

Community media: field, theory, policy

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The outputs, with commentary and appendices have not been submitted for a comparable academic award, and are submitted here in partial fulfilment of the requirements of London Metropolitan University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Prior Output

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Contents

	Page
Title/Submission statement	1
Table of contents	2
Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
Commentary: Community media: field, theory, policy	
1. Introduction	5
2. The field: historical context	12
3. The field: academic context	18
4. Theoretical perspectives	21
5. Policy	30
6. Conclusion	36
Bibliography	39
Appendix A List of Publications submitted	1-7
B Community media publications complete list	1-6
C Participation in conferences and consultations	1-5
D Career summary	1-4
E PhD examination and supervision	1
F Declaration by Committee of Ministers, Council of Europe February 2009	1-4
G Letters to <i>The Guardian</i>	1-2
H Statements by co-authors	1-3

Abstract

Community media: field, theory, policy

The submission consists of twenty-three outputs, spanning over three decades. These range from books and chapters to reports, journal articles and edited publications. The accompanying commentary aims to set the submitted work in context, demonstrate that it constitutes a coherent whole, and that it makes an independent and original contribution to knowledge and the advancement of the academic field of community media within the discipline of media studies.

A number of overlapping contexts are summarised: the socio-historical setting in which the practice of electronic community media first emerged; the ‘personal/professional’ context in which reflection on practical experience led to developments in theory and policy analysis; the academic context of the development of British media studies where at first radio was marginalised and there was no discursive space for the notion of community media, then a later stage where a wider range of theoretical contexts brought community and alternative media into the academic frame.

Three main sections discuss, respectively, the candidate’s contribution to the identification and categorisation of community media, the application to it of theoretical perspectives, and the development of policy analysis. All three areas, it is argued, were part of a wider strategy aimed at bringing recognition to the field and which involved activities outside the scope of the submission (advocacy, interventions in mainstream media) but which are part of the context of the submitted work. For that reason an appendix (B) lists all the candidate’s publications on the subject, while others list conference presentations and other relevant activities. In addition, the documentation includes a brief career summary and statements by co-authors.

Acknowledgements

Two kinds of thanks are due, one to those involved in the research and writing of the submitted outputs, the other relates to the writing of the commentary.

In the first category, the list of those involved over three decades would be very long: colleagues in broadcasting and education, staff and volunteers in *Bristol Channel*, workers in other community media projects I have researched, peer reviewers, editors and publishers, those who have campaigned with me for community media's recognition, and those who have joined in raising radio's profile within media studies – few of them will ever read my thanks. Among those who will, three typify the support I have received from different quarters: a head of department whose encouragement and example allowed me to start to explore the field of community media, an academic colleague who has shared in the task of developing it as an academic subject, and a journalist whose research for an article on community radio in the mainstream press had lasting consequences neither of us could have imagined back in 1977.

In the second category come colleagues in the Department of Applied Social Sciences whom I take pleasure in naming and thanking: John Gabriel and Anna Gough-Yates for designing a post, perhaps the first in Britain, of lecturer in community media and for choosing me to fill (half of) it; James Bennett and colleagues in the Media Information and Communication Section for their friendly support, and Jenny Harding for her patient and perceptive supervision.

Community media: field, theory, policy – a commentary

1. Introduction

The purpose of this commentary is, in accordance with the University's *Guidelines for a PhD by Prior Output*, to

- set the submitted work in context
- demonstrate that it constitutes a coherent whole, and
- state the independent and original contribution to knowledge and the advancement of the academic field of *community media* within the discipline of media studies.

'Contexts'

The work discussed¹ represents a strand of activity which has taken place over more than three decades – in effect, a life's work. To review this work and to set it 'in context' is to write a kind of autobiography, one bound in this case by academic guidelines², but which nevertheless exposes the tension between a narrative which makes a "case for support"³ and the reflexive interrogation that is needed to create critical distance. The published outputs which support this "academic life history" deal in many cases with "contested pasts", to use the title of the edited collection of essays by Hodgkin & Radstone who point out that "contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present" (Hodgkin & Radstone 2003:1). The outputs here include several revisionist histories (see, e.g., Lewis & Booth 1989: 3-4, Output 8) and the commentary, too, particularly in Section 5, Policy, argues that present policy debates are affected by the interpretation of "contested pasts". The commentary on the other hand is unavoidably in the present, its viewpoint one of hindsight, its concern: "what should be the explanatory and narrative context that would make sense of a given episode" (Hodgkin & Radstone, *ibid.*). The commentary also ranges at times outside the boundary of the listed outputs, in order to summarise the convergence of contexts – social, historical, academic and

¹ Appendix A lists the submitted outputs, each with a brief explanatory note, and in-text references to these are in the Harvard style with an added Output number, as (Lewis 1976, Output 1). Appendix B is a complete list of publications on community media which are referenced as (Lewis 1972, B1) etc. Neither Appendix B, nor Appendix C (Participation in conferences and consultations) includes my work in other areas *not* pertaining to community media, such as radio drama, soundscapes and masculinity. Some of these last are referenced in the bibliography at the end of this commentary, along with publications by the other authors cited.

² 'An output list would normally *not* contain text books, ephemeral works or "popular" or polemical works', should normally be in the public domain (Guidelines p.1), and should focus on sub-set of the candidate's work that is 'a coherent and linked original contribution (Guidelines p.2). The outputs here submitted conform to these requirements with two possible exceptions: Output 13 was a paper delivered at a conference whose abstract was peer-reviewed; Output 19 is a unit in a Distance Learning MA course.

³ The phrase is used by UK Research Councils for the central requirement in a funding application.

personal/professional - which influenced each. To do so involves abandoning the supposed objectivity of the third person - as indeed many of the outputs have done.⁴

The work I have submitted was a contribution to an academic endeavour, shared with colleagues in Britain and other countries, in which we identified, described, categorised and theorised the field. Running parallel to academic work and usually preceding it, since ‘people have not waited for academics or regulators to define the activity before going ahead to use the medium themselves’ (Lewis 2005a:3, Output 15), was a developing practice and a continuing campaign of advocacy. I have been involved in both, and at this point a brief biographical summary will provide some of the personal/professional context.⁵

My interest in pedagogical praxis arose out of my experience first as a teacher, then as a practitioner involved in the use of television to assist teaching and learning in school and adult education settings. While I was still working in educational broadcasting, the use of video in community development in Canada and the USA came to my notice and I researched and published articles on the subject in the mainstream press (Lewis 1972 a-d, B2-5). Next came an opportunity to put theory into practice as manager of Rediffusion’s cable television station, *Bristol Channel*, run on ‘community media’ principles adopted from North American experience. After the close-down of the station there followed a period in which I combined publication and consultancy work with advocacy, the last directed towards the political and academic recognition of community media. All three activities continued after my appointment to a lecturing post at Goldsmiths College began a career teaching media and cultural studies in universities.

Another aspect of this commentary’s context is that this is not the first time I have attempted a critical reflection involving personal memories and their relationship both to documents published contemporaneously with the remembered experience, and to academic studies of the topics in question. I have written about my experience of boarding schools (Lewis 1991), and about radio listening in a pre-television era (Lewis 2010). In these projects I have been influenced by critical or ‘revisionist’ (Kuhn 2000:

⁴ There is a variation in the register of the submitted publications, intended to be appropriate to the particular readership or audience. For example, the audience for Lewis 2005b, Output 16, was largely Australian, for Lewis 2008b, Output 21, almost entirely French. In terms of content each had to include explanations of the British context as well as acknowledgement of the hosts’ experience. Several of the Outputs are conference papers subsequently published as edited collections. In print, and in a submission for academic assessment, the register of these spoken pieces is one not normally found in academic writing: academic custom expects contributors to re-write their presentations to conform to a literary register. However, as a former broadcaster and a teacher of radio practice (and therefore also of ‘writing for radio’), I have an antipathy to reading aloud at a conference a text intended to be read on the printed page, and have felt it important in presentations to ‘maintain the illusion’ of what Goffman called ‘fresh talk’ (Goffman 1981:172). Allowing my texts to be published as originally delivered is a small statement in defence of orality. That said, Lewis 1984a, Output 5 (at a BFI conference) and Lewis 2005b, Output 16 (at the Melbourne radio conference) both suffer from my having been denied opportunity to check the edited version.

⁵ Appendix D, a Career Summary, provides more detail.

181) autobiographical writings⁶, and have taken account of the debates about the relationship between “memory work” and history (Kuhn 1995, 2000; Hodgkin & Radstone 2003; Keightley 2008). While the present work does not explicitly invoke memory, relying as it must on published outputs, memory nevertheless colours my interpretation of the history offered: and ‘memory, so far from being a passive receptacle’ as Raphael Samuel remarks, ‘is an active shaping force...what it contrives symptomatically to forget is as important as what it remembers’ (Samuel 1994;x). A further contextual presence has been the recent writing of an article about the British community radio campaign, one of a series whose editor requested an anecdotal and informal style of writing, in which I have told a number of stories to illustrate the problems of combining advocacy with academic objectivity (Lewis forthcoming-b, Appendix B.88).

Striving for discursive space

The academic strand of activity was, for me and for most colleagues in the early part of the period under review, part of a wider strategy of establishing the claim for recognition of community media by a range of sectors of opinion - academics, broadcasters, funding agencies and policy-makers, the latter first at national, and later at European level. As agenda-setting studies have shown, a precondition of successful policy intervention is sympathetic notice from press and broadcast media. For community media advocates to attract such notice was a difficult if not contradictory strategy since community media usually defines itself in opposition to the mainstream (Lewis & Booth 1989:9, Output 8). Moreover, until the arrival of ‘user-generated content’ and ‘citizen journalism’ obliged professional media to notice (and co-opt) these new forms of media intervention, mainstream media coverage of non-professional and community media has usually been dismissive or altogether absent. So support had to be won for policies that would create an infrastructure (funding, regulatory policies) both for the object of study and for study and research itself (academic policies, marketing decisions of publishers).

Why did this matter? Why was the ‘object of study’ important? Communication, as the MacBride Report observed, is a matter of human rights (UNESCO 1980:172)⁷ and in what I have called the ‘breeding grounds’ for community media (new social movements, old, continuing struggles such as those by trades unions, and in newly emerging democracies) the absence of space for a voice in mainstream media led to a search for alternatives (Lewis 1993b:15, Output 11). The result – the use of alternative media - became increasingly politically significant and pointed to a democratic deficit in

⁶ E.g. Ronald Fraser (1984) *In Search of a Past*. London: Verso. Carolyn Steedman (1986) *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*. London: Virago Press.

⁷ UNESCO set up the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, chaired by Sean MacBride, in response to pressure from the Non-Aligned nations who claimed that the resources and flows of global communication favoured rich countries to the detriment of the developing world. The Report largely vindicated their claims and, though criticised at the time by Western media and governments, became the cornerstone for subsequent movements to democratise communications.

mainstream media. UNESCO's concern to address the situation at both global and local level (see Section 2 below) was underpinned by academic conferences and by studies commissioned for the series *Reports and Papers on Mass Communication*. The accumulation of academic work for both UNESCO and the Council of Europe in what is nowadays called knowledge transfer played a part in persuading academic departments, research councils and publishing houses to recognise the significance of the field. At that point the task was to make connections within existing theory and to develop new theoretical perspectives.⁸ So conference presentations and publications, as well as appearances, interviews and interventions in mainstream media attempted to open up a discursive space that would enable the phenomenon of community media to be recognised by the different sectors of opinion.

British media studies

A major problem in attracting academic attention to community radio was the general neglect within media studies of all forms of radio itself. This is the opening argument in, and rationale for, *The Invisible Medium*, written at the end of the 1980s:

‘Radio is hardly noticed in academic literature [and] as a result, radio practice and policy lack a language for critical reflection and analysis. Why we have the radio we do, what radio we could have if things were different – these questions are as difficult to debate as the hidden histories are to uncover or the alternative practices to publicise.’

(Lewis & Booth 1989:xiii, Output 8)

The explanation for this state of affairs is developed in my chapter, ‘Radio theory and community radio’ (Lewis 2002a, Output 12). That a subject infrastructure (subject association, journals, conferences etc) had never supported the study of sound and radio was an inheritance, I argued, of the transition from orality to a predominantly visual culture (Ong 1982) and a strong academic literary tradition. The preoccupations of British media studies in the 1970s and 1980s were the press, television and a French-influenced approach to the study of film. Radio was relegated to ‘an episode in broadcasting history’ (Lewis 2002a:50, Output 12). I pointed out the difficulty this situation created for the study of community radio – ‘a marginal type within a marginal subject’ (ibid, p.52). This was to change: partly it was the work of the Radio Studies Network (a subject association for lecturers and researchers of radio within media studies) and similar organisations in Europe, including the international radio research network, *IREN*, (see below, Section 3), which helped raise the profile of radio within media studies. Partly the attention paid from the turn of the millennium to community and alternative media by what I call the ‘new wave’ of academic work was the result of the stage media studies had by then reached. Other reasons for the changed attitude are discussed in Section 3 below.

⁸ Sonia Livingstone traces a similar succession of stages in a summary of the literature on children and the internet – “an explosion of empirical studies...largely descriptive. Arguably, this initial agenda has run its course. Now the challenge is to theorize...” (Livingstone 2009)

‘Community’

‘Community’ has occupied the attention of sociologists over a long period. The notion expresses both coherence and difference (Cohen 1985, cited in Silverstone 1999:99), is both imagined (Anderson 1983) and experienced materially. The fact that the latter, in internet use, facilitates a technologically supported virtual community only underlines the point made by Silverstone that communities have always been symbolic: membership of them has to be imagined at the same time as it is experienced (Silverstone 1999: 104). The nostalgic connotations of ‘community’ have been used and abused⁹ and its application as a prefix to media is no exception. Thirty years ago the Minority Press Group remarked that it was all too easy for community

‘in its radical formulation the assertion of common interest and the celebration of solidarity...to slip into idealising retrospect [or] a retreat from the central issues of power and domination in the social order’

(Minority Press Group, *Here is the "Other" News: Challenges to the Local Commercial Press* (Minority Press Group series) by Crispin Aubrey (May 1980)

cited in Lewis 1983: 201, Output 4).

Even earlier Raymond Williams, in a discussion of alternative technology, had warned against the ‘public-relations version of “local community”’ that could lead to ““community” stations [being] mere fronts for irresponsible networks which have their real centres elsewhere’ (Williams 1974: 150). But in academic literature an early and legitimate use of ‘community’ was as a prefix to contrast local uses of the press with mass media (Janowitz 1952). By the late 1960s, a period in which rebellion against the scale of corporate institutions was widespread, ‘community’ became attached to health, housing and law projects, to name but a few examples. In the same period, its use in relation to electronic media was canonised by the regulatory authorities in Canada and the USA to describe cable channels set aside for use by community groups.

Definitions

The work submitted here relates to broadcast community media and subsequently also to its application in internet use.

In the ‘new wave’ of academic interest in this field, there has been considerable debate about labels and relationships. ‘Participatory media’ (Servaes 1999; Gumucio Dagron 2001), ‘radical media’ (Downing 2001), ‘citizens’ media’ (Rodriguez 2001) have been proposed. Community media could be seen as a sub-set of Atton’s ‘alternative media’ (Atton 2001) and McQuail had earlier recognised ‘democratic-participant’ as one of his normative theories of media performance (McQuail 1994). In a recent summary of these

⁹ See, e.g., Lewis 2002a:53, Output 12.

definitional disputes I acknowledged that community in particular carries the baggage of ‘past struggles as well as bureaucratic accommodations’ and must now be re-thought with the arrival of the Internet. But, I concluded, ‘it is the term that many practitioners have used about their work’ (Lewis & Jones 2006:27, Output 17). Its use in the title and main body of this commentary is appropriate given the North American usage and philosophy which influenced European practitioners, including myself, and the need to link the label to contemporary analysis.

I will therefore take two definitions from the submitted outputs to assist an understanding of the field and its boundaries.

‘Community media is a term used to describe the use of media by communities, social groups and civil society organisations. ... Projects and initiatives are generally classified as ‘community media’ if they are not run for profit but for social gain and community benefit; if they are owned by, and accountable to, the communities they seek to serve; and if they provide for participation by the community in programme-making and in management.’

(Lewis 2008c: 5-6, Output 22).

Where community broadcasting is concerned community radio is distinguished from mainstream media, whether commercial or public service.

‘Like other forms of community media, community radio is an open or implied criticism of mainstream radio in either of its two models. It charges such radio with distortion, omission and marginalisation of the points of view of certain social groups, and within its own practice tries to offer listeners the power to control their own definitions of themselves, of what counts as news and what is enjoyable or significant about their own culture.’

(Lewis & Booth 1989:8-10, Output 8).

2. The field: historical context¹⁰

The 1970s was a period of rebellion within mainstream media as well as in the reality that the media attempted to report: civil rights and anti-war protests, trade union defence of traditional industries, an emerging women’s movement. Paulo Freire’s *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, targeting traditional approaches to education, was translated and published by Penguin in 1972 and rapidly gained a global readership (Freire 1972). Professionalism came under fire from Illich (1973), while Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful* proposed ‘economics as if people mattered’ in place of large-scale corporatism (Schumacher 1973). In Britain and the USA, protesters and new social movements found their negative experience of media coverage supported by academic studies (Glasgow University Media Group 1976; Gitlin 1980). Groombridge’s *Television and the People*

¹⁰ A fuller contextualisation can be found in Lewis & Jones 2006:22-24, Output 17.

(Groombridge 1972), subtitled ‘a programme for democratic participation in broadcast media’, was a comprehensive critique of the values of broadcasting and made an important contribution to the contemporary debates about ‘access’. Early versions of this genre at that time were to be found in BBC2’s *Late Night Line-Up*, and subsequently *Open Door*, and in at least two ITV company schedules, and it was the delays, constraints and compromises involved in dealing with the access providers that led many groups to look to cable as a better alternative.

The arrival in the late 1960s of portable video cameras and recorders and their use in projects and campaigns by social activists - ‘non-professionals’ in relation to broadcasters - made access to cable networks a realistic opportunity. In an article in *New Society*, the first in the British press to draw attention to community television (Lewis 1972a, B2), I discussed the Canadian National Film Board’s programme *Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle*, which encouraged citizen participation in addressing social problems and used first film, then video as part of the process of effecting change. Some use of video in community development was taking place in London, notably by John (‘Hoppy’) Hopkins whose report to the Home Office on his use of video in community development included examples of the Challenge for Change newsletter *Access* (Hopkins et al 1973). The government had announced its intention to award licences for local programming on cable, and in the *New Society* article and elsewhere (Lewis 1972 b-d, B3-5) I had emphasised the ‘importance of the half-inch portapak and its mediating role in interaction between groups in the community’, and warned that the cable companies’ desire to establish ‘a good name for cable’ might be in conflict with the notion of community participation (Lewis 1976:18, Output 1).

At this time the British public had very little viewing choice: three terrestrial channels with some small regional variations in local news and film offerings. The broadcasters were completing a joint engineering programme to maximise viewing by means of relay transmitters where reception was poor, and this was eroding subscriber support for cable systems whose rationale was to provide better signals in just those areas. Cable licensees were restricted to simply the delivery of the broadcast offering; the importing of ‘distant signals’ was not allowed as it was in the USA. With the arrival of a Conservative administration in 1970 the cable industry, led by Rediffusion, the largest company, calculated that the local programming licence could lead to the concession of pay-TV (programme distribution by satellite being still in the future). Thus, while in a number of European countries the concern of public authorities was with the civic value of cable television, the British approach was commercially motivated.

The initiative was called an ‘experiment’ but as I pointed out ‘no criteria for evaluation were specified, nor was it established who should decide whether “the experiments” had succeeded’ (Lewis 1976:1, Output 1). In the Bristol Channel Report I made clear my disagreement with Rediffusion over its decision not to commission social scientific research before and during the station’s lifetime, its decision to close down the station at a week’s notice before the end of the three year licence period, and in its interpretation of the results as a ‘failure’. The ‘failure’, as Halloran, in two Council of Europe reports (Halloran 1975a, 1975b), was right to surmise, was that the cable industry was unable to

persuade the Labour governments of 1974 to allow them to use pay-TV to win back the disappearing subscribers.

‘Rediffusion claimed to be interested in the community aims of local television, but gave little indication of understanding what it was all about...It is possible that they got out because, following a change of government, they saw less chance of being able to use cable in different ways to make the money they had anticipated when they first agreed to participate.’

(Halloran 1975b: 26)¹¹

Most of the other cable stations were also closed at short notice in 1975 by the companies that owned them. While in their public statements, Rediffusion ‘claimed, in closing the Bristol station, that the experiment had served its purpose and had provided them with the experience and information they required’ (Halloran, op.cit.26), the cable industry’s representative body, the Cable Television Association in which Rediffusion took a leading role, propagated the view of the episode as a failure and their interpretation was the one accepted by the mainstream media and successive governments. The Bristol Channel Report provides evidence of success in terms of community participation, and the University of Leicester’s research on *Swindon Viewpoint* (Croll & Husband 1975), discussed by Halloran (Halloran 1975a and b) is an authoritative substantiation of the claim, advanced by successive campaigns, that small-scale community media serve an important role at local level.

It has been necessary to dwell on this historical moment because of its significance, on the one hand, in creating the myth of ‘failure’ that has played a part in the reluctance over the years of British authorities – and mainstream media - to take community media seriously; and, on the other hand, in providing the disappointments and the positive discoveries that sustained three decades of activism and policy intervention.

For officialdom did not completely reject the community media argument. The Annan Committee on the Future of Broadcasting visited Bristol Channel in January 1975, three months before its closure, and heard volunteers and representatives of community organisations emphasis the value they attached to their experience of working with the station. Along with other evidence and the record of *Swindon Viewpoint*, this played a part in Annan’s recommendations about local radio that were taken up by the Community Communications Group (COMCOM)¹² and found their way into official discourse in subsequent decades. This thread of recognition is discussed further under the heading of

¹¹ Professor James Halloran, then Director of the University of Leicester’s Centre for Mass Communication Research, records my initial approach to secure the Leicester Centre’s involvement and Rediffusion’s refusal, as well as the dismissal by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications of his request that a comparative study of all five cable stations be commissioned (Halloran 1975a:5). His discussion of Bristol Channel (Halloran 1975b:23-27) draws on an interview with me.

¹² COMCOM was formed in February 1977. Besides acting as an information exchange, its aims included campaigning for adequate funding for community media, for the statutory right to local community ownership of broadcast stations, for statutory right of access to and participation in national, regional and local communication services. See Section 5 below for further details of COMCOM’s interventions.

Policy in Section 5 below.

The rest of the British story can be found in the submitted outputs¹³. The eventual outcome of campaigns was the creation in 2004 of a community radio sector, while the case for community television has yet to be accepted

The North American experience made a significant impression on European practitioners and activists. The Canadian *Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle* was particularly influential, both on the philosophy and practice of Swindon Viewpoint and Bristol Channel among the British cable projects (Halloran 1975a & b; Lewis 1976:18, Output 1) and in mainland Europe where Italian and French video producers responded to the project's francophone side and the political radicalism of Quebec (Lewis 1978:7-8, Output 2; Lewis 1972 a-d, B 2-5; Lewis & Booth 1989:139 Output 8; Lewis & Jones 2006:17, Output 17).

By the end of the 1970s, radio had become the most prominent expression of community media in Europe, whether in the *radios libres* of Italy, France and Belgium, or in the more ordered devolution in Scandinavia and the Netherlands. By the mid-1980s, the French radio landscape included, alongside a burgeoning commercial sector, a sector of community radio (*radios associatives*), officially regulated and funded by a levy on the profits of the commercial sector. Community radio developed in various guises and with differing means of support across Europe, struggling in post-communist Eastern and Central Europe, and finally, after three decades of campaigning, achieving recognition in the UK at the turn of the millennium.

The founding conference of AMARC in Montreal in 1983¹⁴ was important in establishing global connections between community radio practitioners and activists in different parts of the world, and for academic researchers. AMARC-Europe, which had during the 1990s made several submissions to EU policy consultations as well as being active in securing funding for support in Central and Eastern Europe, had by the early part of the new millennium faded away, and an important new actor on the scene was the Community Forum for Europe (CMFE) with strong input from Austria and the Netherlands¹⁵. CMFE pressure on the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament led to the Committee's commissioning a member of the Committee, Austrian MEP Karin Resetarits, to produce a report which was successfully submitted for the approval of the full Parliament. The Restarits report stressed that 'community media are an effective means to strengthen cultural and linguistic diversity, social inclusion and local identity' (European Parliament 2008, recommendation no.1) and urged Member States and the European Commission itself to do more to support the sector.

¹³ Lewis 1978 Output 2, Lewis & Booth 1989 Output 8, Gray & Lewis 1992 Output 9, Lewis 2008c Output 22

¹⁴ AMARC is the French acronym now generally used for the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (www.amarc.org/). [Accessed 12/03/10]. Nowadays AMARC has a presence in most regions of the world.

¹⁵ <http://www.cmfe.eu/>. [Accessed 12/03/10].

Meanwhile, beyond Europe, UNESCO'S interest had brought a global dimension to the nascent field. At a time when it was deeply engaged in the NWICO¹⁶ debate at the global level, UNESCO's seminars in Belgrade (for which I acted as *rapporteur*, see Lewis 1978a, B24) and Quito (Appendix C13) and its commissioning of studies of community media (Berrigan 1977; Bordenave 1977) promoted ideas and examples from Europe and Latin America. In the latter region, radio schools, miners' radio and 'popular' radio had a history whose academic discussion was for a long time little noticed in Europe (Lewis & Jones 2006:19-20, Output 17). UNESCO's intervention and support for local projects was in many places successful (Lewis 1984c, Output 7) and on occasions a failure, for example in Kenya (Lewis 1993b:19, Output 11).

While the electronic media and particularly the community radio phenomenon were more noticeable in this period, other media continued to be important elements of the field. Community press and alternative publishing initiatives in the Arab world, in India, Japan and the UK feature in the edited UNESCO study of urban community media (Lewis 1984c); women's journals in Morocco and the alternative press in Belarus are the subject of contributions in *Alternative Media: Linking Global and Local* (Lewis 1993b, Output 11). Street theatre (India) and popular drama (Jamaica), and, in the Indian *yatra*, traditional media are also represented in the two publications. The internet, which has by now effected the most important transformation of media since the invention of printing, appears in the form of pre-history in Lewis 1993b Chapter 9 (Output 11) and in discussions of internet use in Trinidad and of Indymedia in the *Alternative Media* module (Lewis 2006c, Output 19).

3. The field: academic context

Academic engagement with community media followed a sequence of overlapping stages as the field came to be constituted. First came practice - a form of direct action which challenged the assumptions, values and practices of mainstream media and in which, as in all practice, theory was implicit. Next came description, sometimes in the form of a rescue operation to place on record a project whose ephemeral existence and lack of funds to carry out research meant that the experience risked oblivion (this was one of the main aims of the Bristol Channel report). At the same time, demarcation was necessary. Here the need was to classify adjacent types of media practice in order to establish the boundaries of the community media field. Thus, in the submitted output, the claim of BBC local radio to be 'serving neighbourhood and nation'¹⁷ needed to be challenged (Lewis 1983, Output 4); the relationship to 'access broadcasting' clarified (Lewis 1984a, Output 5), and pirate origins explored (Lewis 2008b, Output 21).

Much of the exercise involved challenging 'myth' (Barthes 1976) to counter official histories with a revisionist version. So in *The Invisible Medium* the failings of BBC and commercial local radio were presented, as they still are, as a major plank in the case for community radio (Lewis & Booth 1989, Output 8). Another official history, the cable

¹⁶ New World Information and Communication Order

¹⁷ The title of a BBC pamphlet on local radio (BBC 1977) and used in the title of Chapter 6 in Lewis & Booth 1989, Output 8).

industry's version of the 1970s local programming pilots, has, as we have seen, been less successfully challenged and accounts in part for the shortcomings of contemporary government policy in relation to community radio, discussed in Section 5.

To anticipate, the founding of the Radio Studies Network¹⁸ in 1998, an example followed by similar subject associations in France and Ireland, the launch of *The Radio Journal*¹⁹ in 2003 and the growth of a European-wide community of radio researchers encouraged originally by the *IREN* project (2004-2006) and, since 2008, by the Radio Research Section of ECREA²⁰ have done much to raise the profile of radio within academic study. At the same time these initiatives to improve the status of radio extended the arena for research and publication on community media.

Another strand of coverage of community media was commissioned by the Council of Europe through its Committee for Out-of-School Education and Cultural Development. Throughout the 1970s this programme resulted in reports on a range of European projects, available in English and French²¹, intended as Jankowski notes, 'as materials for policy debate and decision-making by European governments' (Jankowski 1991:166). The Council of Europe had yet to acquire the weight of influence in media matters it later gained but what it did achieve, since the reports' authors were brought together in meetings to discuss them, was the creation across Europe of a community of interest in the subject – it was too soon to call it a research community.

Unfortunately the distribution policy of the Council of Europe, like that of UNESCO, was woefully ineffective, both then and now, when archival access is almost impossible. The result is the works are little known in the UK. Yet the repeated refusal in the same period of British publishers to recognise the community media field meant that recourse to these international outlets was the only available publishing strategy.

Armand Mattelart and Jean-Marie Piemme were not associated with the Council of Europe programme, and their important theoretical and, in this early period, rare contribution to the field in a *Media Culture & Society* issue on Alternative Media (Mattelart & Piemme 1980), was limited in its examples to Belgian and French community television and 'alternative radio'. It was the omission in their article of any experience outside those countries that prompted my response in the same journal (Lewis

¹⁸ The *Radio Studies Network* was recently affiliated as a Network within MECCSA (Media Communication and Cultural Studies Association, the representative UK organisation for the overall field) <http://www.meccsa.org.uk/radio-studies-network/> [Accessed 12/03/10].

¹⁹ *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media* http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-Journal_id=123/ [Accessed 12/03/10].

²⁰ IREN, an international radio research network funded between 2004-2006 by the EC's FP6 within the thematic priority 7 "Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge Society", and in research domain: "New forms of citizenship and cultural identities". After the end of the project IREN partners formed the Radio Research Section in ECREA, the European Communications and Research in Education Association, <http://sections.ecrea.eu/RR/>. [Accessed 12/03/10].

²¹ Beaud 1980 is a summary of the reports and includes a complete bibliographical list, but the listed publications and Beaud's report are rarely to be found in public library collections and perhaps can only be successfully accessed through contact with the Council of Europe's archivist in Strasbourg.

1984b, Output 6). ‘Community radio: the Montreal conference and after’ was a reference to the founding conference of AMARC in Montreal in 1983, the kind of event where the first-hand accounts of community media practitioners, delivered usually in spoken interventions, provided material for subsequent publication as case studies.

The Local Radio and Television Group, formed at the IAMCR’s²² Paris conference in 1982 became an important base for the development of theory and its first published outcome, *The People’s Voice* (Jankowski et al 1992), was edited by researchers from the Netherlands, where Jankowski and colleagues had been carrying out qualitative research since the mid-1970s, and from Denmark where government policy in relation to community media was enlightened and well developed. In the same year, Girard’s *A Passion for Radio*, an AMARC project, provided a useful collection of case studies (Girard 1992). Till then, with the exception of *The Invisible Medium* (Lewis & Booth 1989, Output 8), the only academic notice of community media had been in Downing’s 1984 edition of *Radical Media* (Downing 1984) which included first-hand accounts of KPFA and Radio Popolare, Milan, and a few pages in Crisell’s *Understanding Radio* (1986).

It was not until the beginning of the millennium that the new wave of academic interest appeared and since then new publications have appeared almost yearly.²³ But the timing of this interest prompts the question: why did it take so long to appear, and why at that moment? I have suggested that Atton and Couldry, writing in 2003, may have been right in offering four reasons ‘why alternative media might now be emerging from the margins of scholarly attention’. They point to the revival of social activism, often on a global scale and using non-mainstream media production linked to the Internet; the apathy towards, or commercial appropriation of, conventional democratic processes; the recent increased interest of international agencies in local empowerment within development projects. A fourth reason, they think, might be a ‘loss of momentum’ in certain ‘critical traditions’ within media and cultural studies (Atton & Couldry 2003:579-580, cited in Lewis & Jones 2006:29, Output 17).

The commentary so far has covered the historical and academic contexts within which

²² The acronym now stands for International Association for Media and Communication Research but at that time ‘Mass Communication’ were the words in the title, revealingly indicative of an emphasis which left little room for interest in small-scale media.

²³ In chronological order, the main contributions are Mitchell 2000 (women’s radio), Atton 2001 (alternative media with particular attention to print publication), Downing 2001 (radical and ‘rebellious communication and social movements’), Fraser & Restrepo Estrada 2001 (a UNESCO handbook of good practice in community radio), Gumucio Dagron 2001 (a global range of case studies preceded by an important introduction written from a Latin American perspective), Rodriguez 2001 (‘citizen’s media’), Jankowski with Prehn 2002 (theorising ‘community media in the information age’), Couldry & Curran 2003 (*Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World*), Atton 2004 (*An Alternative Internet*), Howley 2005 (‘people, places and technologies’), Rennie 2006 (a ‘global introduction’ to community media bringing together theory and practice), Cammaerts & Carpentier 2007 (citizenship, participation, journalism and activism), Coyer et al 2007 (history, theory, activism and DIY media), Buckley et al 2008 (‘a public interest approach to policy law and regulation’), Day 2008 (Irish community radio viewed through Enzensberger’s multi-flow concept), Howley 2010 (community media from theoretical, empirical and practitioner perspectives).

the field of community media was developed. It has identified a first stage of description, categorisation and demarcation of the field, and noted that stages overlap so that reflection and empirical fieldwork (case studies) are also to be found at this stage. In the next section I will identify a number of themes which provide a coherent thread throughout the submitted work.

4. Theoretical perspectives

In a number of aspects the Bristol Channel report contained within it the seeds of later theoretical development and provides a starting point for the discussion. It was an example, cited by Jankowski (Jankowski 1991:167) of what in the research literature on community media he categorises as ‘reflective essays, often intended for policy discussions’ (ibid p.164). The refusal of Rediffusion to commission independent, academic research (Lewis 1976: iv,17, 29, Output 1), already referred to, was one of the motives for undertaking the study: at least, I thought, a first-hand account would be available. The report used recent experience and documents (station records, personal diary) in a method which might now be classed as ethnographic. The work made reference to sociological studies of broadcasting (Burns 1969; Elliott 1972)²⁴, but there was no attempt to develop a theoretical framework.

Training and pedagogy

Both the pedagogical philosophy used in Bristol Channel and summarised in the IBA report, and the methodological approach used to compile it, were developed from my experience of teaching and of the research methods used in broadcast television. The former drew on the experience of teaching practical skills in a London comprehensive school, subsequently reported in *Screen* (Lewis 1970, B1),²⁵ the latter adopted the holistic research methods which were standard practice in documentary and current affairs programming. Freire and Illich²⁶ are both referenced in the report, and the absorption of Freire’s pedagogy in the practice and discussion of training volunteers is evident.

An appreciation of this pedagogical approach, implicit in the work of *Challenge for Change*, was evident in my *New Society* article (Lewis 1972a, B2) and explains the importance I attached to the Knowle West project within Bristol Channel’s work. To make the point clear, it is worth quoting at length from the Bristol Channel report:

‘Bristol Channel was interested in finding an area where the use of portable television by ordinary people might lead, as it has done

²⁴ Burns pp. 65, 76; Elliott p.77

²⁵ It was only later that I encountered the German version of ‘action-oriented pedagogy’ discussed in Günnel’s chapter (Günnel 2006) in Lewis & Jones 2006 (Output 17). At this time, British study of media at secondary school level was being developed within the subject field of English in an approach summed up by Masterman (1980).

²⁶ Freire pp.77, 92; Illich p.78. A reference to Schumacher’s book (Schumacher 1973) is clear in the title, ‘Small is Viable’ (Lewis 1975c, B9), given (by a sub-editor) to an article which was published in the BBC’s weekly, *The Listener*, and which formed the basis for Chapter 18 in the Bristol Channel report.

in cities in Britain and North America, to greater social cohesion and more effective communication between groups and the responsible authorities. A number of Bristol Channel programmes, made by staff or outside groups, had, like broadcast documentaries, descended on city-wide problems for just so long as it was necessary to portray them on television. The trouble was that all too often no solution to the problem followed and the programme-makers turned their attention to another topic. Often, too, it was the most articulate and forward whose views were featured in the programmes. Bristol Channel wanted to see what would happen if a portapak was made continuously available on terms decided by local people... Our reason for starting a project of this kind was that television, like schooling, seems to confer advantages on the already advantaged – the articulate middle-class. There was no lack in Bristol of pressure groups wanting airtime or enthusiastic volunteers willing to help in production – and we welcomed them. But the real importance and challenge of television on our small-scale seemed likely to be measured by the amount we were used by people who were not basically inclined to express an opinion or leave their firesides (and tellies) to join in communal activity – the silent majority... The point of using television in this way... is to give ordinary people a powerful new means of expression, a self-confidence in their own point of view and an interest in making it heard... The result, hopefully, is a greater participation in democracy and a more critical attitude to the environment, particularly that large part of it which is broadcast television.’

(Lewis 1976:123-4)²⁷

The corollary was a challenge to broadcasting professionals, first offered in my appearance on BBC TV’s *Open Door* a few days before *Bristol Channel* opened:

‘I am not saying that it’s time to dissolve the monasteries of broadcasting, only that the monks should wake up to the fact that people outside the walls *can* learn to read and write, and manuscripts don’t all have to be illuminated.’²⁸

The ‘Knowle West manifesto’ is markedly Freirean in its description of what Freire called the ‘culture of silence’. To help break this silence he proposed a democracy of communication between teacher and student, a dialogue in which students were encouraged to ‘name their own reality’, a process assisted by a ‘de-codification’ of the dominant reality and a ‘codification’ which is meaningful to them (Freire 1972, ch 3).

²⁷ What became known as the ‘Knowle West manifesto’ was first written as a paper given at the *Women and Media* conference in Bristol, July 1974 (Appendix C, No 3), where women from the Knowle West TV Workshop also gave a presentation. Parts of it were incorporated in a report commissioned by the Council of Europe and published in 1975, *Knowle West and Bristol Channel TV a study in community programming on a cable television network* (B8). The Bristol Channel report quotes from the original text.

²⁸ The quotation in a slightly different form appears in Lewis 1978: 74. The *Open Door* talk from which this sentence is taken was reprinted in the industry publication *Broadcast* (Lewis 1973, B6).

Freire used photographic slides, Bristol Channel used video, and a study I carried out two decades later for AMARC-Europe on training in five European countries showed a similar approach being used for community radio (Lewis 1994c, B 65).

“Conscientization” was Freire’s term for the process (Freire 1972). In the early 1970s “consciousness-raising” was feminist usage for a similar self-development. Masterman in his book *Teaching About Television* drew on Freire’s notion of conscientization to suggest that working-class pupils could find, through practical television study, ‘an authentic voice’. ‘Only when pupils value their own language, background and personalities and are not demeaned by them, will they recover their eagerness for expression’ (Masterman 1980:141 cited in Lewis & Jones 2006:23, Output 17).

Much later, I described this kind of conscientization in reporting what has been standard practice in European community radio and has fed into the syllabus of a series of EU-funded projects²⁹ whose aim has been to provide –

‘the training needed for the effective use of radio by social groups whose voices are rarely heard in mainstream media. Community radio is ...potentially a means to bridge the “digital divide”, offering, as most stations now do, access to digital and web technology. But technical skills are not in themselves sufficient to bring people across this bridge. Those whose opinions are rarely given a hearing may have forgotten, or never learned, how to express them. If technical training is combined with research, production and presentation skills, which community radio routinely offers, the experience can also equip people with a self-confidence that is motivating. It can lead to employment – not necessarily in the media – and a fuller participation in today’s information society.’

(Lewis & Jones 2006:6)

To illustrate the continuity or coherence of this theme, we can go back thirty years to the Bristol Channel report’s discussion of ‘the making of a finished programme’:

‘The decisions and compromises implicit in this two-way accountability – to viewers and to the material – are part of a process which is fundamental to programme-making [and] from which the greatest insights are gained: direct experience of the process leads to a questioning of the criteria by which the traditional explainers – whether politicians or media professionals – interpret ‘reality’, and indeed their qualifications to do so.’

(Lewis 1976: 63).

Media and cultural studies

²⁹ See Appendix D and <http://www.crosstalk-online.de/>. [Accessed 12/03/10]. The partners involved in the current project, *Crosstalk*, come from Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland and the UK.

The submitted outputs that date from 1980 onwards show evidence of my immersion in media and cultural studies at Goldsmiths – for example, Lewis 1981 (Output 3), whose sub-title is a quotation from Adorno and Horkheimer (Adorno & Horkheimer 1977: 361), but whose argument used recent (at that time) British developments in audience studies to counter the Frankfurt School pessimism and suggest a role for community radio in opposing multinational trends in entertainment. Lewis 1984a (Output 5), ‘Whatever happened to Access?’ presumes to offer a lecture on media studies to an audience mainly composed of broadcasters. Later outputs draw on critiques of journalistic practice, on studies of international news flow, cultural imperialism and the political economy of mass media, as well as on development theory.

Without always being explicitly referenced, these approaches influenced my writing. Lewis 1993a (Output 10), addressed to an Eastern European readership, proposed community radio as ‘a third way’ and expressed the hope that this form of radio might be ‘a hedgerow against the winds of transnational cultural erosion’ (op.cit. p. 218)³⁰. In *Alternative Media: Linking Global and Local* (Lewis 1993b, Output 11), I described alternative media as ‘antibodies produced as a protection against the neglect, insensitivity and insanity of the conventional media’ (op.cit. p.15), a phrase picked up and cited in UNESCO’s *Community Media Handbook* (Fraser & Restrepo Estrada 2001:7). This Output’s discussion of the relevance of Freire (1972) and Habermas³¹ to alternative media and its taxonomy of the latter were unknown to most of the new wave of academic interest from the turn of the millennium onwards³².

Describing this period, Atton writes of

‘the emergence of cultural studies in Britain...[which] led to a far more holistic, theoretically complex and situated project of social research into the mass media. [...] Society, its institutions and the groups and individuals that constituted them came to be seen through this multi-perspectival lens of culture, subculture, ideology and hegemony.’

(Atton 2004:2)

The new wave of academic study of community media provides many examples of the mix that Atton describes, as well as studies located in a number of other perspectives. (Footnote 23 above lists only book publications and not the growing number of journal articles in the field). For the most part, the use of theory in my published output before

³⁰ The subject had been more fully developed in a paper to a Swedish conference in 1981, B 42.

³¹ In Lewis 1993b (Output 11) I drew on an extract from Habermas’s discussion of the public sphere published in Mattelart, A. & Siegelau, S. (eds) (1979) *Communications and Class Struggle*. Vol 1. New York and Bagnolet, France: IG/IMMRC, and on James Curran’s Rethinking the Media as a Public Sphere. In Dahlgren, P. & Sparks, C. (eds) (1991) *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere in the New Media Age*. London & New York: Routledge. By the time I wrote Lewis 2002a (Output 12) other re-workings and critiques of Habermas were in circulation.

³² An exception can be found in *Understanding Alternative Media* in which Cammaerts and Carpentier adapt and develop my taxonomy in their discussion of ‘four approaches to alternative media’ (Bailey et al 2008: 18-19).

this period (that is, up to the end of the 1990s) was one might call pragmatic: I chose to use theory to explain aspects of the field, rather than setting out to develop an overarching theory.

The ‘object of study’ to which these theoretical contextualisations have been applied goes well beyond ‘practice’. In my essay ‘Radio theory and community radio’ (Lewis 2002a, Output 12) I grouped potential research areas into the traditional divisions of production, text and audience, noting that there was a significant absence of studies in the last area³³, and again pointed to public sphere theory as helpful in explaining the nature of a community radio station’s relationship with the community it serves. A paper delivered the same year ‘Whose experience counts? Evaluating participatory media’ (Lewis 2002b, Output 13), took this idea further in relation to Hochheimer’s discussion of ‘democratic praxis’ (Hochheimer 1993). In *From the Margins*, I pointed to post-hegemonic theory, public sphere theory and Freirean pedagogy as key areas of theory which could assist in explaining community media (Lewis & Jones 2006: 29-33, Output 17).

A more comprehensive division of research fields was proposed by Jankowski. Summarising work done with his Dutch colleagues on theoretical models and methods for research on community media (e.g. Hollander, Stappers & Janowski 2002), he identified four ‘arenas’ – organisation, product, users and environment - and suggested a set of detailed research headings for each ‘arena’. In a further discussion, Jankowski noted that

‘work on the contribution of community media to the public or counter public sphere could ... benefit from efforts to construct empirical studies that take operationalized versions of this concept as their starting point.’

(Jankowski 2003: 10).

Evaluation methodology

The Bristol Channel Report records my regret that the station was unable to secure the kind of social scientific research which evaluated *Swindon Viewpoint*. I returned to the question of impact assessment in 2001 in a paper for the Bordeaux Colloquium, subsequently published in a book of conference papers (Lewis 2003, Output 14) and in which I instanced the Leicester research on Swindon as a good but forgotten example of appropriate method. The following year, at the Barcelona IAMCR conference, I drew on the experience of the EU training projects mentioned above, and on my work in Sri Lanka to pilot ethnographic action research (Appendix D para.8; Slater, Tacchi & Lewis (2002), B 75), to make the point that ‘participatory media deserve a participatory method of assessment’ (Lewis 2002b:1, Output 13).

As a result of the Sri Lanka pilot, ethnographic action research (EAR) has become the approved evaluation method in a number of UNESCO-funded projects in South Asia (Slater & Tacchi 2004). As evaluator of a series of EU-funded projects (Appendix D,

³³ Downing 2003 develops the same point.

para. 9) I have adapted it to assess training; the experience, and some of the problems associated with the evaluation of small-scale projects, are discussed in Chapter 9 of Lewis & Jones 2006 (Output 17). Key aspects of the approach include (a) the range of methods used - observation, interviews, diaries, questionnaire-based sample surveys, scrutiny of public documents and media content analysis – that assist in the attempt to understand the whole ‘communicative ecology’ of a local context rather than focussing exclusively on the project itself; (b) the attempt to establish a *research culture* within a project that allows the ‘subjects’ of research to acquire the capacity to *self-evaluate* their work, rather than thinking about research as an activity that happens *to* them.

Revisionist histories

An integral part of defining a field and opening up a discursive space in which it can be recognised is the telling and re-telling of history. This repeated element in the submitted work was not repetitive for the readerships or audiences to whom specific papers and publications were addressed; each set of readers/listeners had to be introduced to aspects of the story that linked to their interest, experience or academic field. These histories, present in almost every one of the submitted outputs, can broadly be assigned to one of three groups:

(1) *histories which are revisionist in their challenge to official histories*. The chief example is *The Invisible Medium* (Lewis & Booth 1989, Output 8) which offered a critical account of the BBC’s early development in deliberate contrast to that of the BBC’s official historian, Asa Briggs, and went on to provide, what had not existed till then, a critical history of the BBC local radio. ‘Who needs Community Media?’ (Lewis 1983, Output 4) was an earlier version of the local radio critique. Both Outputs 1 and 2 countered the cable industry’s version of the cable TV pilots’ history.

(2) *histories of projects or periods which might otherwise have gone unrecorded, a parallel with rescue archaeology*. The Bristol Channel report is one example (Lewis 1976, Out put 1), the account of CBC in Cardiff another (Lewis & Booth 1989: 108-114, Out put 8). My contributions to Gray & Lewis 1992 (Output 9) chronicle the pre-history of community radio in the UK and the campaigns to gain recognition for the genre. This history is updated in the first part of Lewis 2008c (Output 22).

(3) *Successive historical summaries written for specific readerships or at particular historical moments*. Examples: Lewis 1984a (Output 5) on Access; Lewis 1993b (Output 11) a history of alternative media and the international communication debates; this last topic was included in a retrospective summary of community media advocacy in Lewis 2005b (Output 16); Chapter 2 in Lewis & Jones 2006 (Output 17); Lewis 2008b (Output 21) on the link between piracy and community radio.

This section has shown the main theoretical perspectives covered in the submitted work and in doing so has demonstrated a consistency of themes, as well as the kind of evolution in their treatment that is to be expected over a long period.

5. Policy

This section summarises those publications in which policy is a main concern and, since ‘policy impact’ is now an expected outcome of much of the research funded by research councils, attempts also to trace policy outcomes.

The policy recommendations in the Bristol Channel report were mostly of a generalised kind: arguing the advantages of small-scale in answering local needs and the benefits of encouraging participation in the production of appropriate media material. The report’s argument had at the time a significance as a lone voice opposing the cable industry’s verdict on the cable pilots as one of ‘failure’. As we have seen, local programming had failed to stem the haemorrhage of subscribers as terrestrial broadcast transmissions improved in quality, and the cable companies failed to persuade the Labour governments of 1974 to allow pay-TV. For those in the five pilot areas who had experienced the offered access, however, and for those who had assisted them, the episode was anything but a failure and proved to be the bedrock inspiration for a thirty-year campaign for community radio.

The most important policy outcome from the Annan Report was the creation, under the succeeding Conservative Government, of Channel 4, a modified version of Annan’s ‘Open Broadcasting Authority’ idea. The main focus of COMCOM’s activity, quite soon after its formation in 1977, moved to radio and Annan’s proposal for a Local Broadcasting Authority was supported in its *Comments* on Annan (COMCOM 1977). Although the idea for a separate authority for local radio was never going to overcome the BBC’s objections, a White Paper in the Labour Government’s last year of office recommended that the IBA should experiment with one or two licence awards to the non-profit trusts that had captured Annan’s approval. The result was the Cardiff licence awarded to CBC in 1979. *The Invisible Medium* includes the only published account of that station’s rise and fall (Lewis & Booth 1989:108-114, Output 8). The success of the community group in winning the Cardiff franchise encouraged other similar bids in a number of other areas (ibid. p.113). None were successful – the regulator IBA was quick to reflect the new (Thatcher) government’s support for the commercial sector – but in each the legacy of community mobilisation led to creative contributions to the community radio campaign.

Meanwhile COMCOM’s Local Radio Working Party had given evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Nationalised Industries which was investigating the IBA. The Committee’s report recommended that

‘future plans for broadcasting in the UK should encompass the possibility of frequency assignments to provide very low-power transmission facilities for voluntary community radio services within small communities.’

(SCNI 1978a: xlix)

This put the idea onto the agenda of the Home Office (the government department then

responsible for broadcasting) and although for a long time the item remained low down in the in-tray, it provided the focus for campaigns which, despite being reported in the literature (e.g. Lewis 1983:206, Output 3; Lewis & Booth 1989:106f, Output 8; Gray & Lewis 1992, Output 9), received little support or notice at the time from other academics. I discuss below possible reasons for this lack of support.

One particular recommendation of the Bristol Channel Report argued that, instead of a ‘compartmentalised view of communications’, the government should set up an ‘interdepartmental committee’, along the lines of the Canadian *Challenge for Change* programme, to support community media – ‘at the moment this area is no-one’s business’ (Lewis 1976: 89/90, Output 1). The article in *The Listener*, on which Chapter 18 was based, ended more succinctly with the suggestion that Lord Annan ‘should mark his report for attention of other ministries besides the Home Office’ (Lewis 1975c, B 9).

More than three decades later this appeal is still being made. The 2007 International Colloquium at London Metropolitan University, *Finding and Funding Voices*, had, as its first conclusion, that

‘Central and local government need to recognise the contribution community media are making to social inclusion, community development and regeneration. The Community Radio sector in particular, now expanding rapidly, needs more support than the DCMS’s Community Radio Fund can provide. Ways must be found, through a range of programmes and through inter-departmental co-operation, to find the funding that enables the delivery of the social gain community radio so manifestly provides.’

(Lewis & Scifo 2007: 63, B 83)

In the week following the Colloquium, *The Guardian* published a letter from a number of participants (reproduced in Appendix G), as well as a letter from me, published two years later, on the same theme. A further six months later, at the end of 2009, Hansard reported an exchange in the House of Lords in which the Government spokesman said:

‘the Minister for Creative Industries has met representatives of the community radio sector to discuss the future of the community radio fund. He has agreed to write to other government departments to highlight the benefits of community radio in delivering wider government objectives and to seek a financial contribution from them to the fund.’³⁴

This concession, which has yet to be transformed into reality, resulted from more than a brief *Guardian* letter. In the intervening period hundreds of community media sympathisers signed a letter to the Prime Minister, and thousands added their names to a petition, both texts requesting the government to find more financial support for the community radio sector. An Early Day Motion in the House of Commons had sent the

³⁴ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldhansrd/text/91215-gc0004.htm> [Accessed 12/03/10]. reporting the debate of 15 December 2009.

same message. These actions were coordinated by the Community Media Association (CMA) and culminated in the meeting with the Minister.

Advocacy on behalf of community media has been more successful at a European level. As already mentioned, the Community Forum for Europe played a key role in pressuring the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament to produce a report supportive of community media. I was consulted by MEP Karin Resetarits, as she prepared the report which was eventually approved by the full Parliament. Meanwhile, I had been commissioned by the Council of Europe's Group of Specialists on Media Diversity (MC-S-MD) to produce a report on 'the role of community media in promoting social cohesion' (Lewis 2008a, Output 20). Social cohesion has been a continuing theme for many years in community media usage. I first used the phrase at the start of the 'Knowle West manifesto' (Lewis 1976:124, Output 1). No longer-term research was possible in Bristol at the time to test the 'hope' expressed then for a resulting 'greater participation in democracy and a more critical attitude to the environment, particularly that large part of it which is broadcast television', but many case studies subsequently published, in Europe, the Americas and the developing world, have provided instances of citizens using media to effect social change (to cite only a few: Berrigan1977; Bordenave1977; Beaud 1980; Downing 2001; Rodriguez 2001; Couldry & Curran 2003; Everitt 2003a, 2003b).

The impact of my Council of Europe report is traceable. A recommendation in the Conclusions (p.32) was for observer status at MC-S-MD meetings for representatives of the CMFE. As a result, the CMFE was invited to assist Council of Europe staff in drafting a Declaration which, with some modifications, was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 February 2009. The text of the Declaration is reproduced as Appendix F and will be found, in its language and argument, to owe a significant debt to the MC-S-MD report, Lewis 2008a (Output 20).

Concluding this section, I turn to the role of academics in policy formation. A widely held view among British media academics is that current government reliance on specialist research agencies and polling organisations is marginalising critical academic policy intervention of a kind that was possible in the period that led to the creation of Channel 4 at the end of the 1970s (Freedman 2008:102). Georgina Born, for example, has noted the increasing difficulty academics experience in intervening in policy debates. In policy-making circles, Born claims, academic research suffers from a 'waning public profile and legitimacy' an indication of which is the fact that 'the role of the public intellectual and policy adviser has been taken over by the increasing numbers of freelance consultants and think tanks' (Born 2008:692). Born's own research in the BBC in the period of John Birt's Director-Generalship confirmed this observation (Born 2004).

Another reason, according to Born, for the failure of academics to make an impression in the policy arena, is 'the closure of channels previously available to academics for communicating policy-relevant findings in the press and political weeklies' (Born 2008: 691). She singles out *The Guardian*³⁵ and *The Independent* whose media sections are

³⁵ The last occasion when an article of mine was published in *The Guardian* was on 11 October, 1997. The

‘staffed by editors whose ‘common-sense’ falls within the neo-liberal consensus and for whom there is comfort and kudos in speaking the same language as the industry – pro-market and pro-corporate...the quality of the media coverage is superficial, collusive and unanalytical.’
(ibid p.693)

Like Freedman, Rennie, in her *Community Media: a Global Introduction*, makes a comparison between academic policy input in the 1970s and the present. She discusses the reasons why the UK community television pioneers ‘found their harshest critics to be working within media studies.’ Noting the commercial motives of the hardware manufacturers and cable companies, she observes that ‘the British school of critical cultural studies, in particular, read community media with suspicion due to the involvement of private interests’ (Rennie 2006: 84).³⁶ Rennie is right: Halloran, whose view of the cable TV pilots is quoted in Section 2 above, was an exception. Garnham’s strongly critical review of my BFI monograph (Lewis 1978, Output 2) exactly illustrates her point (Garnham 1978). A changed political climate, Rennie goes on to note, nowadays favours business and community partnerships (ibid. p.86), yet there is still a relegation to inferior status of community media due to the continuing legacy of the public service broadcasting ethos. This attitude, Rennie argues, cannot any longer be justified, given the ‘decentralized broadcasting environment’ within which public service broadcasting now exists (ibid. p.89).

Rennie’s analysis of the media and cultural studies attitude towards community media is convincing, but it is difficult to recognise her ‘decentralized broadcasting environment’ in the current British context. The BBC’s dominant and central position is evident in both the attacks on the Corporation from its commercial rivals, the recently announced strategic review, viewed by many as a pre-emptive measure before a possible change of government³⁷, and the furore created by the government’s *Digital Britain* report in which use of some of the TV licence for funding services outside the BBC was discussed as one possible option (DCMS/DBIS 2009). This ‘top-slicing’ of revenue regarded as the BBC’s own was taken up strongly by academics in media studies and was the main motive for the formation of a Policy Network within MeCCSA, the Media Communications and Cultural Studies Association, the representative organisation of the subject area in the UK.

MeCCSA, since its founding a little over a decade ago, has maintained important contacts with government research policy. Several members of MeCCSA’s Policy Network, senior academics, have formal consultancy relations with official parts of government, casting doubt in my mind on the accuracy of Freedman and Born’s argument. The concentration of the Policy Network’s effort on defence of the BBC and opposition to proposals for ‘top-slicing’ has sidelined the case for funding that could

article is not listed in Appendix A since it dealt entirely with radio with no mention of community media.

³⁶ A large part of Rennie’s discussion is based on my 1978 BFI report Lewis 1978, Output 2.

³⁷ See, e.g. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/mar/03/bbc-strategic-review-editorial> [Accessed 14/03/10].

secure the community radio sector. I have always felt it important that the ‘local public service role’ of community media should be recognised and I was able to make the point as a member of the group representing MeCCSA which in July 2009 briefed DCMS officials about the reaction to the *Digital Britain* Report (Fenton 2009:16). Still in a minority, I was nevertheless invited to contribute to the MeCCSA newsletter to express an opinion. The selection of this last Output (Lewis 2009, Output 23) serves to make the point that the impact of academic policy intervention as a whole may be limited, but the voices within that sector which speak for community media interests are even more limited, receiving as they do very little support and demonstrating the truth of Rennie’s comments about the inferior status of community media *vis-à-vis* public service broadcasting.

6. Conclusion

When I began writing about community media in 1972, very little else was being published. Hopkins’s Home Office report (Hopkins et al 1973), Berrigan (1977) and Bordenave (1977) were for a long time the only other anglophone publications. Demarcation of the field and descriptive case studies predominated both in the corpus submitted here and in the available literature. Application of theory, at first limited, was expanded to take account of a variety of theoretical perspectives and included the contribution of revisionist histories. From the first, my writings have had policy implications or made explicit interventions in the field both within the submitted outputs and beyond in conferences and mainstream media.

Is it possible to trace an impact resulting from this corpus? One can point to the diffusion of knowledge about community media within the English-speaking world when projects were relatively few in number, when information about them was scarce and when the concept simply did not fit the contemporary discourse within mainstream media. So little was published in this period³⁸ (late 1970s to late 1990s) that it would be hard to track the diffusion of knowledge my work supplied. The main vehicles would have been my article in *Media Culture & Society* (Lewis 1984b, Output 6), the edited UNESCO publication on urban community media (Lewis 1984c, Output 7) which like all UNESCO publications was published in French and Spanish as well as English, and *The Invisible Medium* (Lewis & Booth 1989, Output 8) which is indeed cited frequently in later literature. Its publication in Spanish in 1991 gave it wider reach and was presumably why I was commissioned by Fundesco in Madrid to contribute twice to its Annual Report *Comunicación Social/Tendencias* (Lewis 1991a, B 57 and Lewis 1994b, B 64). Another publication in this period may have had an influence: the module on Alternative Media, first written in 1995 for the University of Leicester’s MA in Mass MA in Mass Communications by Distance Learning (Lewis 2006b, Output 19) was part of a Master’s degree that was taken by many foreign students over the years and was in sufficient demand for an updated revision to be commissioned in 2006.

³⁸ Exceptions include Downing’s first version of *Radical Media* (Downing 1984), *The People’s Voice* (Jankowski et al 1992) and Girard’s *A Passion for Radio* (Girard 1992).

Some recognition of my contribution can be found in the new wave of academic interest in community media from the start of the millennium onwards. In addition to the works already referred to in Section 3 above, Howley discusses Lewis 1984b (Output 6) and Lewis & Booth 1989 (Output 8) (Howley 2005: 4, 50); UNESCO's *Community Radio Handbook* quotes Lewis & Booth 1989 (Output 8) and Lewis 1993b (Output 11) (Fraser & Restrepo Estrada 2001: 4, 7); *The Alternative Media Handbook* cites Lewis & Booth 1989 (Output 8) and Lewis 2002a (Output 12), as well as the AMARC-Europe report (Lewis 1994c, B 65) on a survey of employment trends and training needs (Coyer et al 2007: 335).³⁹

Yet to seek evidence of impact may be to pose the question in too crude a form. Anna Green, in an article which criticises cultural theorists and historians for overemphasising collective memory, asks 'can individual memories challenge dominant narratives?' (Green 2004: 41). The question reflects the continuing debate among oral historians about the extent to which individual memories are "scripted" by contemporary culture. Certainly the outputs submitted here reflect the different periods in which they were written and my own development as a practitioner turned academic seeking theoretical interpretation of my experience. In explaining this development the commentary has not been centrally concerned with memory although the work, as I began by pointing out, is certainly affected or coloured by memory or 'structures of feeling', in Raymond Williams's phrase (Williams 1984:64). My claim is that my writing also worked in the other direction, contributing to a collective memory, that of the community media movement if not of MeCCSA colleagues. So here those "extra-curricular" elements once again come into play, those interactions that took place which cannot be reviewed (because this is not a history of three decades of advocacy) but which are nevertheless part of the context: my contributions to conferences (Appendix C), the reviews of my publications, my letters to the press (e.g. Appendix G), the sixteen issues of *Relay* magazine (Appendix B 43; Appendix D, para B.2) which debated community radio issues through the 1980s, requests for me to be External Examiner of PhDs (see Appendix E: eight out of the eleven theses were concerned with local and community radio), my role in founding the Radio Studies Network (Appendix D, para. B 6), and of *IREN* (Appendix D, para. B 7) had consequences which fall outside the evidence of a submitted output but which provided the context in which that output was received.

This commentary has discussed and offered a context for the submitted outputs, and demonstrated a coherence through a consistent set of themes to be found within them; in the area of policy its argument continues to be highly relevant to the current debate about the importance of community media within the communications ecology. My conclusion is that that the published work not only advanced the field of community media within the discipline of media studies, but played a part in creating it.

³⁹ A notable omission in *The Alternative Media Handbook* is to be found in Alan Fountain's chapter 'Alternative film, video and television 1965 – 2005' in which there is no mention of the 1970s cable stations, an omission which may illustrate Rennie's point about the attitude of British media academics to a commercial enterprise discussed in Section 5.

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