accountable to communities, through management, membership and volunteer structures. In these ways, through accountability structures, ownership patterns and its local agenda setting function, community radio may begin to address the deficit of democratic participation within mass media, and act to maintain a media 'space' in which community radio can provide social benefit to the communities it represents.

The social benefits that accrue to community radio are detailed in **Chapter Three**. The consensus among the stations is that community radio generates a sense of connection, engagement and belonging within the wider community. This is elaborated in terms of simple processes of connection like elderly listeners phoning stations, and the more complex sense that the station acts to bring local people together by highlighting issues of common interest and/or concern. Community focused news and information services provided by community radio are understood as a social benefit to the community of listeners because they address micro, practical and localised information as well as broader macro-educational issues as required by and as relevant to the community. Training is another key social benefit provided by the community stations, and operates at a number of levels. Training provides practical production skills, work-based experience for volunteers interested in furthering their skills in the broadcast industry, and personal development benefits to volunteers who may be marginalised prior to their engagement with the station. A further social benefit for participants is the creation of a community of interest within their radio stations through socialising with groups of people who share both experiences in radio production and a focus on the local community. For local groups and community development agencies a significant social benefit accrues from the publicity facility offered by the community stations, which involves engagement with local groups on the part of stations, often outside the confines of the radio studio with a focus on community events. Community radio also offers opportunities for community groups to generate a broad awareness of the activities of networks of community organisations in the locality and facilitates listeners in connecting with the services provided by community groups. In short the social benefits recognised by the stations studied include meeting individual community members' needs to feel connected to the community 'within' the radio station as well as to the wider community more broadly; meeting volunteers' needs for training; meeting the community's need for a localised news and information service, and meeting community groups' needs to publicise events, activities and services, all of which generate significant benefits to the geographic communities and communities of interest associated with the stations examined.

**Chapter Four** examines the plurality and diversity in participation across the four stations employing a seven-level framework of analysis devised for community radio by Day (2009). It is found that, to varying levels and at varying times, participation occurs at all levels of the framework. While participation at the first four levels (involving principally audience feedback, phone-ins and interviews) is common across the stations and often represents a valuable first step in securing deeper participation, it is noted that this merely replicates the opportunities available across other media and offers nothing distinctive. Levels five to seven (where the audience becomes producer, broadcaster, decision maker and owner – representing the distinct differences between community radio and other media) also occurs across the stations to differing degrees. Key factors determining the extent to which these levels are reached include publicity and outreach in raising awareness of the ethos of and opportunities afforded through the stations, the management styles within the stations and the levels of interaction between board members and staff / volunteers.

While participation within community radio is often discussed in broadcasting terms solely, it is noted that all four stations involve community members in a variety of ways drawing on wide pools of expertise, interest and goodwill. With a wide range of options for involvement, a greater diversity of people can be attracted and involved and a good gender mix was reported in all stations, together with participation from communities of the unemployed (Ros FM and Tipperary MW in particular); 'new communities' (Life FM and Ros FM in particular); the disabled (Ros FM and Tipperary MW in particular); those housebound and physically isolated (Tipperary MW in particular); those who are socially isolated and may experience periods of loneliness (Life FM and Tipperary MW in particular); and those who may be experiencing stress, depression or mental health issues (Life FM and Ros FM in particular). On a more positive note, all stations also cater in particular to, and provide a platform for local music and musicians as well as local sporting events. A range of factors affecting the levels and quality of participation across these different communities were identified. These include word of mouth; the relaxed, friendly, non-confrontational atmosphere of stations; advertising / promotion of stations; visibility within the community; the organisation of open days / social events; and the ethos and quality of **training provided**.

**Chapter Five** explores the linkages, in ethos and in practice, between the four community stations and community development with a view to exploring the extent to which community stations can and do function as drivers of change within their respective communities. Although there are distinct similarities in ethos and principles between community development and community radio, interviews with community actors (both within the stations and within community agencies more broadly) reveal that the main opportunities seen to be offered by community radio remain at the lower level forms of participation offered by the stations, rather than at the higher levels of direct control and access to the airwaves as advocated through both the ethos of community radio and through the values of social justice and participation in particular within community development. These findings tally with those emanating from a survey of 23 community and voluntary groups conducted by Unique Perspectives in 2003.

With their strong focus on information provision and exchange (as articulated by both radio and community development activists) and the key service provided in this regard to more isolated and marginalised sections of the local community, it is proposed that community stations prove even more effective in assisting people to **cope with change** as it happens, rather than driving these changes themselves. The crucial and valuable role of community stations in this regard is recognised. However, we argue that community radio's contribution does not and should not end there. At this critical time in our history, as we emerge from the headiness of the 'Celtic Tiger' period and begin to reflect collectively on what makes us truly human, what makes us happy, and what counts in life and within our communities, community radio provides us with the space and means to engage each other, in all our diversity, in these discussions, to collectively re-imagine our communities, and to work together in collectively directing and driving change within them.

# CHAPTER ONE

## COMMUNITY RADIO IN A RAPIDLY CHANGED AND CHANGING IRELAND

### 1.1 Introduction

Ireland is a rapidly changed and changing place. From the depression of the 1980s through the heady Celtic Tiger period of the 1990s to mid 2000s and on to the current crisis, communities have both suffered and celebrated unprecedented upheavals, radically altering their own lives and the lives of those around them. The dramatic growth rates of the 1990s (averaging 7 per cent over the fourteen year period 1993-2006, CSO: 2006) brought prosperity, employment and social development to towns and villages across the country. At the same time many of these towns and villages became home to a growing diversity of 'new communities', with an estimated fourfold rise in inward migration reported making up 10 per cent of the national population (NESC 2006). This was a period of significant growth and development for communities across the country, both economically and socially.

Yet as we now know, and as many knew then, the benefits of this growth and development were not evenly felt by all. Behind the impressive macroeconomic statistics lay a more complex picture. Rising levels of income inequality and social exclusion over the same period (Kirby, 2002; Hardiman, 2004; NESC 2005) revealed an increasingly differentiated society where the Celtic Tiger, while benefiting some individuals and communities, was leaving others behind. The attendant rise in mental health related issues, stress, depression and suicide over the same period (Department of Health and Children, 2005; HSE, 2007) offered further evidence of growing polarisation and alienation within and across society. As the social and psychological fallout of the current (post-2008) economic crisis begins to be felt, the inadequacies of a model that leaves individuals to fend for themselves, to move forward or fall behind, in isolation, is apparent to all. The need to recapture and rediscover what is important to us all, to find time for those around us, and to stem the increasing alienation and marginalisation that has come to characterise our society is all the more acute.

Community, a sense of belonging, of mutual support, of shared interests and of shared experience has long lain at the heart of Irish society. Through difficult times, people have benefited from the kindness of neighbours, friends and people within their communities. Through better times, communities have celebrated together. Community has been the glue which has bound people together through thick and thin. As Fr Harry Bohan, long a strong proponent of community, eloquently puts it...

*No man or woman is an island. People cannot live in isolation and in such extreme forms of individualism; everybody needs friends or companions. A sense of togetherness, belonging and shared experience be it in groups of friends, in family, in clubs, in churches or in groups of any kind it is an integral part of human nature. Community is the foundation of human society. Isolated we curl up and die.*

(Bohan, 2006: 1)

While technology is sometimes blamed for the increasing atomisation in Irish society, technology also offers a valuable tool in bringing communities closer together. Community radio, in place in Ireland since 1995 (although, as pirate stations, a number have operated since the 1980s), has a specific mandate in fulfilling this function in that it represents "a distinct strand in Irish broadcasting" (BCI, nd: 2), in its commitment to work to strengthen communities, promote popular education and community dialogue in a move towards social justice and progressive social change (Barlow, 1988). And so, at a time of growing socio-economic challenges, stress and increasing atomisation within society, with people finding themselves with less and less time to devote to their communities, community radio offers significant potential in bringing communities closer together, fostering a sense of cohesion and togetherness, and helping stem the increasing alienation and marginalisation that has come to characterise contemporary Irish society.

In this context, this study aims at reviewing and assessing the multiple benefits provided by community radio in Ireland to both the communities they serve, and more widely. Through an in-depth study of four community stations across the country, the study documents and analyses the experiences, analyses and aspirations of a range of community practitioners on the role and potential of community radio in building their communities in an era of change.



## 1.2 Media, Society and the 'Public Sphere'

Community radio in Ireland is part of a broader media institution which has shifted in recent decades from playing a role as 'watchdog' of society, through processes of commercialisation and privatisation, which have resulted in the refeudalisation of the public sphere (Habermas, 1996) and the appropriation of the public sphere to the manufacture of consent (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). As early as the 1940s theorists examined the issue of the social functions of the mass media. Laswell maintained that communication in society functions for surveillance of the environment, correlating parts of society and transmitting social heritage (1948). Peterson et al., in the mid 1960s, acknowledged that understandings of the social functions of the media are rooted in theoretical assumptions and argued that the media acts to service the political system, safeguard civil liberties, contribute to public enlightenment, while also generating profit, servicing the economic system and providing entertainment (1965). In the 1970s 'social responsibility' theory proposed that in Western societies the responsibilities of media emanated from its constitutionally guaranteed freedoms and also proposed that economic functions should be subordinate to socio-political functions. Habermas set forth the importance of a normative ideal of the public sphere as a model of public participation and civil life and as a goal to be reached by the media (1973). In this context the public sphere was to be an extension of individuals' freedoms of thoughts and expressions to society at large, including within the sphere, the mass media. The public sphere thus depends on equality of participation and commitment to rational argument. However Fraser notes that Habermas presumes that *"a proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away, rather than toward, greater democracy"* (1992: 117-118) and he fails to examine *"the other nonliberal, nonbourgeois, competing public sphere"* (1992:115). Similarly, Silverstone comments that the public sphere, is *"misleading, since a space where only reason, and a singular and narrow kind of reason at that, determines the viability of discourse and the possibility of action, seriously misrepresents both the possibilities and the limits of human communication in the world"* (2007:34).

Nonetheless, theorists have continued to debate the issue of the presence or absence of a mediate public sphere for decades (Dahlgren, 1995). On the one hand, new media is often credited with extending the range of access to communication networks in meaningful ways and enhancing democratic processes. On the other hand, the expansion and ever-increasing commercialisation and transnationalisation of the media, as well as subtle critical reflection on the relationship between the media and its fragmented and multiple public spheres, and the complex relationship between media and power has initiated further interrogations of the ideas of the Fourth Estate concept (Splichal, 2002). *"A central issue... is the problem of (the absence of) accountability, which raises questions about the function of the media in relation to the public, whose interests the media should ideally serve...the relationship between the media and other branches of power; and relations of power among the media themselves. The Fourth Estate/Power model 'emancipates' power of the media from responsibility and reduces audiences to passive 'consumers'"* (Splichal, 2002:11). Silverstone captures the complexity of the media-society relationship succinctly *"The media are both context and themselves contextualised. They both construct a world, and are constructed within and by that world. And of course the world is plural, not singular"* (2007:6). Silverstone coins the term 'mediapolis' to describe the *"mediated public space where contemporary political life increasingly finds its place, both at national and global levels, and where the materiality of the world is constructed through (principally) electronically communicated public speech and action"* (2007:31). The mediapolis is both more and less than Habermas's public sphere, more in that communication is multiple and there is no claim to rationality or singular meaning, and at the same time less than the public sphere in the scope of its ambition *"there is no expectation that all the requirements for fully effective communication can be met by those responsible for its initiation, and those in good faith who contribute to it"* (Silverstone, 2007:34).

Within the mediapolis it can be argued that the mass media increasingly tends towards becoming an independent participant in politics and has more freedom but less legal responsibility than individuals. Moreover, processes of dumbing down, Hollywoodisation, celebrityisation, commercialisation, breaches of privacy, and trivialisation of the important are all indicators of the media's failure to protect the public good. Nonetheless the importance of the ideal of the media as possessing some kind of 'watchdog' function persists in social commentary. As Silverstone puts it *"the media do in fact constitute the world's publicness – there is arguably no other – and therefore it behoves us to interrogate what kind of publicness this is, what its strengths and weaknesses are, what its consequences might be, what its responsibilities, and what might be changed"* (2007:29). Within this debate the idea of the media as a fourth estate is an important touchstone. *"... the Watchdog concept of the press is the most generalized idealisation of a (possible) function of the press in society – its action on behalf of the public to bring to its attention any political, economic or administrative abuses of power"* (Splichal, 2002:8-9). For Silverstone *"The media, in all their differentiation, do have responsibilities and, indeed, these responsibilities are not confined only to the nuts and bolts of reporting and representation. They include these of course, but the net has to be cast much wider: to the principles which underlie these responsibilities, and which in turn need to be based on an interrogation of the context, the increasingly global context in which they have to be*

exercised and which significantly increases them" (2007:22). While the public service model, which emanated from a focus on public good, has "been able to include a sizeable amount of public interest programming without having to chase the advertising pie... the system has had its own set of shortcomings... PSB has been plagued by issues of governance and modes of financing the system" (Saeed, 2009: 468). Hackett and Carroll highlight the media's continuing democratic deficit due to factors such as "public sphere failure, centralisation of power, inequality, homogenisation, undermining the sense of community, corporate enclosure of knowledge, elitist process of communication policy making and the erosion of communication rights" (2006: 2-10). The goal of media democratisation, in the sense of maximising freedom and equality of communication remains. It is to this latter agenda, to some extent, that the endeavour of Community Radio in Ireland is addressed.

### 1.3 Community Radio

Academic literature on community radio points to the fact that the movement has been inadequately theorised and analysed in proportion to its levels of activity (Janowski, 2003; Lewis 2002, Day, 2009). Nonetheless, much of the existing literature does explore the core concepts, aims and ideals of community radio. It explores how these aspects distinguish community radio from public service or commercial broadcasting and the literature serves to outline the role that community radio can play in community development.

Janowski outlines the defining characteristics of community radio.

*Perhaps the most important characteristic is the overall objectives of these media: to provide news and information relevant to the needs of the community members, to engage these members in public discussion and to contribute to their social and political 'empowerment'. The ownership and control of community media is often shared by local residents, municipal government and community-based organisations. The content is locally oriented and produced. The production of that content involves non-professionals and volunteers, distribution of the content may be via the ether, cable television infrastructures or electronic networks like the internet. The audience of such media is predominantly situated within a relatively small, clearly defined geographic region, although some community networks attract large and physically disperse audiences. Finally the financing of these media is essentially non-commercial, although the overall budget may involve corporate sponsorship, advertising and government subsidies (2003: 8).*

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters AMARC defines community radio in developmental terms as "A station that responds to the needs of the community which it serves and that contributes to its development in a progressive manner promoting social change" (AMARC, 2000). Barlow is equally emphatic in pointing out the developmental remit of community radio stations, which he argues are "governed by their social commitments. They work to strengthen their communities through the cultural production and reproduction of radio programming which is used as a tool for popular education, social justice and socioeconomic development... community broadcasters use the airways to promote community dialogue and to present audio evidence in support of movements for progressive social change..." (1988:101). Servaes adds "This type of participatory communication is not limited to sending messages to the public; it is an agent for social change, cultural development, and democratization. This implies for every community radio broadcaster a democratic dimension; popular participation in the management of the station in the production of its programmes. Community radio is accessible; it is neither the expression of political power nor the expression of capital. It is the expression of the population" (1999: 260). Day (2009) makes explicit links between community development and community radio and investigates the extent to which Irish community radio stations can be considered community development projects (Day, 2009:67). While highlighting the links in principles between community radio and community development, Day notes that it remains unclear to what degree community radio stations foster debate within their communities. The emergence of legal community radio stations in Ireland and current understandings of the extent to which the sector participates in community development are explored in more detail below.

Community radio in Ireland emerged from a pilot-project established in 1994 by the national broadcasting regulator, the Irish Radio and Television Commission, which licensed eleven stations to operate, initially from 1995 until the end of 1996. The Commission's objective was to explore and evaluate the potential of community broadcasting in an Irish context. As part of the support structures put in place, the Commission

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<sup>2</sup> This research was commissioned by the Community Radio Forum (CRAOL) and funded by the BCI.

<sup>3</sup> We are grateful to Jack for sharing this work with us, together with his insights and ideas on the potential of community radio

adopted the AMARC Community Radio Charter for Europe (1994), as a statement of the objectives community stations should aim to achieve. The commission appointed a Community Radio Officer in 1995 and a Community Radio Forum was also established to facilitate inter-station communication and co-operation, as well as to identify and discuss the general lessons to be learned from the pilot project. The resultant Forum report, *A Community Radio Model for Ireland*, became one of the key sources for an initial policy document on community radio from the Commission, which acted to define community radio.

*A community radio station is characterised by its ownership and programming and the community it is authorised to serve. It is owned and controlled by a not-for-profit organisation whose structure provides for membership, management, operation and programming primarily by members of the community at large. Its programming should be based on community access and should reflect the special interests and needs of the listenership it is licensed to serve.*

*(BCI Policy on Community Radio Broadcasting, nd: 3)*

Stations included in the community broadcasting strand were expected to: *“describe clearly the geographical community or community of interest served; promote and support active participation by this community at all levels in the operation; (and) operate in a manner which is in keeping with the ethos or value system which underpins community activity”* (BCI, nd: 3). Following the pilot project, the IRTC and later the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland supported an expansion and a deepening of its commitment to community broadcasting in Ireland.

Currently, community radio is bound by the 2009 Broadcasting Act. Under this legislation issues that are regulated by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland include the licensing process for community radio, the ownership and management structures of stations, the funding and finance of community stations and programming policy. The Act also altered the definition of community radio to include the concept of social benefit as follows...

*Subject to subsections (3) and (4), the Authority may enter into a class of content provision contract (“community content provision contract”) with 2 or more members of a local community or a community of interest whereby those members may supply a compilation of programme material for the purposes referred to in subsection (1) if it is satisfied that—*

*(a) those members are representative of, and accountable to, the community concerned, and  
(b) the supply of programme material in pursuance of the contract will be effected with the sole objective of— (i) specifically addressing the interests of, and seeking to provide a social benefit to, the community concerned, and (ii) achieving a monetary reward of no greater amount than is reasonably necessary to defray the expenses that will be incurred in effecting that supply.*

*(Pt.6 S.72 [No. 18] [2009] Broadcasting Act 2009)*

The extent to which community radio in Ireland provides this social benefit, encourages participation and engenders community development by informing and driving social change are all central issues addressed in this research. The research builds on existing work in this area in Ireland, most notably that of Farren (2007), Day (2009) and *Unique Perspectives* (2003). The work of Niamh Farren (2007) focuses specifically on the issue of quality in community broadcasting. She seeks to establish a contextual definition of quality which recognises that media have different functions and that the vision of community radio organisations and their broader role in culture and society needs to be acknowledged (2007: 12). While noting that many community stations raise issues of marginalisation and disadvantage through their programming, Farren notes that the impact of this programming on public debate and social change remains unknown. Rosemary Day’s work focuses principally on plurality and diversity in participation across a number of stations. The framework she devises for this purpose is employed in this study which examines participation within and across four different stations. Both Day (2009) and a report commissioned by the Community Radio Forum<sup>2</sup> and carried out by *Unique Perspectives* (2003) highlight the links between community radio and community development. Day (2009: 69), arguing that *“Community radio can assist community development work as a channel of communication”*, highlights the need for further work in examining the extent to which this takes place. *Unique Perspectives* (2003) examine the role community radio does and can play in community development through a survey of ten community radio stations and twenty three community and voluntary groups / agencies. Highlighting again the similarities in principles and ethos between both spheres, the report points to the *“potential and untapped community development role of community radio”* both within and outside their transmission areas (2003: 41-2). In the context of the divergent models characterising the evolution of community development in Ireland over the decades, this study builds on these studies by examining the extent to which the four participating stations function as drivers of change within the com-

munities. The work is also informed by ongoing work on the interlinkages between participation and social benefit being developed by Jack Byrne<sup>3</sup> (with CRAOL). The nature and degree of social benefits provided by and through community radio underpins many of these issues. These benefits are examined in this study both from the perspectives of community radio practitioners themselves and through the interrelated lenses of community participation and community building in and through the four participant stations.

## 1.4 Constructing Community/ies

While the concept of community lies at the heart of Irish society, in reality who or what makes up a community proves difficult to ascertain and the concept itself has been much deliberated upon and debated. The Broadcasting Bill of the BAI (2009: 3) divides community in relation to community radio into two categories – ‘geographical communities’ and ‘communities of interest’. These two categorisations fall into line with some of the broader literature on the topic. Banks et al (2003), for example, delineate four principle categories of community, the first two of which mirror those identified by the BAI. For Banks et al, communities may be geographically based; may constitute communities of interest (for example Christian communities such as those served by Life FM); they may be communities based on ‘social

identity’ – i.e. deriving from a collective experience of oppression such as for minority groups; or they may be made up of groups organising themselves around an earlier displacement or origin (for example groups of migrant workers, refugees etc...).

Moyo (2000) problematises these categorisations somewhat by introducing cultural considerations and reminding us of the ever changing nature of identity and hence community affiliation. She highlights the problems inherent in the ‘geographical community’ concept, most notably within urban industrialised societies characterised by high rates of mobility and complex social networks. Moreover, within such complex social settings ‘communities of interest’ are bound to overlap and interweave with each other. Moyo highlights the problems of notions of ‘communities of common identity’ when identities are ever-changing. She cautions against the potentially negative associations of such communities and argues that diversity should be celebrated within broader communities rather than bounded within those more narrowly defined.

In fact communities are rather amorphous entities defined more by their fluidity than their permanence. Moreover, as Gilchrist (2004: 2) argues “*Communities can be regarded as actively constructed by their members, not merely arising from local circumstances. Cultural traditions and symbols are used to assert or imagine community identity, expressed through ritual activities, music or flags, or their equivalent.*”. What this means is that communities are far more than empirically verifiable groups of people, characterised by their particular locality. They are constructed entities based on social relations and social organisation constituting, as O’Farrell (1994: 17) neatly puts it “*a state of mind, a disposition of involved neighbourliness*”. At the core of this state of mind, these relations and the trust thereby engendered, is communication. Relationships cannot be fostered, trust cannot be built, and common identities cannot be forged in the absence of communication. Community radio, in opening up a space for this communication, thus lies at the heart of community building.

## 1.5 Research Design and Methodology

This research, which aimed at reviewing and assessing the multiple benefits provided by community radio in Ireland to both the communities they serve, and more widely, was guided by the following three research questions:

- How are the social benefits of community radio defined by its practitioners?
- To what extent do the membership, operation, broadcasting and management of community radio stations promote these social benefits and reflect the plurality and diversity of the community they serve?
- To what extent do the operation and broadcasting of community stations promote dialogue and debate on issues of concern to their membership, acting as a driver for social change within their communities?

The research design entailed an in-depth study of four community stations across the country, documenting and analysing the experiences, analyses and aspirations of a range of community practitioners on the role and potential of community radio in building their communities in an era of change.

Field research was carried out over the period October 2009 to April 2010. This included an initial workshop at the CRAOL annual conference in October exploring meanings of the concept of social benefit with participants from community stations across the country. An interview schedule to guide interviews was prepared in November. This was piloted in interviews with three community radio activists during the months of November-December exploring the key issues. The schedule was amended and finalised in December and field visits to the four participant stations were conducted during the months January – March where interviews were carried out with 25 staff and volunteers across the four stations. A further round of interviews was held with representatives of eight community groups and agencies in the four transmission areas to explore their links with the respective stations. Findings were collated into a draft report in April and this was sent to the managers of the four participating stations for comment and feedback in May. The resultant report was finalised and submitted to the BAI in June, 2010.

## 1.6 Report Structure

The report comprises six chapters. **Chapter One** sets out the overall context for the study. Charting the socio-economic changes and challenges to communities over the period spanning pre- to post-Celtic Tiger, it examines the role of community radio within this context as a tool for democratisation and social change in an era dominated by the commercialisation and privatisation of mainstream media.

Drawing from the views and analyses of community radio participants in the research, **Chapter Two** sets out the characteristics which distinguish community radio from other forms of media. Unique among media institutions in being owned by, accountable to and reflective of the agendas and views of the communities they represent, this chapter argues that community radio stations promote a distinctive form of media engagement with significant potential to address the democratic deficit within mass media and provide social benefits at a range of levels to their communities at large. A brief overview of the four stations participating in the research is also provided in this chapter.

The range of social benefits provided by community radio, as identified by station practitioners, is set out in **Chapter Three**. These include connecting individual community members to both the community within their stations and to their wider community more broadly, the provision of training to volunteers within the stations, the provision of local news and information to the wider community, and providing publicity for local events, activities and services.

**Chapter Four** turns to an examination of the levels of plurality and diversity in participation across the four stations. All four stations are found to include a diversity of participants engaged at varying levels and in diverse ways in the stations. Three key factors promoting levels of participation that distinguish community radio from other forms of media are identified. These are outreach and awareness raising on the distinct ethos of and opportunities afforded through community radio, management styles within stations, and level of interaction between board members and station staff / volunteers within the stations.

The extent to which the four community radio stations function as drivers of change within their respective communities is discussed in **Chapter Five**. With much of their strengths and contributions in the areas of information provision and exchange, together with the important service they provide to more isolated and marginalised groups and individuals within their communities, this chapter proposes that community stations prove extremely effective in assisting people to cope with change as it happens, rather than in driving change itself. While recognising this crucial role in assisting people to cope with difficult changes – a role very much in line with traditional conceptions of community development, it is argued that a greater role for community radio in providing the space for collective reflection on our direction and future is both timely and necessary given the challenges we currently face.

The overall findings and analysis are brought together in **Chapter Six**, the conclusion, where it is argued that community radio, as a distinct and crucial media space that is fundamentally different to mainstream commercially-oriented institutions, provides the means to recolonise the public sphere and engage with each other, in all our diversity, to collectively re-imagine our collective direction and future, working together to effect positive change for all. The Chapter concludes that the extent to which community stations, groups and individuals come together in this endeavour will ultimately characterise and determine the multiple social benefits accruing from the community radio project, alongside the multiple benefits to Irish society more broadly.

## CHAPTER TWO

### COMMUNITY RADIO IN IRELAND: A DISTINCTIVE MEDIA 'SPACE'

#### 2.1 A Brief Overview of the Four Stations

Four stations participated in the study. A brief overview of each is provided in Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1 A brief overview of the four participating stations**

Station / Characteristics	Life FM	Liffey Sound	Ros FM	Tipperary MW
<b>Established</b>	License awarded in Sept 2006, on air in March 2008	On air in 2006	License awarded in 2003, on air since 2005	Began as a pirate station around 1979; awarded commercial license from 1990 – 2004; community license since 2004.
<b>Broadcast area</b>	Cork city boundaries	10 mile radius around Lucan	5 mile radius around Roscommon town	20 mile radius including 7 miles around Tipperary town and 4 miles around Cashel
<b>No. staff (paid)</b>	4 (a fifth staff member – the station manager – is voluntary)	0 (all staff are voluntary)	3 (1 full-time and 4 part-time)	12 (4 full-time and 8 part-time with hours ranging from <3 hours per week to 20 hours per week)
<b>No. volunteers</b>	60-80 with 30-40 broadcasting weekly	150 with 72 broadcasting weekly	>100 with 17-18 broadcasting weekly	>100 with 51 broadcasting weekly
<b>On air</b>	Mon-Sunday 7am-midnight, with repeats through the night	Mon-Friday, 5pm-midnight; Sat/Sun, 8am-midnight	Mon-Friday, 2pm-9pm	Mon-Sunday, 8am-12 midnight, with repeats through the night
<b>Estimated Listenership</b>	13,000 per week	11,000 per week	13,000 per week	Approx. 90,000 per week (calculated by station manager on the basis of census statistics and survey results showing approx. 90% listenership).
<b>Cost per year to run (2009 figures)</b>	Total €84,000 52% Membership / Donations and Fundraising 5% Advertising* 0% Pobal 43% Sound & Vision	Total €35,000 Breakdown not available but majority from fundraising and a high level from Sound & Vision. 0% Pobal	Total €150,000 0% Membership / Donations 17% Fundraising Minimal Advertising 83% Pobal	Total 250,000 32% Donations / Fundraising 50% Advertising (55% Fas**) 6% Grants 2% Investments

\*Under the terms of their licensing agreement all community radio stations are limited to 6 minutes advertising per hour of broadcasting.

\*\* Tipperary MW secured funding for staff costs from Fás in 2009, but is securing this from Pobal in 2010. These costs are not included in the overall budgetary costs for the station and so appear additional to the total set out here.

As Table 2.1 outlines, all four stations are relatively 'new' stations, although Tipperary MW has been on air, under different licensing arrangements, since 1980. All broadcast within a relatively localised area around the station. Three of the stations have paid staff and in Liffey Sound, all staff are voluntary. A number of staff within both Ros FM and Tipperary MW are part-time, with Tipperary MW employing a wide range of part-time staff with their hours varying from less than 3 hours per week to twenty hours a week.

All stations engage a high number of volunteers with between 20 and 75 broadcasting weekly. The level of participation of volunteers in broadcasting is largely a function of the number of hours the stations are on air per week (with two stations broadcasting 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) and the number of paid staff. The listenership for each station is difficult to ascertain as the JNLRs only apply to commercial stations. However, independent surveys commissioned by each station estimate listenerships of over 11,000 each week, with Tipperary MW combining local census figures with a recent listenership survey to estimate an approximate listenership of 90,000 per week.

As Table 2.1 also shows, the four stations differ significantly in the annual costs required to run the stations, as well as the sources of funding for the stations. Life FM is heavily dependent on fundraising, membership and donations to support the station and its staff, and the station has also succeeded in financing specific programming through the BAI Sound and Vision Scheme. Liffey Sound obtains the majority of its revenue through fundraising and also has drawn on the Sound and Vision Scheme for specific programming. Ros FM in contrast secures over 80% of its overall costs through Pobal's Community Services Programme, with the balance coming from fundraising events held throughout the year. In contrast again, Tipperary MW secures 50% of its costs from local advertising, with a further 32% coming from fundraising events and donations. Grants account for 6% of the station's revenue while investments make up a further 2%, most notably two annual draws which bring in between €55,000 and €60,000 per annum. Tipperary MW also secures a significant proportion of its revenue from public schemes (Fás' Community Employment Scheme in 2009, Pobal's Community Services Programme in 2010) but does not include these in its overall station costs in its budgeting.

While a considerable degree of variation may be observed in the costs and make-up of the four stations, as the following section demonstrates, the views of those involved in relation to the distinctive character and contributions provided overlap significantly.

## **2.2 The Distinctiveness of Community Radio: Views from the Sector**

Community radio in Ireland co-exists with public sector and independent commercial broadcasters but adds significantly to the diversity of programming available. It constitutes a distinctive form of media with strong connections to the local community or community of interest that it is licensed to serve. In defining community radio, the consensus among the stations examined was that community radio is distinctive because:

- Community radio aims to reflect the views and agendas of the community it represents;
- Community radio is owned and controlled by non-profit organisations;
- Management, membership and volunteer structures are all constituted from the community served and so are accountable to the community, who are ultimately in control of the station.

Staff and volunteers within all of the stations agreed that a primary agenda of community broadcasting distinguishing it from public service and commercial equivalents is that it aims to reflect the views and agendas of its community. This aim was articulated in a number of ways. The stations recognised firstly the importance of promoting ideas and issues that are important to their communities. *"We would support the community in doing what we can through the medium of the station to promote their ideas, that's what we're there for..."* (Liffey Sound manager). *"We are a medium for the community to express itself ...to give voice to those who might not otherwise have access to the radio..."* (Ros FM manager). As a volunteer with Liffey Sound succinctly put it *"Where commercial radio is designed to broadcast to people or talk at people and garner an audience, community radio is about a community speaking to itself and giving people that chance to participate, to be part of it and shape their own community and address problems in their community and also to be more inclusive..."* (Liffey Sound volunteer). Moreover, the preoccupation with reflecting community issues was articulated in terms of an emphasis on the importance of the local nature of community radio. *"Community radio is like an ear to the ground, it knows the local scene, knows the local people... local groups can come in here to get a message out"* (Liffey Sound manager). *"I think the principle role of community radio within the community is to broadcast local news, to be diverse, to include community organisations and to involve people within their community groups"* (Liffey Sound volunteer). This sense of local emphasis was very strong in the rural context, as two volunteers from Tipperary MW noted *"With community radio you're focused on the audience at hand... some of the bulletins would include local issues that wouldn't get onto a bulletin on local commercial*

stations – minor issues –... It's more of an information point, a locally based information point... something that's meant to knit the community together and participate in the community. You're not solely driven by the balance sheet, it's something that focuses on the community as an information point..." (Tipperary MW volunteer) and "People can relate to community radio. The people who work here in the community radio would know the locality and the people they're talking to..." (Tipperary MW volunteer).

In their efforts to reflect the views and agendas of their communities, the stations identified the importance of developing skills amongst their constituent communities. "A lot of people have never been in broadcasting in their lives, they're ordinary people, and the interest brings them in, doing something that's different, and going on air and doing something that's of benefit to the community and they've learned a lot... but it's developing those people's skills, to use in a different form in radio" (Liffey Sound manager). "We're about getting people in here, getting them on air, getting their stories on air, getting them involved..." (Life FM manager). Staff in the stations were very clear about the unique approach taken by community radio in this regard. "The big difference to commercial is you don't have a hidden agenda... they need to make money. With community radio you want to develop your community and be able to impact somebody's life and make it better..." (Life FM staff). A key commentator on community radio more broadly explained "a community radio station bedded down in its community can bring in initially nervous awkward people... give them some training, give them the experience of speaking on radio. And you can go back over a relatively short period and bring them in again, and they'll be more confident next time. So there is a capacity in community radio to empower people to speak on media because they gain ongoing regular experience, it's continuous. And we have to be here to foster that, to train them if they need specific training..."

This issue of the importance of community radio reflecting the agendas and aims of the community was also addressed by key informants, who observed that community radio is a distinct media space because of its ambition not just to mediate local views and agendas but to achieve an objective of acting as a conduit for the community to express its own views and determine its own agenda independently of any interference. As one informant notes, "I often say that we here in community radio are just sort of 'social techies', or social activists, media activists. And our role really is to facilitate the community in dialogue, that sort of thing... it's a different way to do radio...". When questioned as to how this ethos was operationalised the commentator notes "I think it ranges from, first of all respect, bringing people in... making sure the interviews are well constructed, that it's beneficial to the participants and to the listener... But it runs further than that... I think community radio shouldn't be mediating people and explaining people to the listeners. We need to provide the technical facility for people to tell their own stories. This is an empowering beneficial phase where people gain the confidence to go on air and talk about themselves... we empower people to the point where we disappear into the background. The community radio station is just a channel for them to talk direct..."

A second central characteristic of community radio that constitutes it as a distinctive media space is that community radio is owned and controlled by non-profit organisations. As the station manager at Life FM observed "Community radio is for the community really – for us the community is the Christian community in Cork, the Board is elected from the Christian community. The people in the station, most of them come from this community. Even if they're not in the Christian community, we're open to that too... It's not for profit, it's to build the community, encourage the community, promote dialogue in the community... a lot our funding comes from members... if it wasn't for members we wouldn't be on air it's a good model because if your community is funding you they must want you on air..." (Life FM manager). The Liffey Sound station manager concurred "The people in the station don't own the station. It belongs to the people of Lucan. Over the years it's not a huge membership but it belongs to the community of Lucan – 'your voice your station' that's our motto..." (Liffey Sound manager). Tipperary MW also highlights its distinct community focus with the slogan "broadcasting from the heart of your community".

A third and linked characteristic was that the management, membership and volunteer structures came from the community and were accountable to the community. "The board are pretty involved because they meet here and they're in and out and they meet people... they listen too... the board – they'd have a report at every meeting of what's happening at the station. There's a huge connection between the board and the people they're in charge of – how we're doing financially, and who's good for what job, what do we need, where can we strengthen..." (Life FM staff). A volunteer at Liffey Sound agreed, "The board set the vision but it's consultative. It's a very fluid organisation. The board members would have their own shows. It's not a rigid board stance. They'll be on the panel discussions, they'll be presenters, producers and monitors as well. I see them all the time so we'd talk about ideas and positions and what you'd like to see, and there's a suggestion box where you can put your suggestions. It is very inclusive with young people as well... they're very much included. It's a very inclusive organisation..." (Liffey Sound volunteer).

In summary, respondents in the stations and key informants were very clear that community radio in Ireland constitutes a distinctive media space because ownership and control structures, agenda-setting and accountability within the stations were embedded in the represented communities and determined by the communi-



ties. While Nicholas Garnham argues that the value systems in commercial media are “inimical... to the very process of democratic politics itself” (1990: 111) community media may provide a “possible solution that could help break this colonisation of communication” (Saeed, 2009: 469). Kidd et al (2005) propose that “faced with a systemic exclusion from the dominant media, counter publics must create their own communications”. Similarly for Murdock (1999, 7-17) “‘rights to information’, ‘right to experience’, ‘rights to knowledge’, and ‘rights to participation’ are all ‘questions of representation’ about social delegation, about who is entitled to speak for whom, what responsibilities they owe to the views and hopes they claim to articulate, and more importantly, about how well these contribute to the exercise of full citizenship” (Saeed, 2009: 470). These key questions are addressed in the operation practices and working vision and understanding of the role of community radio that is in evidence in the stations studied. In this regard the function played by community radio in Ireland, of offering an alternative, representative and accountable media space to communities provides enormous social benefit to Irish society generally. It is to this question of the other social benefits of community radio in Ireland that the analysis now turns.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE SOCIAL BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY RADIO

In defining the social benefits generated by community radio, the consensus among the stations examined was that community radio provides the following benefits:

- Community radio generates a sense of connection, engagement or belonging within the wider community;
- Community radio provides a localised and relevant information and news service for the community;
- Community radio provides training for volunteers in production skills and facilitates on-air experience, which often results in personal development outcomes for many volunteers;
- Community radio creates a sense of community within stations;
- Community radio provides a publicity service for community groups, through pro-active engagement with groups, by engaging with groups and listeners outside of the studio, by publicising events and by generating an awareness of activities of networks of community groups and organisations.

#### 3.1 Listeners’ Sense of Belonging

All of the stations articulated the importance of the community radio service to their listeners and were confident that the stations added value to their local communities. “The benefit is it brings people together, they organise events, it’s open to the wider community and it highlights and addresses local issues. People text or phone in... so it gives a voice to people that might not have a voice normally...” (Liffey Sound volunteer). They noted that their broadcasts facilitated local people in engaging with the broader community and, in this way, counteracted isolation and generated a sense of belonging among the wider community. “I’ve found elderly people ringing in, they don’t listen to national news because they’re detached from it, they listen to the community station because they feel included in it” (Liffey Sound volunteer). Staff in Tipperary MW observed the importance of listeners phoning to chat to a familiar person on reception. In particular some elderly listeners call the station on a daily basis and, for some, this contact might be the only person they talk to each day. On average the station receives about 150 calls per day. This theme was not an exclusively rural phenomenon, it was also addressed by Life FM in Cork City. “A lot of elderly people are lonely so it’s a way of reaching out to people, letting them know people are there that actually care, we’re not chasing their money” (Life FM staff). The stations are important in addressing this sense of belonging for listeners generally and not just the older cohort. As a Life FM presenter noted “It is important when people are rushing after money that we have a chance to be together as a community, when the floods were there we were there for the people of Cork to help, not for our own benefit...” (Life FM staff). Thus, at a number of levels, community radio generates a sense of community among its constituencies. It achieves this end by creating connections for individual listeners to a sense of broader community, by facilitating community members to interact with broader networks by publicising community events which bring people together, and by constituting a forum in which communities can communicate simply as communities and not for any other political or economic ends. At each of these levels community radio brings a benefit of building a sense of community among its listeners.

#### 3.2 Community focused News and Information

The social benefit generated by the news and information service provided by community radio is succinctly

described by a volunteer with Life FM. *"Listeners feel that they're going to find out what's going on on their doorstep and... they don't feel they have to offer something back, they just get to hear what's going on in their community.... We like to talk about what we feel is relevant to our listeners, not what's going on in Dublin, or might not have relevance and (we talk about) what's not going to cost, because they don't always get the platforms to talk about it..."* (Life FM staff). As well as highlighting events, other themes that community radio addresses in its news and information dissemination capacity include practical information on weather and road conditions, obituaries, missing pets, and utility supply problems. As a Life FM volunteer put it *"those small things are important"* (Life FM staff). Other important information services include highlighting citizens' information services or referring listeners to appropriate public service agencies when asked for advice. Again this information is important to listeners because it is localised to their needs. As a Tipperary MW volunteer put it *"With community radio, they're more focused on the audience at hand. We look at news issues locally, it's more an information point or service... It's about participating in the community"*.

At a more macro level, community radio also addresses broad educational and informational issues. For example, in its capacity to broadcast information to the local community Ros FM is particularly focused on its remit to educate and inform about disability. As the station manager put it *"...there is a lot of community activity, is it's a dynamic environment we broadcast to, we're the only community station that has a disability ethos written into its contract with the BAI. We're very proud to be able to deliver an informative view about issues pertaining to disability, to allow volunteers with disability to come in work with us here, present shows, have community notice-boards and have programming dealing with topics pertaining to disability"* (Ros FM manager). The range of levels at which information is disseminated by the stations, from 'micro' issues such as missing pets to 'macro' educational issues such as the dissemination of information on disability, the community radio service plays an important role in localising these news and information services in ways that are appropriate to its community's interests. In this way community radio provides an immense social benefit to communities that goes largely unaddressed by any other media service.

### **3.3 Training and Skills**

Training in community radio operates at a number of levels. Volunteers are trained in the practical and intellectual skills required to produce radio programmes, volunteers gain invaluable on-air experience which allows them to continually up-skill, and volunteers develop personal and professional skills from their exposure to the unique work environment of the community station. The manager at Life FM explains the initial process of including new volunteers in the stations activities *"When a volunteer comes in they fill out an application form... with different details of what areas they're interested in and when they're available... and then they do a voice test and if they're good at news we put them there or wherever the need is, or wherever they're interested in. If they want to do research, then we put them with someone doing that. Then the training is ongoing... we cover all areas - researching, producing, editing, community, technical... mostly it's on the job, one to one. We found that to be the best..."* (Life FM manager). The manager at Liffey Sound outlines the results of their station's training process. *"We take people in here and we train them...St John of Gods, the Clondalkin partnership, and we've done it on an individual basis and the result of that is that, since we opened, nine people have found employment in the industry, and any newsreader on the local stations in Dublin were in here reading the news... that's the benefits I'd see from us the station to the community"* (Liffey Sound manager). A presenter on Life also noted that the process benefits participants *"We try to see what they want to do, where their interests are, and fit in around them... and be gentle with them, and encourage them, and you see them grow then..."* (Life FM staff).

For volunteers who may wish to undertake professional broadcasting work, entry-level positions in commercial and public sector stations are very difficult to access and so community stations provide invaluable work-based experience for volunteers. Many volunteers comment positively on the outcomes of this facility. *"As part of my FETAC course in sound engineering and media technology I'm required to do work experience. I tried a lot of stations and it was hard to get someone to take me on... I rang Brian (Life FM station manager) and he met me for interview and took me on..."* (Life FM volunteer). A couple of Liffey Sound volunteers also comment on how open the station is to facilitating their progress onto having their own programmes. *"They let me in right away. I was recording news segments to start, then I started to do a drive time show of music and news, then I did a music show for 6-8 weeks and now I do an American specialist music show..."* and *"I tried to get interview experience, and heard them broadcast in the 'Spar', and met the station manager he brought me on to a sports programme and three weeks later I got a show..."* (Liffey Sound volunteers). One volunteer outlines how her own views of community radio have changed through participating in the station's work. *"Initially I viewed it as a stepping-stone, as a way to get experience as a student and have something on my CV. Now I'm not so sure... I'd like to get paid at some stage, but what I like about community radio is it's a chance for me to play what I want to and very few people get to do that in commercial radio... and I do think that what community radio stands for and is supposed to do for the community is very important"* (Liffey Sound volunteer).

A Life FM volunteer articulates the personal development benefits resulting from his training and experience in the station *"I got to come into an environment where I got to pick up skills. I was unemployed at the time and I got to pick up skills and see what I was good at and what I was comfortable with. And it gave me confidence to work in that area, an opportunity to expand, and I've discovered what I'm good at, and I've gone off and worked with that in other areas. And I've seen other people come in and, getting training and enjoying what they're doing, and moving on from there. It was a great starting point for someone like myself who was out of work. It helps people to grow and develop. That was a huge thing for me..."* (Life FM volunteer). The confidence gained by volunteers at a personal level is clear. *"I never flourished in secondary school but doing this [own music programme on Ros FM], you're put on show to your entire town... you have to find your own voice pretty quickly... I was a person who felt myself apart from my own social group. I never really felt part of the town until I did this... I was always from here but I never really fit in... until you have an outlet to speak to everybody"* (Ros FM volunteer). Thus the training dividend that emanates from community radio functions at a number of levels. Volunteers and participants gain insights or skills in the production and creative capacities required to make radio programmes, either by producing programmes or simply by participating in them on-air. For students and volunteers interested in pursuing careers in broadcasting, the training received at the station is invaluable in progressing this aim, by facilitating them in upskilling technically, by increasing their confidence in their production abilities and by providing a supportive work-environment in which to further their interest in and understanding of community radio.

### **3.4 'Community' within Community Radio.**

A further significant social benefit to the participants in community radio is the creation of what some describe as a 'community within' the stations. These internal communities share a common interest in community radio but have also developed into social networks that are inclusive of people who may otherwise be quite marginalised in their social worlds. Liffey Sound's station manager describes the impact of the shared interest in the station *"Knowing people is very important... on a Sunday people come in at 12 and don't leave till 6. That's because other people come in and they're trading ideas with one another and talking about show ideas asking 'would you come in on my show?'... Relationships have built up there and you realise where people are coming from... We're like a church here... there's great harmony here..."* (Liffey Sound manager). Volunteers explain how the social element of the community radio experience benefits them. *"You get to make friends. You get to know people you never met before and they're all doing different things... whether it be full time employment, or students... and that's a good community in itself... you build up a lasting friendship and you know the people and that's important amongst our volunteers..."* (Liffey Sound volunteer). Two volunteers in Liffey Sound note the importance to them of the social aspect of volunteering at the station *"It's like a bug, it gets into you. It's very much a social organisation... a community within. And you meet people you'd never meet on a day to day basis... your social circle has grown..."* *"The managers and monitors are around, and it's nice to talk to people and feel like we know each other and what we're doing. There is a sense of community there..."* (Liffey Sound volunteer). Life FM's station manager acknowledges the importance of the station to some vulnerable volunteers. *"It's very much a community in here... some people are involved and this is their home. They might not have a great home life... they spend a lot of time here hanging out..."* (Life FM manager). Similarly, a presenter from Life FM notes the weight given by the station community to involving volunteers in the station and ensuring that they feel comfortable in that environment. *"Sometimes I feel like a parent. We have volunteers where this is like a home. It's a community within. The people that come in, they feel like they belong here and we've people from so many different backgrounds, so many walks of life, with troubled pasts. It might be the first place they ever feel safe and they belong. It doesn't matter what they're doing - only putting a form in the envelope - they belong here, they're part of what we're doing. It gives all of us a sense that my life has purpose because I'm helping someone else..."* (Life FM staff). As a community with a shared interest, which is inclusive of all volunteers, community radio provides a distinct social benefit to those that participate by constituting a 'community within' the community radio station.

### **3.5 Publicity for Community Groups**

A further social benefit for local groups and agencies is the publicity facility offered to them by community radio stations. This service involves engagement with local groups on the part of the stations, whereby volunteers and staff actively seek to include a wide range of local community groups in their programming. As the station manager with Life FM notes, while acknowledging the challenges to station resources of outreach to community groups, *"There's various community groups like Mahon Community Group or Tougher Community Group, we'd meet with them... We'd like to grow it more but, because community centres are under pressure trying to get what they do done, it's hard for them to get time to see outside that even though involvement with us helps promote what they do more... Community news is a thing where they can email in what they're doing... but it's the time and resources that are limited so we can't be chasing them all the time.... Some of the more rural groups are better than the city groups at sending stuff in... it's really up to the people in the organisation... Its*

down to resources really having the finance and people who are eager enough in that area... We'd like to do more of going out to particular areas... I'd like to see more community centres getting involved... but the problem is resources" (Life FM manager). A presenter at the station agrees "We target the community groups that would meet in the library, all the community groups like the local music school... smaller organisations as opposed to big ones, the local groups of bigger things like the SVP. I have huge interest in accessing community groups 'cause if we're not going to have an impact what's the point..." (Life FM staff). With the Christian community as its principal focus, Life FM works particularly closely with other Christian groups such as the Haven Christian Resource Centre and the YMCA.

The station manager at Ros FM also acknowledges the importance of engaging with the community outside of the confines of the studio. "It's important for a community station to be active and present on the ground..." (Ros FM manager). Liffey Sound documents its involvement with local groups and events and also the importance of 'going out' into the community to cover events "the drama people have done plays on the radio... the Garda group... ran a concert before Christmas... We broadcast soccer... the St Patrick's Day Parade... We broadcast from the Lucan Festival week, the Garda station open day... We cover the local elections... the main Dáil elections at the RDS... and we work closely with the other stations like NEAR FM to do semi-broadcasts... And the politicians here... one of the general elections... rather than have a brow beating in the studio with all of them we brought them in individually, and gave each one a half hour... to sell their wares, tell us about themselves... two reporters in the studio and gave everyone a fair chance... They came back to us and said they were delighted 'cause you were very fair to us to sell to the local people'..." (Liffey Sound manager). As the station manager of Tipperary MW notes, that station has also provided extensive coverage of both national and local elections "...people love elections. The last general election we had several debates where all candidates were asked to take part. On the day of the election we had coverage from 12 noon until 8.30pm. During this coverage all local results were analysed. WE reported from Tipperary North, Tipperary South, Limerick East and Limerick West, and also from Cork North...". The ex-Chair from Near FM highlights the benefit to be derived from community radio participating in events 'on the ground'. "We found very early on that we were killing ourselves trying to get large groups of people in here. And even trying to set up cultural events for the station and arts events and... after a lot of work we realised that it would be better if people were gathering somewhere in the community, to do a cultural thing, a spiritual thing, an artistic thing, be there with them. Acknowledge and celebrate with them. And we found people appreciate this. That the station comes to their event, broadcasts it, celebrates it... So we get out as often as possible. And we have a person employed fulltime as an outreach worker, sort of coordinator. So we work very hard on that because we do believe it isn't all about the couple of rooms here."

The stations also make themselves available to groups to publicise events in the community. Volunteers note in relation to their stations, "They promote local events, address issues in the community that mainstream radio would gloss over" (Liffey Sound volunteer) and "There's community organisations, voluntary or otherwise, chamber of commerce, any organisation within the community that's got something to say or that's promoting something or is giving information to the community, they contact us and we pass that on" (Tipperary MW volunteer). As another volunteer in Tipperary MW put it "We have the South Tipperary volunteer service –they're on once a week letting people know what's involved and the benefits that can have..." (Tipperary MW volunteer). Similarly in Liffey Sound "the SVP are running a show, we give them coverage, advertise it for them... the Lyons Club have been very good to us... at any time here we're carrying little features and ads on those types of people...the soccer clubs, the Gaelic clubs... running clubs... retirement groups... We found it difficult when we started here first just to involve people, to be honest we found it difficult... so I'd say it's amazing now, people are phoning here now, we're three years here and people do use us...and they're very quick to get onto us..." (Liffey Sound manager).

Community radio also generates a broad awareness and integrates with the activities of networks of community organisations in the locality. These networks are generated in part by other organisational connections held by the staff. "With 100 plus volunteers, each one of them is involved in at least one other organisation, so if something happens they're on to us..." (Liffey Sound manager). As a presenter on Life FM puts it "The big benefit is that it's something positive for the groups, they have something they know they can access and build relationships and we're not going to knock a community group... Community groups have taken time to build their reputation down through the years and media bias can have done damage, but now it's spreading that we're not out to get anything from them, to do them down, but to channel their information to the people living next door to them... A lot of community groups are connected to one another so we're becoming part of the network, but we're the new group coming in to established networks... People have come back to say that they're pleased with the interviews that there was nothing to throw people off... They're out there actively trying to do something... If we can give them a hand we can benefit the community..." (Life FM staff). The stations' interactions with community groups also mean that the broadcasts help to connect community groups to their client base through the radio station. "We help with access for them, to get their message out, that groups are in the community and can help. It's hard for groups to do that through the commercial stations. If community groups are doing something that will really help people, the commercials might not fit them in, but we build up relationships with these people and I get a sense they appreciate the connection to us because we become a connection to their

*communities"* (Life FM manager). A key informant sees community radio serving to bring community activists and groups together *"I think another social benefit that community media can do is bringing all these activists together, sharing their experiences and information and building it. It's a synergy of information that's there. And this again is an entirely different form of media. This isn't just about somebody sitting with, I'm the presenter, I'm going to ask you questions, you sit there now and I'll ask you the questions. It will be an entirely different form of media where it's really about information sharing. And communities becoming more active and involved in social change. And I think ultimately that's the sort of social benefit that community radio can deliver for its community"*. In a number of ways community radio provides a social benefit to communities by constituting a media space within which communities can publicise issues, agencies and events that are of importance to them, as well as sharing ideas, plans and thoughts on air. Typically this publicity function operates through a variety of mechanisms, for instance the stations researched were all proactive in engaging with community groups in their areas. They frequently made very intentional efforts to move outside the physical confines of their studios in order to interact with communities at particular events. They were open to promoting community events on air, and they were conscious of creating connections for networks of community groups to engage with each other as well as to connect to their client base through the medium of radio.

In summary, the social benefits recognised by the community radio stations reviewed, ranged from stations' capacities to create a sense of belonging within the wider community as well as internally within stations, to providing a localised information service, to fulfilling a training remit, to providing a publicity service for local community groups. In these ways community radio generates social benefits that contribute significantly toward community building and stations articulated a thorough understanding of the contribution that they made in this regard. However, if we return to the broad literature on community radio, we find a broader vision of the potential capacities of community radio and the social benefits that accrue to the movement. Community radio literature details that, through processes of increasing participation and plurality of involvement amongst communities, further social benefits can be derived from the philosophy and practice of community radio. Moreover, the literature on community radio details how the endeavour can be used to progress community development and social change. It is to an exploration of these latter themes and issues that the following chapters are directed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: PLURALITY AND DIVERSITY IN OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, OPERATION AND BROADCASTING**

As we have seen in Chapter One, and as identified within the AMARC Charter, issues of access and participation lie at the heart of community media ethos and practice. Not alone does community radio provide a news and information service relevant to the needs of the local community, it provides a service which is owned and controlled by this community, with content and production determined by the community itself. These issues have been comprehensively theorised by Rosemary Day who, drawing in particular on the work of McCain and Lowe (1990), puts forward a framework of access and participation in the specific context of Irish community radio which proves extremely useful in facilitating our analysis of the plurality and diversity in community participation within the four stations examined in this study.

#### **4.1 Plurality and Diversity in Participation: A Framework of Analysis**

Day's framework is made up of 7 cumulative levels, with each level encompassing those lying below. Following Day's framework, levels 1-4 can be provided by all types of mass-media whilst levels 5-7, offering opportunities to communities to become involved at increasing levels of operation, planning and ownership, may only be provided by community media alone. Our aim in using this framework in our examination of the four stations participating in this study is not to assign levels, or values to the stations, as per the framework. Clearly different stations sit at different levels at different points in time in relation to different aspects of their work. Rather, we feel that the framework is a useful aid in unpacking the different aspects and degrees of participation (which necessarily vary with circumstance) over time. Day's framework is set out in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1: Framework for Participation in Mass Media (adapted from Day, 2009: 126)**

Level	New Categorisation	Type	Example	Provided by
1	Reactive Access	Responding to content broadcast	Phone (off-air), fax, letter, email, text	C, PS, CM
2	Controlled Access	Speaking on air	Phone-in, talkback radio	C, PS, CM
3	Controlled participation	Presenting programmes with professional producers	Guest spots, some documentary programmes	C, PS, CM
4	Mediated Participation	Producing and presenting programmes	Access radio, open channel	C, PS, CM
5	Participation	Schedule, programme planning, autonomous production after training by the station, open to all members of the community	Access channels, community radio	CM
6	Self-management	Management and decision-making open to community, unmediated by outside groups	Community radio	CM
7	Full and active participation	Full ownership by community	Community radio	CM

C = Commercial media  
 PS = Public service media  
 CM = Community media

## **Levels 1-4: Mediated participation, controlled participation, controlled access, reactive access**

Following the framework, the first four levels provide for participation and access in ways offered by other forms of media also and therefore replicate the opportunities available elsewhere rather than the more democratic opportunities for diversity and plurality in participation afforded through the distinct media space of community radio. Many of these forms of participation are offered by the four stations. In most cases they complement the 'higher level' forms of participation also offered by these stations as discussed below. It is important to emphasise however, that these lower levels, for the most part, do not offer anything new in a media sphere dominated by commercial and, to a lesser extent, public broadcast media.

**Reactive access** is essentially audience feedback to the content provided by particular shows. While all four stations receive regular feedback from listeners (the vast majority of it positive, they report), all regard this as just feedback, and make no claims for participation from this form of access, in any substantive sense of the term.

**Controlled Access** constitutes a level of access that is quite tightly mediated and controlled, generally through the form of 'phone-ins'. Again, this is a format employed by all four stations (although Tipperary MW does not permit 'live' phone-ins for reasons of liability). While, within the wider media literature, such formats are often hailed as providing widespread democratic access to the airwaves (RTE Radio 1's 'Liveline' or 'Talk to Joe' as it is colloquially known being the classic example), as Day (2009: 138-9) notes, there is now substantial evidence arguing that such formats disempower rather than empower callers as their inputs are constrained and ultimately overpowered by the authority (and sometimes the ideology) of the presenter. That said, for stations experiencing difficulties in attracting volunteers (3 out of the 4 note that they do have difficulties in this regard, most particularly with respect to talk shows), staff note that putting a caller on air can represent the first step in enticing them into the studio and ultimately on to planning, producing and presenting their own show as volunteers within the station.

**Controlled participation** is where members of the public are invited to present spots on shows which are produced by station staff. This generally entails interviews with select experts or commentators in particular areas and is a common format within commercial media. While it does provide access to key groups and interests, it still falls short of the remit of community broadcasting in that tight control through the selection, production and broadcast processes by the station itself does not provide open access for all.

This is, again, a format regularly employed by all four stations examined in this study, most particularly on talk shows which are often produced and presented by station staff. Interviewees note that this type of programming is generally popular with listeners and such programming, with guests from local community development agencies, social services etc, often mentioned in response to questions regarding the social benefits offered by stations (see Chapter 3). Again, it is important to reiterate that, while important in providing a voice to key interest or community groups (see also the following Chapter), such participation again falls short of the ideals of community radio in that the plurality and diversity of these voices is mediated and controlled.

**Mediated participation** involves members of the public producing and presenting their own programmes on a channel owned and controlled by others. These opportunities are generally provided by public access media (such as public access cable television in the US). Participants are empowered through their involvement and the possibilities of airing issues of importance to themselves and/or their communities. However, they do not have involvement in either the ownership or decision-making within the stations / networks concerned.

While, in theory, this situation does not apply to community radio stations where shared ownership and access to decision-making is the overriding ethos, in practice, this can certainly be the case in stations where practitioners (volunteers) come in, present their shows, and then leave again with little or no interaction with others in the station. A number of volunteers interviewed from Ros FM noted that this was indeed what happened in their case. This is largely due to their own limitations in time rather than any shortcomings on the part of the respective stations however. In contrast, volunteers in Liffey Sound, Life FM and Tipperary MW spoke very much of the stations being theirs, with volunteers tending to hang around talking radio business in general with other practitioners and the manager both before and after their own scheduled slots.

## **Level 5: Participation**

Level 5 of the framework opens up participation within community radio to members of the community. Programme planning, production and broadcasting form the most basic level within self-management and

operation. This is the stage which most fundamentally differentiates community media from other forms, with the audience becoming broadcasters in their own right and exercising their right to communicate as laid down under the first objective of the AMARC Charter (see Appendix A).

Each of the four stations relies heavily on volunteers drawn from the community to plan, prepare, produce and present their own programmes. The extent of this reliance varies from station to station. Liffey Sound, on air from 5pm to midnight, Monday to Friday, and 8am to midnight Saturday and Sunday, depends exclusively on volunteers for its programming. Both Life FM and Tipperary MW broadcast 24 hours a day. Life FM is live from 7am to mid-night, while Tipperary MW is live from 8am to midnight, and both stations broadcast repeat programming overnight. In Tipperary MW, staff produce and present the majority of shows up to 6pm with volunteers presenting in the evening time while in Life FM, most of the programming is carried out by volunteers. Ros FM is on air from 2pm to 9pm with paid staff largely presenting during the afternoon and volunteers largely presenting in the evenings.

Volunteers within all stations receive skills training in the use of the specialist equipment together with mentoring to build confidence as required. Two of the staff members within Ros FM hold FETAC certificates in adult education and have conducted training programmes with volunteers. Much of the training in all stations is on a less formal, one-to-one basis however. This enables stations to tailor their training to the specific needs of participants and encourage people to get on air as soon as possible.

Since 2002, the network of Irish community radio stations, CRAOL, has offered training opportunities to its members, most notably a Train the Trainer course. These training opportunities have been availed of by members in both Liffey Sound and Ros FM (although the former now has in-house trainers drawn from volunteers who work as trainers in their own professional employment). A member of Life FM has also participated in this course. Tipperary MW organises its own in-house training for all staff and volunteers once a year, contracting a media specialist to conduct the training.

The issue of training is important in relation to the dissemination and continued reproduction of the ethos and values of community radio. This is discussed in further detail in Section 4.3 below.

## **Level 6: Self-management**

Level 6 of the framework requires involvement at the level of self-management whereby members of the community have a direct input into management practice and the decision-making process. In practice, the cooperative ownership structures (with shares made available either free or at nominal fees), share owners, or 'members' as they are known, feel the station belongs to them (as it does) and operate accordingly, making use of the services and opportunities it provides within their communities. Legally and financially however, responsibility lies with the boards of management of the respective stations, with station managers accountable to these boards. Therefore, while large sections of the local community may lay claim to ownership of their station, the key decision-making in this regard, and thus the power to influence the direction, development and ultimate sustainability of the station, rests with a smaller grouping.

Plurality and diversity in participation at this key level therefore depends not only on the constitution of respective boards, but also on their degree of responsiveness to the wider membership, together with the management styles employed within stations. Each of the four stations examined has a board of management, elected by the membership, to which the station manager is accountable. In all cases, a series of different sub-committees also operate, some on an ongoing basis (e.g. fundraising committees, programme committees) and some for a shorter period as the need arises (e.g. to plan for specific events). Representatives of both staff and volunteers comprise members of the boards in all stations. In three of the stations (Liffey Sound, Life FM and Tipperary MW), volunteers report regular contact with a number board members with members regularly coming in and out of the station and chatting informally with them. In Tipperary MW, 12 out of the 20 member board (10 volunteers and 2 staff) present their own programmes. Members of the board also present their own programmes in both Liffey Sound and Life FM and so maintain close contact with other practitioners and are familiar with the day-to-day running of the stations. A volunteer in Liffey Sound explains how this works in her station, "*It's a very fluid organisation. The board members have their own shows*".

The station managers of both Ros FM and Tipperary MW are full-time, paid employees while the managers of both Liffey Sound and Life FM work fulltime in a voluntary capacity. Station managers' duties are manifold and include staff supervision (some staff are employed through publicly funded employment schemes), financial management, and management of the station overall. Station managers in all four stations have different backgrounds and this reflects differing management styles. The manager of Life FM has worked as both a builder and a mechanic in the past while the manager of Tipperary MW has a background in financial



administration and management and was recruited by the board following a difficult period of financial mismanagement within the station. A particularly constructive division of labour was noted within Tipperary MW where the manager focuses on financial and reporting requirements, whilst a longstanding staff member deals with much of the programming and production issues. Both the managers of Liffey Sound and Ros FM have backgrounds in commercial broadcasting. Reflecting perhaps the more hierarchical managerial ethos of commercial stations, both the manager and the staff representative on the board in Ros FM noted some small tensions between staff representation on the board and the role of staff within the station on a day-to-day basis. Overall, however, in all stations, the clear lines of management and responsibility, necessary for the efficient running of the stations, do not appear inimical to the community radio ethos of working cooperatively and democratically. Regular staff meetings, together with more informal chats and the overall approachability of all managers, means that staff feel they have a voice in major issues affecting the station. It is pertinent to note, in this context, Day's (2009: 137) finding from her comprehensive study of six different Irish radio stations that "*Stations that employ a participative approach to management, where decisions are arrived at collectively and by consensus, and management are conscious of the need to serve rather than command, are found to experience fewer management difficulties, than those who do not*".

## **Level 7: Full and active participation**

Following the framework, level 7, full ownership by the community, is the most complete form of participation. While the BAI requires only that "*ownership be representative of the community*" (BCI, 2001: 3), all four of the stations studied aim at full community ownership. This returns us to the question as to 'who is the community?' or indeed 'which community(ies)?' effectively own the stations. The four stations examined in this study employ one of three models of community ownership. Two of the stations, Liffey Sound and Tipperary MW, are owned by their respective communities through a cooperative structure, with shares available to all. In contrast, Life FM, a company limited by guarantee with no share capital, is owned and managed by individual and group members of Cork's Christian community, while Ros FM is owned and managed through a partnership of a range of different agencies working within the local community. These contrasting structures reflect the different origins of the four stations, with Tipperary MW beginning life as a pirate station run by local community activists, and both Life FM and Liffey Sound emerging also as projects of local community activists. Life FM, as a community of interest station, draws on its membership from the broad Christian community including church groups, while Liffey Sound draws its membership from geographically defined community around the West Dublin area. Ros FM originated as a project of the local Partnership company targeting people with intellectual and physical disability and its membership draws from the range of voluntary and community agencies and groups in the area.

While the former membership structures potentially allow for greater levels of community participation through their direct forms of ownership, affording this opportunity on its own does not, of course, guarantee full awareness or uptake of this within the community. This is dependent on the level of publicity and awareness of the stations within their respective communities. Of the four, Tipperary MW appears the most well-known, undoubtedly due to its longstanding record and loyal listenership (broadcasting under a range of different licenses since the 1980s). In contrast, practitioners within both Life FM and Liffey Sound report that a big challenge is getting people to become aware of the station while community agencies engaged with Ros FM report the same issue in relation to this station. The lower level of awareness of these stations (in comparison to Tipperary MW) appears due to the combination of age (both are relatively 'new' stations with Liffey Sound broadcasting since 2006 and Life FM since 2008) and the broad range of other stations in the respective broadcast areas.

This section has examined the plurality and diversity of participation within the four stations employing a framework devised by Day (2009). Again, it is important to emphasise that the aim was not to evaluate stations against particular levels on the framework. Rather, it was to use the framework to assist in unpacking the different issues in relation to plurality and diversity in participation, from being afforded a voice on air in different formats through to being afforded a voice in relation to the direction and development of the station itself. While this section has focused on the opportunities afforded for participation at all levels generally, the following section will now look in more detail at the plurality and diversity of participants / practitioners themselves through an examination of who is involved in each of the four stations.

## **4.2 Communities within Community Radio: Who is Involved?**

As we have seen in Chapter 2, community radio constitutes a distinct space within the largely commercialised media sphere in that it provides communities with the opportunities, skills and tools to exercise their right to

communicate, not just on the public airways, but also in key decisions affecting the ethos, direction and development of their stations. Having examined these different levels in the previous section, this section turns to the related questions of who is involved, and how. These questions are examined in three different ways. First, the numbers of people involved in each station are explored. Second, we look at their roles within the stations. While discussions on participation within community radio often focus on the voices on air, participants within each station highlighted a range of ways in which people are involved, leading, to varying degrees, to their feelings of joint ownership and stewardship of the stations. Third, we look at the profile of people involved. Again, this necessarily varies from station to station in line with the different 'communities' targeted by the stations. In all cases, without exception however, we find an openness to engage with a diversity of groups in efforts to represent the ever-changing diversity within each station's transmission area.

## Numbers of people involved

In all of the stations examined, there appears to be no upper limit on the numbers of people involved on either a weekly or an ongoing basis. While clearly both office and studio space together with the number of hours broadcast time each day / week impose practical limits to the numbers of people in the stations at any given time, all stations report a high level of involvement from community members in a voluntary capacity, together with a core team of dedicated paid staff in Life FM, Ros FM and Tipperary MW.

Life FM, on air since March 2008, reports it has between 60 and 80 volunteers. Approximately 35 of these broadcast on a weekly basis while others are involved in a range of other activities. Liffey Sound, on air since 2006, has over 150 volunteers involved, with 72 broadcasting on a weekly basis. Ros FM, on air since 2006, also reports over 100 volunteers being involved, with 17-18 of these broadcasting weekly, while Tipperary MW, on air as a pirate station in the early 1980s, operating from 1990 under a commercial license, and being awarded its community licence in 2004, also has over 100 volunteers with 51 broadcasting weekly. While all stations report a turnover of volunteers in relation to production and presenting, with people's lives sometimes becoming too busy to make the regular commitment required or with people moving on in other ways with their lives, all stations report that people tend to stay involved and there is always a large pool of people to turn to when assistance or involvement is needed.

## Plurality of roles, plurality of participation

While, given the popular ethos of community radio, there is a tendency to focus on people's involvement in terms of presentation and broadcasting, practitioners in all four stations emphasise the variety of ways in which people can become, and are involved. Among the most common forms of involvement are membership of the board; involvement in programme production and presentation; involvement at the administrative and/or research end of the station's work – answering the phone, carrying out some of the administration, updating the website, carrying out pieces of research for producers of various programmes; and fundraising.

The boards of management of each of the four stations are largely made up of people working in a voluntary capacity – although in some cases, most notably on the board of Ros FM, a station originating as a project of the local Partnership company, their areas of paid work within the community align with the ethos and interests of the station. In line with their contractual agreement with the BAI, the boards of all stations meet six times a year. However, boards of all stations contain sub-committees which meet on a more regular basis as required. As noted in the previous section, ultimate responsibility and accountability (to both the community they represent and to funders) rests with the board and the high level of voluntary participation within this reflects the true nature of community ownership which sets community radio apart from other public and commercial broadcasters.

The numbers of people broadcasting is largely dictated by the number of hours each day or week each station is on air. And so, Tipperary MW, on air 24 hours a day, has a higher number of volunteers broadcasting than the other stations. Nonetheless, Tipperary MW reports having, on occasion, more people interested in broadcasting than the station can accommodate, and has had to ask people to wait until a slot becomes available on a few occasions. In contrast, the three other stations report that they find it difficult to entice people to come on air for a regular weekly slot. Partly this seems due to the demands on people's time, and

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*It should be noted that this is the view of the authors. In response to this, Tipperary MW's manager argues that "this in no way limits access from the community we serve so well. For example, we provide free advertising to charity groups, also to commercial enterprises that run community or charitable events. Events are advertised and charged when it is for profit, but if that event were for a charity, then the advertising would be free."*

partly people's own qualms about going out live to their community on air. In Ros FM, the station manager notes that while there are many participants keen to produce and present music programmes, it proves much more difficult to attract participants to talk shows.

The amount of time, energy and commitment required in attracting, developing and maintaining broadcasters working in a voluntary capacity cannot be overstated. Most particularly, individuals or groups from more marginalised communities, require intensive support and encouragement. This raises a significant issue in relation to how staff and volunteer time is divided and some differences are apparent between stations in this regard. As we have seen in Chapter 3, one of the key benefits cited by many involved in community radio is the core skills and experience acquired in broadcasting which stand to many practitioners as they move on in their careers. The staff interviewed in two of the three stations with paid staff (Ros FM and Tipperary MW) spend the majority of their time preparing and presenting their own programmes. While all have provided, at different stages, one-on-one training to volunteer broadcasters, with some, notably in Ros FM, offering a considerable degree of support to disabled volunteers in researching, producing and presenting their own programmes, a core challenge for stations is to find the time and manpower to support the inclusion of more disadvantaged groups and people in broadcasting. In contrast to this, staff within Life FM focus less on programme production and more on the training and management of volunteers. The aspirations and expectations of staff in each station are key in this regard. A key question in sourcing suitable staff, and indeed long term volunteers, is the principal role they are expected to carry out. Within all three of the four stations examined (Liffey Sound, Ros FM, Tipperary MW), a number of staff and volunteers were recruited for their skills, aptitude and/or experience in broadcasting. Many interviewed acknowledged that their interests lay in broadcasting and that the experience acquired in their community stations provided them with valuable 'air time' necessary to pursue careers thereafter in the public or commercial sector. While, most notably in stations experiencing difficulties in attracting voluntary broadcasters, the attraction of staff with broadcasting expertise is undoubtedly a plus, allowing stations to broadcast quality programming at times when volunteers may be busy in their 'day jobs', a question which perhaps merits further reflection is how much of staff time should be spent focusing on supporting and training other voluntary members of the community to produce and broadcast their own programmes and how much should be spent producing and broadcasting their own shows. In this regard, we note that the BAI (formerly BCI) recommends that a full-time paid manager possess a mix of management, media and community development experience but does not address the issue of the division of other staff time.

*The Irish experience has indicated that two full-time paid staff is desirable if a community station is to achieve its full potential. However, the Commission recognises that in the current funding environment, stations are unlikely to be able to employ more than one full-time person in the foreseeable future. The Irish experience has also indicated that this person should ideally have management skills plus some previous media and community development experience.*

(BCI, n.d 6) BCI Policy on Community Radio Broadcasting

In all stations, but particularly those with predominantly a voluntary staff (Liffey Sound), this question is particularly pertinent. The majority of paid staff and a number of volunteers (broadcasters) interviewed within Liffey Sound, Ros FM and Tipperary MW noted that their interest lay in broadcasting. A number of paid staff and volunteers in these three stations revealed that, while they were content with the broadcasting experience acquired during their time with their respective stations, their broader aspirations lay elsewhere. The principal reason for this was their specialism and interest in broadcasting and the more attractive salaries offered by public and commercial outlets. This poses a real dilemma for community radio stations. If the carrots are the broadcasting skills, experience and airtime, how long before people are attracted to greener pastures? If, on the other hand, the carrots are facilitating people, in particular those more marginalised within society, in having a voice within the public sphere, are the salaries and prospects proffered equal to the task? In reality, all stations appear to have an amalgam of both. There is a need for greater reflection perhaps among station communities on the most appropriate and suitable mix of staff profiles to maximise the development and consolidation of the ethos and aims of their stations.

An important area of community involvement in a voluntary capacity, and one often overlooked, is what we may loosely (and somewhat inadequately) call the area of administration. This involves a wide range of activities, from answering telephones, to carrying out basic but essential administrative tasks, to updating websites, to carrying out basic research for programming such as checking the death notices or local newspapers

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<sup>5</sup>Pobal is a not for profit company with charitable status that manages programmes on behalf of the Irish government and the EU. Pobal was formerly known as ADM – Area Development Management.

for news of events and relevant items. While the task of answering the telephone might seem a very simple job, interviewees in both Life FM and Tipperary MW noted that this was possibly one of the most important services carried out by the station with respect to some of the people calling in two principal ways. First, this is often the first stop for people requiring information and services – station personnel on the telephone can and do refer them to the appropriate service or information point in relation to their query. And second, most notably in Tipperary MW, people often call simply for a chat. Station staff and volunteers note that the person on the telephone may be the only person callers, who may be elderly or housebound, may talk to that day. This point was also underscored by Mary Ruddy in interview, ex-manager of Connemara Community Radio, who cites this service as one of the most crucial provided by community radio in isolated rural areas. The answering of phones therefore, can be one of the more important tasks carried out by community stations, and certainly, at times, far more than just a straightforward administrative job.

In addition to this task, stations visited had volunteers busy carrying out other administrative duties and research. While many of these volunteers are enticed by broadcasters to come on air (initially perhaps simply to announce an event or answer a brainteaser, but ultimately, with much encouragement, ending up producing and presenting their own show), some interviewed noted that they prefer to remain 'out of the limelight', keen to support the station however they can, but not on air. The fact that all stations are willing, and keen, to accommodate such diverse ambitions and wishes is testament to their level of inclusiveness.

An area again often overlooked, but one essential to the ongoing sustainability and development of the stations, is the involvement of community members in fundraising events. Having to raise a significant percentage of their own funds themselves (greater than 50 per cent in the cases of Life FM, Liffey Sound and Tipperary MW), fundraising is an essential component of all stations. Public events such as table quizzes, concerts etc... are organised by subcommittees of people drawn from the local community. These groups constitute the wider grouping of volunteers which stations draw on for these and other occasions. As well as the community becoming involved in organising the events, all four stations report that these events are extremely well supported by the wider community, either through participation in the events themselves, or by contributing prizes for raffles, a venue for the evening, entertainment for the evening etc... Talking about a recent event held in Tipperary town, Tipperary MW staff and volunteers noted that a number of people who could not attend the event on the night nonetheless purchased tickets, with some contributing more than the price of the ticket as a way of supporting the station. While clearly the financial dimension of these events is important to the sustainability and development of the respective stations, they also provide a way of involving wider members of the community in its development, enhancing local ownership over it. In this regard, the issue of advertising is somewhat contentious within the community radio movement more broadly. While some activists, such as those from Near FM, argue against advertising as they feel it undermines the non-commercial ethos of the station (Near FM does not run any paid advertisements on air although, according to the ex-chair, the issue is regularly raised for debate and review among staff and volunteers in the station), under the terms of their licensing agreements with the BAI all community stations are permitted 6 minutes advertising per hour of broadcasting, with a 50/50 ratio to be maintained between advertising and funding from other sources. While Liffey Sound, Life FM and Ros FM draw in a negligible level of funds through advertising (see Table 2.1 in Chapter 2), Tipperary MW draws a substantial portion of its funding (50 percent) from advertising, with this spread across a wide range of small advertisers. One of the staff in the station, as well as broadcasting a 2 hour daily daytime talk show, is also the advertising officer for the station. The station manager's view on the subject is unequivocal, "*here in Tipperary we're used to paying our own way in as far as possible. You get nothing for nothing, somebody has to pay*". While clearly no community station can exist without external support, through state employment schemes for staff and support for specific programming such that afforded under the BAI 'Sound and Vision' scheme for example, there is something of a contradiction between local ownership – bolstered through community support in the form of advertising by local businesses and enterprises as well as local fundraising – and dependence on external sources. While increasing the spaces and scope for local advertising certainly risks driving community stations down a more commercial route, with air time no longer freely accessible to all but rather selectively apportioned to particular sections of the community<sup>4</sup>, the contrasting positions of Near FM and Tipperary MW on this issue do raise pertinent issues for reflection in relation to the complex and somewhat contradictory issues of funding and local ownership.

In this section we have examined some of the principal roles available to participants within the four stations. While participation within community radio is often discussed in broadcasting terms solely, all four stations involve community members in a variety of ways drawing on wide pools of expertise, interest and goodwill. With a wide range of options for involvement, a greater diversity of people can be attracted and involved. The following section turns to the concrete question of who these people are.

## Plurality and participation: Who is involved?

Each of the four stations tries to accommodate a wide range of people from within and around their transmission area. One of the stations (Life FM) falls under the BAI category accommodating 'communities of interest', while the other three stations cater to their overall community more widely (although Ros FM has a disability ethos built into its mission). Life FM is a Christian station with a message of hope which it aims to bring to all the people of Cork. While this 'community of interest' constitutes a specific cross-section of the wider community, with specific efforts made to include people from this community in producing and broadcasting programming, Life FM nonetheless also involves wider sections of the community and makes a particular effort made to involve more marginalised people within the community. Ros FM, established as a pilot project through a Roscommon Partnership supported programme (funded through the European EQUAL programme) to support people with disability, caters in particular to people with intellectual and physical disabilities, as well as to its wider community. A wide diversity from across the community is involved in Liffey Sound while Tipperary MW tends to involve and cater to an older age group, defined by station practitioners as 'in their 40s upwards', although there are exceptions to this, with youth in particular being involved also.

Practitioners within all four stations report a good gender mix among people involved in their stations. In all four stations, female voices are very much in evidence on-air although, as in other areas of community and political life, it can, at times, be difficult to attract women onto working committees or onto the board. This reflects gendered structures and pressures in society more broadly however, and cannot be interpreted as a reflection on the stations themselves, all of which appear to actively encourage a gender balance at all levels of operation and management.

Following on evidence more broadly in relation to gender equity in the workplace (see for example Shapiro and Olgiati, 2002), it is likely that stations with female managers and staff will have less difficulties in attaining a gender balance. Tipperary MW is managed by a woman and the most longstanding staff member is also female. Whilst the station is clearly run in a very professional and competent manner, a strongly co-operative ethos was also noted within the station. The longstanding staff member is reported as having a extremely high level of success in attracting a wide variety of 'ordinary' people onto her extremely popular Cuardaigh programme – a mix of music and chat based on the old tradition of 'visiting' neighbours in the evenings – *"they don't feel under pressure, that's the magic of it. They don't even think of microphones, it's sitting by the fire at home"*.

All stations reported some difficulties in ensuring that a good mix and range of age groups are represented and involved on an ongoing basis. In particular, stations have difficulties in involving and retaining young people. All stations have made specific efforts to involve young people however. Of these, Ros FM, appears to have had particular success, most notably through its work the Leos (the junior version of the local Lions Club), members of whom produced and presented a popular programme on the issue of mental health, entitled Radio for You, last summer. The station also produces a show which goes out into the schools to bring children on air – *'Playground'*. A number of young people also produce and present music shows on the station, as they do in Life FM and Liffey Sound.

Tipperary MW caters principally, through its programming and scheduling, to an older audience. There is a strong traditional ethos to the station, with a keen interest in local history and traditions among broadcasters and listeners alike, the music choice (principally traditional Irish and country and western) appeals to an older group, mass is broadcast each week from the local church catering to those who cannot get out to church, and the obituaries are noted (by all age groups interviewed) as being extremely popular and useful. Despite this conscious slant to its programming, the station involves young people on a regular basis in activities within the station. A nineteen year old, doing her first work experience placement on the telephone on the day one of the researchers visited the station, had just been on air for the first time and has decided to come back after her placement to work in the station as a volunteer. Two transition year students also dropped by on the same day to organise to volunteer for a period also. The station recently carried out a drama project with a local youth group in the town and the resultant play was recently broadcast.

Two of the four stations (Ros FM and Tipperary MW) have staff supported through either the Fás Community Employment Scheme and Pobal's Community Services Programme<sup>5</sup>, both of which target unemployed people, assisting them in returning to full-time work by providing 20 hours a week employment and some training. Life FM, while funding these posts from its membership and support from its community of inter-

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<sup>6</sup>Ros FM is currently moving to a new premises located on the outskirts of town on one of the main roads. Plans are in place to increase signage to and for the station and it is generally felt that this move (which will also, importantly, make the studio fully wheelchair accessible) will greatly enhance local awareness of, and hopefully, participation in the station.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.craol.ie/cms/publish/CRfaqs.shtml>.

est, also targets the marginalised and unemployed with, inter alia, an internship programme for early school leavers. In this manner, these three stations provide training, confidence, new skills and expertise to their staff. While the manager of Ros FM notes that the station targets long-term unemployed in this context, providing a valuable service in training them to move on in society, Tipperary MW appears to view the scheme more as simply a funding scheme for posts, a number of which are held by longer term staff. There does not appear to be any broader, concerted strategy within any of the four stations to specifically involve people who are long-term unemployed within the stations.

While the transmission area for Tipperary MW (with the possible exception of Cashel town) remains largely unchanged in the make-up of its community over the last decade, the transmission areas for the other three stations have changed somewhat significantly. All three stations are cognisant of the growth of 'new communities' of political refugees and migrant workers within their communities and two in particular have been proactive in drawing in these communities and representing some of the issues they face. Roscommon town is now home to a large Brazilian population and, for the last number of years, a group of Brazilians have come into Ros FM's studio on a weekly basis to produce and broadcast a popular evening music programme in English and Portuguese entitled *Brazilian Beat*. One hour a week Ros FM also invites members of other ethnic minority groups to broadcast a music and chat show in a slot called *Global Affairs*. Life FM has highlighted the issue of racism and sought to promote integration and mutual understanding through a series of popular programmes including *Different Lives* and *Across the Street around the World* as well as a range of music programmes.

As noted previously, Ros FM is proactive in involving people with disability as well as highlighting the many specific issues they face in society. One of the staff employed in the station for a number of years is blind and a number of other staff and volunteers in the station discussed how working with and becoming friends with him has taught them a lot about the world(s) of the visually impaired and radically altered their preconceptions and perceptions of disability / ability. A group of disabled people from the Brothers of Charity association also produce and present their own show. The intensive support and work of one of the station's staff members with this group was noted. The group now produce and present the show (which initially featured issues relating to disability but, on the decision of the group, is now principally a music show) more or less on their own. Through the Brothers of Charity, a number of disabled people visit the studio on a regular basis and sit in on broadcasts.

There are, of course, many other categories of people, or communities – many marginalised within society, which are also involved in and/or catered to by the four stations. Some of these targeted, in different measures by different stations, include those who are housebound and physically isolated (Tipperary MW in particular), those who are socially isolated and may experience periods of loneliness (Life FM and Tipperary MW in particular), and those who may be experiencing stress, depression or mental health issues (Life FM and Ros FM in particular). On a more positive note, all four stations also cater in particular to, and provide a platform for local music and musicians.

### 4.3 Enablers and Constraints to Plurality and Diversity in Participation

It has hopefully become apparent at this point that plurality and diversity in participation is not something that happens within stations all on its own. As with so many other social institutions, without proactive strategies and actions to attract a diversity of individuals and groups to become involved in the stations, community radio will end up being a medium dominated by the more powerful and articulate communities within the broader communities they purport to serve. All four stations have demonstrated a high degree of proactivity in relation to building and maintaining the diversity and plurality in participation within their stations outlined in the previous two sections. This section highlights a number of these strategies – some conscious, some simply engrained in the ethos of the stations and carried out in a more sub-conscious manner, discussing their effectiveness in enabling or constraining plurality and diversity in participation.

**Word of mouth:** Staff and volunteers in all stations were unanimous that one of the most effectiveness means of encouraging people to become involved in the station is by word of mouth. A number of volunteers interviewed noted that they had first heard about and become involved with the stations through either friends or family. While this proves a highly effective strategy in attracting and maintaining participation within the station, it can also run the danger of ending up a relatively 'closed circle' or participants, again mitigating against the broad-based participation that stations espouse. Another strategy used by a number of stations is to invite people in for interview, then encourage them to stay around, chat with people and become more deeply involved. In Tipperary MW, one of the staff outlines how he often invites volunteers just beginning with the station (or people who have just called in for a chat) on air for a couple of minutes

to read out a daily 'brainteaser' (a riddle which people phone in to respond to), a few days later he may ask them a couple of questions to start them chatting on air, and from there gradually builds their confidence to a point where they may begin to consider broadcasting their own show. "... we'll bring her in and she'll pick the brainteaser winner. So we'll have a bit of chit chat on air. It's usually the first time they've been on air. They're usually very nervous the first day but then as it goes on they're fine...". In Liffey Sound a Board member who broadcasts himself describes a similar strategy "We had a guy on our board, and he'd get stuck in organising raffles but no way would he go on air... one evening I was stuck... he knew a lot about GAA.... So I threw a few questions at him and now I can't get him out of the chair. He does 2 programmes here... he's totally addicted."

**Relaxed, friendly, non confrontational atmosphere:** The atmosphere in all community stations is noticeably warm, welcoming, relaxed and friendly. Practitioners broadcasting for the first time with their community stations noted that this relaxed atmosphere, which some had encountered initially through either being interviewed in a non-confrontational manner or through working in the station office, was one of the key factors in attracting them to the station and putting them at ease when on air. There is a distinct effort made to put people at ease and volunteers and staff alike stress how important it is not to 'put people on the spot' or challenge them in any way that might show them up on air. Practitioners who had worked previously within public and commercial sectors noted that this was one of the key factors which maintained their interest, enthusiasm and involvement in the station. All interviewees with previous experience in other media sectors were keen to point out the significant difference in approach and ethos of community radio which, while putting people at ease and nurturing broad based participation, still manages to produce high quality broadcasts. As a volunteer from Life FM notes "No-one else is really doing it the way we are. They probably go for topics but a lot of it is fighting on air. For us a lot is understanding where people are coming from, not saying you're wrong or you're right, but understanding topics". The key is a respect for colleagues and listeners alike with an emphasis placed on equality across the community, exemplified on air by, in the word of a voluntary broadcaster from Life FM "*not being above them [guests and listeners], not talking down to them*".

**Promotion / advertising:** Liffey Sound, Life FM and Ros FM have placed advertisements in the local press (and, in some instances, through poster campaigns) in an effort to attract participants to the station. As noted heretofore, Tipperary MW, in existence, in one form or another, for a much longer period, at times has more participants than it can accommodate and does not find a need to advertise for involvement. Again, staff and volunteers within stations, though noting that these strategies have brought in some participants, feel that word of mouth remains the best way for attracting and certainly maintaining participation within the stations.

**Visibility within the community:** All four stations emphasised the importance of getting 'out and about' and being seen and becoming known within their community. The use of mobile units are key in this regard, bringing the station out into the community and getting diverse voices on air without their having to make the daunting step into the studio. While, again, Tipperary MW is well known already within its community, practitioners within both Life FM and Liffey Sound commented that they would like to get out into the communities much more. A number of people involved with Ros FM noted that awareness of the station within the community remains a real issue, in part due to the location of the office and studio (upstairs in a building relatively hidden among others)<sup>6</sup> and in part, due to a need to get out and about more. A key constraint in this regard is, of course, resources. With many community events happening at weekends, staff and volunteers in stations with restricted hours (e.g. Ros FM) must work additional hours to ensure coverage of, visibility at and involvement in local events.

**Social events / open days:** Both Ros FM and Tipperary MW hold open days within their station at least once a year. Liffey Sound holds sessions more often in the year for smaller groups of approximately 30 or so. Life FM also hold Christian concerts, coffee mornings and social events regularly during the year for smaller groups. Station participants report that these events are extremely popular with, in the case of the open days, people calling in and out of the stations all day. Children are shown how to use the equipment and many broadcast on air for their first time during this visit. As noted previously, all stations hold regular social fundraising events which, while raising funds for the stations, also help raise their profile within the communities.

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<sup>6</sup>RIDC is an amalgamation of the original Partnership company and two LEADER companies in the Roscommon / Leitrim area.

**Training provided:** A key attraction cited by many involved with all four community stations is the training provided ('free of charge' as many note) in the various technological aspects of broadcasting. This, together with the airtime provided, provides participants with valuable expertise and experience which, as we have noted heretofore, constitutes a significant benefit for many involved in community radio. The nature and focus of training provided by the stations can, in fact, prove both an enabler and a constraint to broad-based participation in a number of ways and this issue perhaps merits some further discussion.

A comprehensive training programme together with a package of associated supports is provided by the Community Radio Forum of Ireland (CRAOL). Discussions with both CRAOL's coordinator and Jack Byrne, ex-chair of NEAR FM and an ongoing contributor to CRAOL's work, highlight two principal dimensions to training for community radio practitioners and activists. The first emphasises the distinctive ethos and values of community radio. As CRAOL states<sup>7</sup>, "*The first thing to realise is that 'community radio' is more about 'Community' and less about 'radio.'*". The second dimension incorporates the more technical aspects of station management together with all aspects of programme production.

While training is provided to all volunteers in all four stations (although, with pressures on staff, in some cases volunteers report that, in their cases this has entailed a quick demonstration of equipment before or during the volunteer's first broadcast), this training provided within the stations appears to focus more on the technological dimensions to community broadcasting and less on the ethos and ideology. The result may be the tendency to view community radio as being the same as local commercial radio only for a smaller listenership disseminating local news as evidenced from a number of interviewees characterisations of community radio vis à vis other media – e.g. "*Community radio is for the community really... we support activities by community groups, we send people out to interview*" (Life FM staff); "*...With the commercial, it's mainly advertiser focused... with community radio you're focused on the audience at hand. Some of the bulletins would include local issues that wouldn't get onto a bulletin on local commercial stations, minor issues, council notices. It's more of an information point, a locally based information point.*" (Tipperary MW staff), rather than something more inclusive and empowering as espoused by more politically motivated activists. In practice, and very much in line with traditional, voluntaristic conceptions of community development as discussed in Chapter 5 below, community radio becomes a service more for the community than by the community with the emphasis lying more on the programming itself rather than the widening the diversity of programmers. Staff from Liffey Sound, Ros FM and Tipperary MW interviewed for this study broadcast daily and report that much of their time is spent preparing material for their programmes and broadcasting rather than working with volunteers per se. In contrast, two of the four staff in Life FM focus exclusively on work with volunteers.

Given the importance of disseminating and reproducing the distinctive ethos and contributions of community radio within the wider media sphere in Ireland, we would concur with Farren's analysis on the need for a wider ethos and format to staff and volunteer training within community radio stations.

*"...particular attention needs to be paid to the type of training delivered and the methodologies used to deliver it. As is the case in education, training can encourage mimicry. In the research findings, respondents favoured a conventional approach to training with a strong emphasis on studio production values. Community radio needs to think laterally around approaches to training which move beyond this format, if new formats are to flourish. The ethos of training in community radio should provide opportunities for practitioners and members of the community to develop their own voices and means of expression, even if these subvert conventional formats."*

(Farren, 2007: 71)

**The quality versus inclusion dilemma:** An associated, and certainly not readily resolvable question to that discussed above, is the issue of quality of output versus the capacities and approaches of broadcasters. This 'quality versus inclusion' or 'quality versus process' issue is generally not so polarised as this characterisation suggests but nonetheless remains an issue for stations aware of the commercial competition and keen to maintain a high level of professionalism. Thus whilst ardent community radio activists stress the 'right to communicate' for all, managers within the four stations interviewed were all aware of the dilemma this poses when faced with a volunteer whose style / tone / delivery may cause impatience and frustration among some listeners, or worse still, cause offence. While managers stress the importance of training and working with volunteers, and the high level of investment in this within the station, it has happened on rare occasions that they have had to refuse air time to some volunteers. As the manager of Ros FM explains "*...audiences are very sophisticated... they wouldn't be very forgiving... you're only as good as your last show and so you have to be consistent with your standards.*" The manager in Tipperary MW is quite emphatic about it "*If they're not good*



*enough, they won't go on. It's a decision unfortunately we have to make".* In a medium competing for listenership among an audience used to high standards (for what is the point in having the right to communicate if no one is out there listening?), there is clearly some tension between the right of all to communicate and the need to maintain consistent standards of production.

This is an area which has been examined in depth by Niamh Farren (2007). She observes that because community radio engages 'ordinary people' as broadcasters, less emphasis tends to be assigned to issues of quality, which, when combined with scarcity of resources, has resulted in community media being perceived as 'amateurish'. In work examining this issue more broadly, Carpentier et al. note that community media comes to be presented as "*unprofessional, inefficient, limited in their capacity to reach large audiences and as marginal as some of the societal groups to whom they try to give voice*"; (2003: 65). Van Vuuren (2006) argues that tensions over quality in community production is part of a valuable process of decision making and constructing democracy. Farren concludes that the debate on quality of production is an important one for Irish community broadcasters but emphasises that a quality framework should embody the ethos of community radio as well as production values (2007: 73). The extent to which this tension is managed in manner which upholds the central tent of community radio as embodied in the dictum of "the right to communicate" is largely dependent on the ethos and practice of "community building" of the respective stations, an issue to which we turn in some detail in the following Chapter.

This Chapter has focused on the plurality and diversity in participation within the four stations participating in this research. Employing the framework of participation developed by Day (2009), it has found that, to varying levels and at varying times, participation occurs at all levels of this framework. The distinction between forms of participation which mirror those offered by other media and those unique to community broadcasting has been highlighted. Having discussed the 'what' and 'how' of participation, the Chapter has then gone on to examine the 'who'. A wide variety of people from different 'communities' within the community have been identified as being involved in all four stations, with a particular focus on the inclusion (again at different levels of the participation framework) of those frequently marginalised from the commercial airwaves and consistently marginalised from society more broadly. The Chapter has finally turned to the 'how' of participation, examining the factors promoting or enabling widespread participation at a range of levels across all four stations. A range of strategies adopted by stations for increasing the participation of such groups has been identified and their effectiveness in enabling a substantive level of participation in line with the broader ethos and values of community radio discussed.

Many of these issues relate closely to the ethos and perspectives of practitioners within the four community stations as to what constitutes 'community building' and indeed, 'community development'. It is to this dimension of their work, and this broad social benefit to the community at large that we now turn.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### COMMUNITY RADIO AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: DRIVING CHANGE?

*The first thing to realise is that 'community radio' is more about 'Community' and less about 'radio.' Community radio stations that have proven successful, have often seen themselves primarily as community development resources, which happen to use radio as their tool. If your group has people with various community development experiences, this is more important than having radio DJ experience. Radio skills can be learned and the Craol network will assist with this, but to be a successful community radio service, you need to be based on the idea of community building and cultural and social development.*

Craol (2009)

The complex, dynamic and constructed nature of community (and communities) was discussed at some length in Chapter 1 where it was argued that communities represent constructed entities based on social relations and social organisation constituting "a state of mind, a disposition of involved neighbourliness" (O'Farrell, 1994: 17). As we noted in Chapter 1, at the core of this state of mind, these relations and the trust thereby engendered, is communication. Relationships cannot be fostered, trust cannot be built, and common identities cannot be forged in the absence of communication. Community radio, in opening up a space for this communication, therefore lies at the heart of community building. As we have seen in Chapter 3, each of the four stations recognise and emphasise the role of their stations in building and consolidating their respective communities.

In this respect, community radio shares many common traits with the ethos and practice of community development. Indeed, a survey commissioned by the Community Radio Forum in 2002 revealed many stations around the country to have links of varying degree with community development groups (Unique Perspectives, 2003). Within this study, Ros FM, initially a project of the local Partnership company, was characterised by an interviewee from the Roscommon Integrated Development Company (RIDC)<sup>8</sup> as a community development association in its own right. In this Chapter, we examine the linkages, in ethos and in practice, between the four community stations and community development projects, groups and associations within their area with a view to exploring the extent to which community stations may and do function as drivers of change within their respective communities.

#### 5.1 Community Development: Ethos and values

Community development essentially combines a set of values aimed at facilitating and empowering individuals and groups within communities to take control over their own development, building their communities in the process. Some definitions from a range of sources below highlight both community development's political and its socio-economic nature. Community development is variously described as...

*...a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation.*

UN (1955) after Gilchrist (2004: 123)

*Community development is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives.*

Standing Conference for Sustainable Development (2001)  
after Banks et al (2003: 12)

*A discourse of social action informed by communitarian values that aims to promote social inclusion and democratic participation.*

Powell and Geoghegan (2004: 19)

*Community work or community development involves an analysis of social and economic situations and collective action for change based on that*

*analysis. It is centred on a series of principles that seek to go beyond consultation to participation and beyond capacity building to consciousness raising and empowerment. It recognises the changing and often hidden nature of the structural inequalities based on 'race', class, gender and disability to name but a few. It seeks to be transformative rather than conforming and empowering rather than controlling.*

Community Workers Cooperative (nd: 10)

The theory and practice of community development is often associated with a set of principles and/or values. These are synthesised by Gilchrist (2004: 22) as follows:

**Table 5.1: Main values and commitments for community development**

Values	Commitments
Social justice – enabling people to claim their rights, meet their needs and have greater control over decision making processes that affect their lives	Challenging discrimination and oppressive practices within organisations, institutions and communities
Participation – facilitating democratic involvement by people in the issues that affect their lives based on full citizenship, autonomy and shared power, skills, knowledge and expertise	Developing policy and practice that protects the environment Encouraging networking and connections between communities and organisations
Equality – challenging the attitudes of individuals and the practice of institutions and society that discriminate against and marginalise people	Ensuring access and choice for all groups and individuals within society
Learning – recognising the skills, knowledge and expertise that people contribute and develop by taking action to tackle social, economic, political and environmental problems	Influencing policy and programmes from the perspective of communities Prioritising the issues of concern to people experiencing poverty and social exclusion
Cooperation – working together to identify and implement action based on mutual respect of diverse cultures and contributions Challenging discrimination and oppressive practices within organisations, institutions and communities	Promoting social change that is long-term and sustainable Reversing inequality and the imbalance of power relationships in society Supporting community-led collective action

after Gilchrist (2004: 22)

The key values and practices of community development as outlined by the Community Workers Cooperative (CWC) in Ireland bear very many similarities to those outlined above. For the CWC (nd, 22-29), community development encompasses five core principles as follows:

**1. Collective Action** ...working with and supporting groups of people. It enables them to develop knowledge, skills and confidence so that they can develop an analysis, identify priority needs and issues and address these through collective action.

**2. Empowerment** ...the empowerment of individuals and communities, and addressing the unequal distribution of power. It is about working with people to enable them to become critical, creative, liberated, and active participants, allowing and enabling them to take more control of the direction of their lives, their communities and their environment.

**3. Social Justice** ...based on a belief that every person and every community can play an

*active role in creating conditions for a just and equal society where human rights are promoted and all forms of oppression or discrimination are challenged.*

**4. Equality and Anti-discrimination...** *community workers must work from the starting point that while people are not the same, they are all of equal worth and importance and are therefore equally worthy of respect and acknowledgement. Community workers have a responsibility to challenge the oppression and exclusion of individuals and groups by institutions and society that leads to discrimination against people based on ability, age, culture, gender, marital status, socioeconomic status, nationality, skin colour, racial or ethnic group, sexual orientation, political or religious beliefs. It is particularly important that community workers acknowledge the particular and historical inequalities experienced by women in all cultures.*

**5. Participation** *...the involvement of groups who experience social exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination in decision-making, planning and action at different levels, from the local to the global. It can be viewed as a continuum of activity that can start from information sharing through capacity building and empowerment to active engagement and meaningful participation in democratic processes. It recognises that people have the right to participate in decisions and structures that affect their lives.*

While some of the specific commitments directly aimed at improving people's quality of life do not necessarily tally with those of community radio, values of social justice, participation, equality, learning and cooperation/collective action certainly mirror those of the four stations examined in this study. Moreover, a number of these also ally with the objectives set out in the AMARC Europe Charter (see Appendix A), most notably objective 10 of the Charter which seeks to promote a "*greater understanding in support of peace, tolerance, democracy and development.*" Whilst not identical in specific aims and objectives therefore, community radio and community development certainly complement, and have much to offer each other, in providing the Habermasian public space for people to communicate their experiences and aspirations working together towards a more tolerant, inclusive and democratic society.

## **5.2 Community Development in Ireland: Two Models**

While the overall values and ethos of community development in Ireland remains largely uncontested in public discourse, some divergences are apparent in how more socially equitable outcomes should be obtained and a sharp dichotomy has become apparent in the development of its practice over the decades. This dichotomy is best, though perhaps rather too simplistically, characterised by a charity model which entails *helping* people cope with difficult circumstances versus a politically transformative model which entails working with people to *challenge and transform* the very structures and processes that lead to these circumstances in the first place. Although the divisions are rarely so polarised, this dichotomy helps distinguish between two models of practice and community building across the community and voluntary spectrum. The origins and evolution of these models become apparent as we look back at the history of community development in the country.

The origins of community development in Ireland are generally associated (see for example Daly, 2008, Motherway, 2005, Powell and Geoghegan, 2004 for comprehensive overviews) with the aftermath of the bitter civil war which, following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922, divided community and families throughout the country. Following the war, the founders of the new 'free state' focused their attention on both healing divisions and, following the withdrawal of the British administration, putting in place essential services and supports to communities and families. This involved a two-pronged approach in close association with the Catholic church. Since the 1844 Charitable Bequests Act the Catholic church had been a major provider of health and social care services throughout the country leading to what has been described (O'Toole, 1998: 67) as a '*cradle to grave*' welfare system. In tandem to this, community development, in the form of traditional voluntary organisations (for example the GAA, Muintir na Tíre) were heavily promoted

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<sup>9</sup> Note the Mahon Community Development Project and the Mahon Community Centre are separate initiatives, the latter being the one with which Life FM has ongoing contact.

<sup>10</sup> The Leos is a youth group within the Roscommon Lions Club.

by both church and state alike. Espousing virtues of neighbourliness, self-reliance and independence from the state, such associations, closely linked to the Catholic clergy, fostered a 'self help' approach within communities aimed at promoting cohesion, consensus and conformity, healing the wounds of the bitter civil war, and providing assistance and services at a time when the state was ill-equipped to do so. Stemming back to the civil war and reflecting the deep penetration of the Catholic church in Irish society, this charity model therefore has deep roots within Irish society.

In contrast to this consensual approach, a second more radical wave of civic engagement, influenced by the US civil rights movement, began in urban areas in the 1970s, with the rise of tenant and housing groups, together with the rise of the women's movement (Daly, 2008, Motherway, 2005). Influenced by European anti-poverty programmes, these community groups adopted a more radical social analysis aimed at challenging and transforming the structural causes of poverty and exclusion. While many of these groups and their successors later became involved in partnership arrangements with the state in the late 1980s and now are often perceived as representing the more 'professionalised' end of the spectrum (Daly, 2008), a wide range of radical protest groups continued to emerge over the ensuing decades (Peillon, 2001). In addition, a number of smaller less resourced, informal groups also continued to quietly work away in their own communities, challenging the dominant status quo and, in doing so, engaging at political as well as social levels. And so, while the more visible, vocal and well-resourced formal community agencies, institutions and groups are those often associated with the community development sector, the reality is a far more diverse range of individuals and groups working within their communities, both assisting others and challenging, through what channels available, structural inequities. In a recent (and first) ambitious attempt at mapping community activism across the country, Donoghue et al (2006) uncovered 26,000 formalised community and voluntary groups linked into a further 89,000 less formalised groupings around the country. Clearly community activism is alive and well, if a little invisible in its more informal manifestations, across the country.

Community development in Ireland therefore, may be seen to have developed in two different, politically contradictory directions. However, with a strong legacy of voluntary-statutory service provision fostered by the close state-church relations on to the local partnership arrangements developed in the late 1980s and in place up to today, state support to community development has actively fostered the more traditional approach of service provision. A range of more professionalised groups have emerged, with many (though certainly not all) focusing more on the service provision or voluntary end of the community and voluntary spectrum. However, both research and knowledge of local areas reveal the extent of community activism to be far greater and far-ranging than that represented by formalised, institutionalised groupings alone. The challenge is to render visible (and vocal) this critical facet of Irish community life.

### **5.3 The Links between Community Development and Community Radio in the Four Transmission Areas**

Staff and volunteers within each of the four stations were asked about community groups they had links with or worked with. A sample of groups was contacted and interviewed on their links to their local community station and its usefulness to them and their work. As the account below illustrates, there are some differences in the extent to which different stations engage with local community groups, both in scale and in levels of participation within the stations. It is important to note that the findings and analysis deriving from this aspect of the research are suggestive rather than conclusive due to the small number of community groups interviewed – a necessarily small number due to the small number of links with some stations.

**Liffey Sound:** Liffey Sound engages with a range of local community groups including the GAA, other sporting bodies in the area, the local drama society etc... The station manager identified the Clondalkin Partnership company as the key agency in the area in regard to community development (understood in the more formalised 'charity model' sense as characterised in section 5.2 above). The representative from the Partnership interviewed noted that the agency has found the station useful in both promoting its own work and getting messages out in relation to various events it is organising. *"We would ring the station to promote events, we'd have our staff speaking on radio around topics and that's very useful in getting messages out."* The Partnership does a lot of work in the area of interculturalism and both the Equality Officer and the Ethnic Minority Officer are regularly interviewed on air. The station has also broadcast Partnership events using its mobile unit and, at the request of the Partnership, organised a one-day workshop on radio for members of a youth group in Ballyfermot – *"The youth group found it very interesting. It was a new opportunity for people who haven't done that before to engage... and the station even gave them a chance to go on air... and some of them did"*.

The Partnership clearly views its local community station more as a portal for information for the community, rather than as a means towards providing a voice to people directly, *"While we work in the main with disad-*

*vantaged groups that's not always about money. Many people can be financially ok but they're disadvantaged with regard to information, because they don't speak English, and they're disadvantaged with being able to access and get information. Community Radio has a role there"... although the Partnership representative notes that local newspapers still remain the agency's first port of call in this regard... "We would still tend to use the local papers more than community radio still. I think that's just 'cause we're more used to them... its easier to email a piece or a report to them... but if we're doing a press release it goes to all media."*

**Life FM:** Life FM, as a community of interest station, focuses principally on Christian community groups, in particular the YMCA and the Haven Christian Resource Centre, rather than community groups more broadly. While the manager emphasises that this is the station's focus, both the manager and staff and volunteers interviewed within the station aspire to link with broader community groups also and get the station more widely known in the area. The issue of resources is one which is repeatedly raised, with staff commenting on the difficulties in getting out and about and therefore more widely known. As one of the voluntary staff in the station notes, *"we'd like to do more of going out to particular areas... I'd like to see more community centres getting involved... but the problem is resources"*. In part, this is undoubtedly also due to the relative youth of the station, on air just over two years.

One centre that the station works particularly closely with is the Haven Christian Resource Centre in the city. As well as supporting the work of Haven by publicising their activities, interviewing people involved in the centre and broadcasting from there from time to time, a representative from Haven emphasises that, in attempting to bring people from a range of Christian churches together (in a context where the institutional churches themselves do not) and in spreading its messages of joy, peace and love in a non-judgemental, overwhelmingly positive manner, Life FM has been somewhat ground-breaking for Cork's Christian community. Through raising awareness of Haven itself, the station has led to an increase in the number of people availing of its services. Again however, the station serves more as a support in publicising Haven's work and services, rather than as a portal for the voices of people attending the centre. Thus, Haven has not considered producing its own programme, although people attending the centre have been interviewed on other programmes on the station.

Another centre the station enjoys a good relationship with is the Mahon Community Centre. The Mahon centre caters to 38 groups in the area and the coordinator reports that over 130,000 people were involved with the centre last year. As with the Haven centre above, Mahon's coordinator views the media as particularly important in getting information to people. He notes that the radio is a particularly effective medium for this as it is often switched on in homes throughout the day and is very useful in reaching people with literacy problems. Echoing many other commentators, Mahon Community Centre's coordinator comments that the larger commercial stations remain, by and large, disinterested in engaging with small community groups. Life FM however, as been very supportive of the Centre's work and the coordinator now has a one hour slot on Mondays where he talks about the work of the centre, together with various events taking place. Expressing his gratitude to Life, Mahon Centre's coordinator notes that *"they have room for us to get our message across... they are a vital link for the community to sit down and listen to the community"*.

In relation to broader communities outside its community of interest, Life FM comes up against an additional barrier, particular to this station, in attempting to engage community groups as the Christian ethos of the station, if not effectively communicated, risks being perceived exclusionary and problematic. Although Life describes itself as *"a non-denominational"* station aiming *"to bring hope to the people of Cork"*, a representative of another community project which was only vaguely aware of the work and ethos of the station, the Mahon Community Development Project, expressed reservations with respect to the station's Christian ethos. *"I think it's seen as a Christian station and we would avoid those forums. We try to stay neutral – non political and non religious"*. Clearly staff and volunteers in the station need to be very proactive in building links and communicating in direct and effective ways the aims and ethos of their station if they wish to engage with communities outside of their specific community of interest. This proactivity includes setting out what makes the station distinct from its commercial counterparts, in particular emphasising that the station offers far more to community groups and members than just publicity – the principal function of the station highlighted by representatives interviewed from both the Haven and Mahon Community Centres, and in line with that articulated also by the representative from Condalkin's Partnership above.

**Ros FM:** Of all four stations examined, Ros FM appears to have the most strongly embedded links to community groups and services in its area. This is no doubt due to its origins as a project of the local Partnership company and the ongoing involvement, either formally through board membership, or more informally through other forms of support, with a wide range of community and voluntary agencies and groups, as well as the small size of the town, where everybody knows just about everybody else. A representative from Roscommon Integrated Development Company (RIDC) outlines how the RIDC uses the station in a some-

what similar manner to Clondalkin Partnership's linkage with Liffey Sound above "*We always include it [Ros FM] in press releases and do interviews in relation to specific projects*". However, she also highlights the specific service provided by the station to people with disability in the town and its surrounds, offering them work experience and teaching them new skills "*the station develops their own sense of independence. It's not just a service for the sake of being a service, it delivers real tangible outcomes.*" The other area niche she identifies for the station is their work with smaller groups and communities such as those from ethnic minorities. "*They get people involved who otherwise wouldn't be involved... they try to include the most isolated in the station..*". For the RIDC, which is funding the costs of refurbishment in Ros FM's move to their new offices, Ros FM is, in essence, a community group with "*the same aims, the same objectives... the people are the same*".

For another local community activist in Roscommon town and leader of Roscommon Leos, Ros FM, through its highly successful *Radio 4U* series last summer (2009), a programme researched, produced and presented by the Leos focusing on the issue of positive mental health and suicide awareness, "*opens up so many doors for young people*". She believes the Leos group gained valuable experience and confidence in putting together and presenting the programme. Her plan this summer is to pitch the programme to the local commercial station *Shannonside*, in an effort to garner a higher listenership. Other than its role in fostering such young talent, the Leos leader also highlights the valuable information provision function of the station. Local events that would not receive airtime elsewhere will always be publicised on Ros FM as "*the fact that it's community, we know they will cover the event*". The station has also facilitated debate and discussion on a range of local issues. Some examples include a member of the Tidy Towns Committee going on air to voice concerns about a local developers' plans to build on a site overlooking the park (the developer in question was also invited on to the show to debate the issue but failed to appear) and interviews with people on the picket line of the town's controversial 'headshop'. As in the case of Tipperary MW, a number of people in interview commented that the coverage of the local elections last year was excellent, and that interviews with councillors were "*very fair and not biased in any way*".

**Tipperary MW:** Tipperary MW also appears to have strong links with a variety of formalised community groups in its area, due, in part, to the small size of the area (Tipperary town is quite small, and Cashel town just a little bit larger), and in part, to its long history in the area. A strong connection is maintained with Moorehaven Centre in Tipperary town – a Centre offering rehabilitative training, sheltered work, employment advice, and a residential service to people with intellectual disabilities. The station is a favourite of residents and clients of the Centre and is played all day in the Centre, with requests played at night for residents. A number of residents dropped in from the Centre to visit station staff and volunteers the day of one of the researcher's visits, and staff and volunteers took the time to sit and chat with the visitors. As noted by many other people talking about the station, the Moorehaven representative interviewed noted that the local news (community diary), obituaries and Mass on Sunday "*where people know the priest*" are all extremely important to their residents and clients. Coming in and being interviewed by Seán Buckley (a staff member with a talk show four afternoons a week) is described as a highlight also for residents of the Centre.

Knockanrawley Resource Centre is a large community development centre in Tipperary town which, originating from a local resident's association, now has over 50 paid staff. As with a number of the community centres discussed above, Knockanrawley makes extensive use of the station to advertise its events and trainings. The Centre's staff member interviewed noted that, when they hold an event, they always ask how people heard about it and find that "*approximately 60 percent of people (or their mother!) hear about our events through the station.*" Noting the high level of listenership to the station (even "*the young ones in the office*" tune into community diary and the obituaries), the Centre's representative notes that while the local newspaper costs approximately Euro 2.50 (a significant enough additional expense to those on tight budgets), the radio is free. Asked about the station's role in promoting debate on issues relating to marginalisation and disadvantage in the area, Knockanrawley's representative notes that "*we contacted them to put some events and issues on the radio which they did [examples cited include issues and events around International Women's Day, the National Day for the Eradication of Poverty, and the 16 Days of Action against Violence Against Women], but on the whole, the station does not go for controversial issues... It's a safe pair of hands, therefore people are not alienated, and there's nothing wrong with that.*". Reflecting further on their work with the station (and discussing it with others in the office), the feeling within the Resource Centre appears to be that they should use the station more by working with people in local community groups to put together their own programme. While staff within the Resource Centre feel that the station would be open to this, as has been the case whenever it has been approached on any issue by the Centre, they feel that the impetus, and a large amount of time and energy for this, will have to come from themselves. Noting that "*this would be a huge thing for Knockanrawley*", staff note that "*we could both [the station and centre] be more proactive in putting together a genuine community-based programme.*". While the station lacks this level of proactivity in assisting groups produce their own programmes, Centre staff note that it nonetheless is "*terribly supportive of community activity with a huge loyalty from the community... we'd miss them terribly if they were gone and, without them, the place would be significantly poorer.*"

Interviews with both staff and volunteers across the four stations, together with representatives from a number of community projects and agencies in their areas, reveal some differences in the scale and depth of linkages between the stations and local community groups. What is noteworthy in many of the cases where links are active is that community groups principally view their stations as opportunities to publicise events and disseminate information on particular projects and pieces of work. With the exception of Roscommon where, again, close links to many agencies and services have become embedded through the origins of the station, community agencies and services in the other three areas (albeit drawn from a necessarily small sample) appear to view the stations principally as services for local information dissemination, as well as of course, more general entertainment. While these are important functions of the respective stations and most certainly – and most particularly for more marginalised and less mobile listeners such as those in Moorhaven – make a valuable contribution in counteracting isolation, the levels of participation they offer to their communities rarely rise above level 3 (*controlled participation*) of Day's framework as discussed in the previous Chapter.

Among the community groups interviewed in three of the four areas, the service function of the station appears to override its process function, paralleling the charity end of the community development spectrum (*working for*) dominating the more radical, transformative end (*working with*). These findings tally with those emanating from a survey of 23 community and voluntary groups conducted by Unique Perspectives in 2003. Discussing the key findings the authors note that "*although it is difficult to quantify in any systematic way, the main way in which the groups conceive of this valuable contribution [that of community radio to community development] is a new dimension, avenue or approach in community development work. (Unique Perspectives, 2003: 35). The precise nature of this 'new dimension' is detailed elsewhere in the report as encompassing "a new medium for access to the public, raising of issues, ability to widen the reach of our message and service, interviews to highlight issues, training and skills" (Unique Perspectives, 2002: 28). Again, as with a number of interviews with community actors (both within the stations and within community agencies more broadly) for this research, the emphasis is on the lower level forms of participation offered by the stations, rather than at the higher levels of direct control and access to the airwaves as advocated through both the ethos of community radio and through the values of social justice and participation in particular within community development. This perception of the main role and contribution of the community stations has implications for their function as potential drivers of change within their communities broadly – an aspect to which we turn in the following section.*

## **5.4 Community Radio: Driving Change?**

From the findings presented above, the key roles and contributions of the four community stations may be categorised into three principal areas. First, they have an important role in the area of information provision and dissemination. Commentators from all four transmission areas highlighted this role repeatedly during the course of the research, noting that a lot of the local news and events taken up by community stations would never be picked up by their local commercial counterparts. The 'community diaries' of both Ros FM and Tipperary MW were highlighted as extremely useful and informative in letting people know what's happening locally while Life FM provides information on services and activities within and across Cork's Christian community. Second, and allied to this first point, the stations function as a service in their own right, counteracting isolation, loneliness and social exclusion by providing familiar company and comfort to people more marginalised and isolated within their communities. This role, articulated as "*a message of hope*", is the core aim of Life FM. Staff, volunteers and listeners of Tipperary MW, in catering predominantly to an older age group and serving a loyal listenership, also see this as an important part of the station's function. Merely being on the end of a phone to chat when someone rings up to talk to a familiar voice (this being the only person they may talk to that day) is an essential service in itself to those who are isolated. And third, all four stations, in different ways and employing different formats, have, in conjunction with other agencies and groups in the area, succeeded in raising debate on certain issues pertinent to the community. Although, following Day's framework, these debates in some cases are quite tightly mediated and controlled by presenters and producers through the form of phone-ins and interviews, in general all stations appear open, when approached – often by members of organised groups, to offering the space to open and unbiased debate on a wide range of issues. Moreover, all stations, at different times and to different degrees, have been proactive in inviting groups and individuals to come into studio and present their own programmes raising issues for deliberation and debate themselves.

A common theme running through the analysis of linkages between community radio and community development groups within their areas is the dominance of the first two roles (information provision and a service in counteracting physical and social isolation). Most notable is the view among community development groups themselves (as reflected in both the findings of this research and the findings of the



broader based Unique Perspectives research in 2003) that the principal opportunities provided by community radio are in the areas of information provision and publicity for the groups themselves in publicising their activities and services. This is undoubtedly a valuable service provided by the stations. However it is important to note that it represents both the lower end of the community radio participation framework discussed in the previous Chapter and the lower end of the participation and social justice continuum as reflected in the principles and values of community development outlined in the previous section.

Participation, following the community development models, encompasses a continuum from information sharing (the principal role community development activists see for community radio) to empowerment of communities themselves to become more vocal and active in their own development (the principal role of community radio as articulated by many of its practitioners and as set out in the AMARC Charter) to affording communities and individuals more control over the direction of their lives through involvement in deliberation and decision-making processes affecting these (the social justice component of community development and the procedural outcome as theorised within the Habermasian public sphere). With a focus, in particular across three stations examined, on the lower end of the participation continuum, in part reflecting the dominance of the charity model over the transformative one within community development ethos and practice more broadly, and in part reflecting a poor understanding across the community development sector of the distinctiveness of the space and opportunities afforded by community radio vis-à-vis other media, valuable opportunities for the more meaningful and potentially more transformative levels of participation and engagement are perhaps overlooked. Reflecting the dominance of the charity model across the community and voluntary sector, community stations appear to be often perceived as local specialist services, to be supported and assisted through volunteerism, rather than facilities and spaces for social change, to be used and exploited by their owners, their communities, in building and consolidating their communities through debate, exchange and learning in an open and accessible space.

And so, do the community stations participating in this study drive change within their communities in the inclusive and democratic sense envisaged by their community building ethos? In the absence of more extensive data linked to a concrete and tightly parametered definition as to what constitutes 'change', this proves a difficult question to answer as community radio activists themselves acknowledged when posed the question. Station practitioners and commentators more widely noted that, while the content and messages of specific programmes and pieces broadcast by the stations certainly raise many pertinent and timely issues for discussion, their impact in terms of changing attitudes and promoting action is very difficult to gauge. It was noted however that the feedback received by stations, either through emails and texts (which all four stations report receiving in high numbers) or vox pops conducted on the local streets (Liffey Sound) suggest that certainly the stations are contributing towards raising local awareness on a number of pertinent issues – examples include greater understanding of ability/disability, of mental health issues and suicide prevention, as well as maintaining local interest and debates on topical issues of the time – such as the issue of schooling in relation to new housing developments in West Dublin, the 'headshop' in Roscommon, and the range of local issues pertaining to local elections at the time of elections. And so it appears that stations do indeed play a role in driving change, through providing a space for open debate, discussion and exchange on issues of pertinence within their communities. However, with their strong focus on information provision and exchange (as articulated by both radio and community development activists) and the key service provided in this regard to more isolated and marginalised sections of the local community (both at specific times, as during the harsh frosts of the last winter, and on a more ongoing basis in a multitude of ways explored heretofore), the community stations may prove even more effective in assisting people to cope with change as it happens through radical shifts in the economy and society more broadly, rather than driving these changes themselves. This again reflects the more charity / service end of the community and voluntary spectrum and is certainly a much needed, invaluable resource in the increasingly individualised, alienated and alienating world we live in today.

As we finally begin to emerge from the heady, frenetic, consumer-driven consciousness that imbued the Celtic Tiger, it has never been a better time to rub our eyes, look around and begin to reflect collectively on what makes us truly human, what makes us happy, and what counts in life and within our communities. The effects of the rapid changes inflicted upon us and by us over the last two decades bear careful scrutiny, and the needs and rights of those left forgotten and marginalised in more frenetic times need to be addressed and upheld. Community radio, working with community and voluntary groups in assisting and enabling these more marginalised groups within our communities to cope with these changes, has a crucial role to play in this regard. But community radio's contribution does not and should not end there. As we collectively reflect on where we have come, where we are going, and how we may get there – within our communities and more broadly; as we collectively reflect on the true meaning of a rich life, community radio provides us with the space and means to engage each other, in all our diversity, in these discussions, to collectively re-imagine our communities, and to collectively drive change within them.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

Community radio has played a key role nationally and internationally in scoping out space for a type of media operation that is fundamentally different to the mainstream commercially-oriented institution. In its core concepts, aims and objectives community radio, as an international social movement and as a micro practice, is fundamentally distinct from any other form of media production. Within the community sector, the emphasis is on extending communications rights to all members of the community while also focusing on the importance of equality of access and participation. Community media insist on overt resistance to the commercialisation of communication and the commodification of communities by refusing to treat them as passive anonymous 'audiences' or worse, mere targets for advertising. Instead community radio treats listeners as fundamentally necessary participants in diverse styles and formats of radio programming. Community radio equally counters tendencies towards nationalisation and transnationalisation aimed at maximising the number of consumers for a limited media 'product' and thereby optimising profit. Instead community media insists on the power and importance of the local and the micro issues that are relevant to audiences and participants on an everyday basis, as determined and articulated by those cohorts. Community radio assumes responsibility for its actions, agendas and positions by remaining accountable to its constituencies. Thus, the interests served by community radio are those of its communities. In many ways community radio is constructed by and, in turn, constructs and reconstructs its communities. In other words the relationships in community media are entirely reciprocal. Community radio generates a sense of belonging for its listeners, that they are part of and connected to a bigger collectivity or listenership; it creates the same feeling of community for the participants in radio production, who become part of a community of shared interest within the station; and it encourages a sense of identity for the community served by the station, which is both a fundamental influence on the operation of the station, but which also comes to be shaped by the processes of communication that are part of the working definition of the community carried within the programming. Ultimately the endeavour of community radio to create a different type of media world is enacted every day within community radio stations in Ireland and internationally. This is most succinctly and effectively stated by Servaes who argues "*Community radio is accessible; it is neither the expression of political power nor the expression of capital. It is the expression of the population*" (1999: 260).

As the findings of this research have shown, the four community radio stations examined certainly work towards this ideal and endeavour on a daily basis and to admirable ends. Most notably their strong focus on information provision and exchange, together with the key service they provide to those more isolated and marginalised within their communities serves a crucial function in binding communities and counteracting the growing marginalisation and atomisation which has come to characterise Irish social life in recent years. But community radio's contribution does not and should not end there. As we enter a particularly challenging time in our collective history, the need for collective reflection on our past and on our ongoing journey is ever more prescient. Community radio, as a distinct and crucial space for this reflection, debate and engagement, in collaboration with community groups – both formal and informal – remains a crucial tool in this endeavour. It provides the means to recolonise the public sphere and to engage with each other, in all our diversity, to collectively re-imagine our collective direction and future, working together to effect positive change for all. The extent to which community stations, groups and individuals come together in this endeavour will ultimately characterise and determine the multiple social benefits accruing from the community radio project, alongside the multiple benefits to Irish society more broadly.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **The AMARC Community Radio Charter for Europe**

Recognising that community radio is an ideal means of fostering freedom of expression and information, the development of culture, the freedom of form and confront opinions and active participation in local life; noting that different cultures and traditions lead to diversity of forms of community radio; this Charter identifies objectives which community radio stations share and should strive to achieve.

Community radio stations:

1. promote the right to communicate, assist the free flow of information and opinions, encourage creative expression and contribute to the democratic process and a pluralist society;
2. provide access to training, production and distribution facilities; encourage local creative talent and foster local traditions; and provide programmes for the benefit, entertainment, education and development of their listeners;
3. seek to have their ownership representative of local geographically recognisable communities or of communities of common interest;
4. are editorially independent of government, commercial and religious institutions and political parties in determining their programme policy;
5. provide a right of access to minority and marginalised groups and promote and protect cultural and linguistic diversity;
6. seek to honestly inform their listeners on the basis of information drawn from a diversity of sources and provide a right of reply to any person or organisation subject to serious misrepresentation;
7. are established as organisations which are not run with a view to profit and ensure their independence by being financed from a variety of sources;
8. recognise and respect the contribution of volunteers, recognise the right of paid workers to join trade unions and provide satisfactory working conditions for both;
9. operate management, programming and employment practices which oppose discriminations and which are open and accountable to all supporters, staff and volunteers;
10. foster exchange between community radio broadcasters using communications to develop greater understanding in support of peace, tolerance, democracy and development.

Adopted on 18 September 1994 in Ljubljana, Slovenia at the first AMARC Pan-European Conference of Community Radio Broadcaster

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Interview Schedule**

#### **1. Defining community radio**

**1.1 How does your community station differ from commercial stations / what makes community radio different?**

#### **2. Social benefit**

**The Irish Broadcasting Bill (2009: 71-72) includes a provision noting that "...the supply of programme material... will be effected with the sole objective of ...specifically addressing the interests of, and seeking to provide a social benefit to the community concerned".**

**2.1 Do you feel your radio station provides social benefits to the community you serve?**

**2.2 If so, what is the nature of these benefits / how would you define them**

**2.3 Are these benefits something you consciously seek to provide?**

**2.4 If so, how / what specific actions / activities are you undertaking in seeking to provide them?**

**2.5 Do you feel you're successful in providing these? Anything hampering you?**

**2.6 Are there other benefits you would like to provide? What are these?**

#### **3. Plurality and diversity in operations, management and decision-making**

**3.1 What is the ownership structure?**

**3.2 What community(s) are you targeting? Why? What are you trying to achieve by targeting/ engaging them?**

**3.3 How, within the constraints of your resources, do you go about engaging the community in your station? (in terms of a) programming content, b) operations within the station and c) management and decision-making processes within the station)**

**3.4 Are you successful in engaging them would you say / are you happy with the level of engagement?**

**3.5 What has helped in engaging them – internal and external factors?**

**3.6 Are there any obstacles to engaging community members? What?**

**3.7 How do you think some of these obstacles might be overcome? What would be required?**

#### **4. Promoting dialogue and debate**

**Community radio activists / practitioners often talk about the role of community radio in promoting dialogue and debate on issues of concern to communities, leading to social change...**

- 4.1 Do you think your radio station promotes such debates?**
- 4.2 Can you give examples? On what issues?**
- 4.3 Why / how these issues – how did this come about? Do you (if so, who?) select particular issues you would like to raise debates on?**
- 4.4 Have there been instances where these debates have led to concrete changes within your community / catchment area? Any examples...**
- 4.5 What were the main factors which helped in making these changes?**
- 4.6 Are there changes you were aiming for that you weren't so successful in achieving? What were the reasons for not achieving these?**
  
- 5. Other**
- 5.1 What would you like to see your station doing / achieving in 10 years time?**
- 5.2 What will you need to do to get there?**
- 5.3 Anything else?**

























