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Linguistic diversity and communication rights: the role of community media in the promotion of regional or minority languages in Europe

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Abstract

According to the UNESCO, the translation and promotion of local languages supports cultural and linguistic diversity and provides a basis for the social, economic and cultural life. However, the globalisation of digital media is having a direct and negative impact on minority languages and cultural diversity. According to EuroLang (2014), there are 60 minority languages in Europe and 50 million people (10 % of European population) communicate through a minority language. In this context, community media play an essential role in the life of these peoples – as the European parliament recognised (2008) – by consolidating their sense of belonging, providing information and becoming a space for the expression of local and/or regional sensitivities. The Third Media Sector also fulfils educational and cultural aims, preserving the local identity of the native language and culture in a contemporary framework. Therefore, community media are indeed social technologies that reinforce pluralism and diversity, not only through the production of radio or TV content, but through democratic and participatory processes that support and reinforce the European identity and cultural wealth through the use and promotion of minority languages of Europe.

Keywords

minority languages; community media; linguistic diversity; local identities

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Universal recognition for minority languages not properly implemented. How does globalisation compromise local languages and cultures?

The fundamental right of freedom of expression includes the principles of diversity and pluralism as essential tools for the defence of democracy. However, access to the media is a readily available right for the socially and economically powerful classes, but it is not equally available to minority or indigenous communities. Even these days, recent reports and manifestations from the *United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression* remark the enormous challenges still existing in relation to giving full effect to the right of freedom of expression and access to media, including restrictive legal regimes, as well as commercial, political and social pressures. The right to freedom of expression has historically been limited to disadvantaged groups – women, cultural and language minorities, indigenous people or sexual minorities – in terms of the underrepresentation of these minorities among mainstream media workers, being stereotyped or giving inadequate coverage regarding minority groups.

The international regulation recognises the right of access to media to minorities, excluded groups or indigenous communities, which have the same right to have *quality* media in order to ensure their cultural and linguistic diversity, which includes the right to access and receive information and opinions in their own language. The existing legal framework protects and promotes the citizens' right to communicate and the use of European regional languages, as the Charter of Fundamental Rights (European Union, 2000) or the Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities (OSCE, 1998) recognise. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe, 1995) recognises that “the right to freedom of expression of every person belonging to a national minority includes freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas in the minority language” (article 9.1) and proposes “licensing, without discrimination and based on objective criteria, of sound radio and television broadcasting” (article 9.2), while protecting the person's right to belong to a national minority, creating and using their own media. Besides, the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (Council of Europe, 1992, art. 11) recommended “the creation of at least one radio station and one television channel in the regional or minority languages”.

The Protocol Number 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 2000) protects the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to create media companies, the freedom of individuals and citizens to communicate freely through any medium, and this right, guaranteed by international law, is the main legal framework on which to base claims in support of community radio. However, the mentioned Protocol has not been

implemented in a way that would ensure equal access of minority language speakers to broadcasting licenses, which would enable them to develop media activities in their own languages as part of the special considerations required in order to protect cultural minorities. AMARC (2014) considers that the occurring damage is not limited to the language community but it also affects fundamental individual and subjective rights. According to La Rue (2010), commercial pressures are a threat for public interest information on media, in the sense that that digital media globalisation is having a direct and negative impact on minority languages and cultural diversity. Particularly, the increasing concentration of media ownership by multinational companies will have “serious potential implications for content diversity and detriment of greater diversity and access to public interest media” (La Rue, 2010a, pp. 6-7). In order to reinforce minorities’ access to media, the United Nations former Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Frank La Rue (2010b, pp. 19-20), recommended States to adopt anti-monopoly laws that would prevent undue concentration of media or cross-media ownership and promote community media in order to offset mass media monopolistic practices that have a negative impact on linguistic and cultural diversity.

Language diversity in the European media sector. The role of community media

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The *Report on European languages in danger of extinction and linguistic diversity in the European Union* (François Alfonsi, 2014) calls on the EU and its Member States to pay attention to the endangered status that many European languages find themselves in, and to commit to protection and promotion policies along with the task of preserving the diversity of cultural and linguistic heritage of the Union, by supporting policies for language protection within the linguistic communities. In this sense, the Alfonsi’s report clearly underlines that language revitalisation should be based on efforts developed in various fields, such as mass media and radio broadcasting.

According to the non-profit organisation EuroLang, there are 60 minority language in Europe and 50 million people (10 % of European population) communicate through a minority language. However, their right to be informed or entertained in their own language is not guaranteed by commercial media and sometimes not even by public media. For example, in North Ireland (Belfast), Irish language suffered the hostility of the public authorities for years, being the language activists and community radio stations who kept the language alive. According to the radio activist Fergus Ó hÍr (2014, pp. 14-15), the progress of the Irish language act proposal is still vulnerable. In Belfast, there’s no Irish paper or Irish TV, just a few hours per year on the BBC. Only the community radio “Raidió Fáilte” broadcasts 24/7 in Irish language. Other regional minority languages in Europe, like Breton language, Occitan, Corsican,

Alsacian or Catalan (in France), seem to be going through media discrimination or lack of public protection, as some experts remark (Hicks, 2014).

In Spain, the use of regional languages in mass media is not equal. Spanish language is the most used in the public and commercial media of Galicia, Basque Country, Navarra, Catalonia, Valencia or Illes Balears, all of them regions where territorial languages have a co-official status. However, the presence of local and regional culture contents in mass media, such as traditional music and cultural broadcasts, has been reduced. In June 2015, public radio “Radio Galega” – which is the only radio station that uses Galician language in all its productions – cancelled its most relevant radio production on traditional and Galician music, called “Planeta Furancho”, without proposing any similar alternative in Galicia. In response, several citizens’ protests tried to rescue the programme without succeed (Praza Pública, 2015).

European experts (Hicks, 2014) have outlined the positive sociolinguistic effects of community radio in terms of language revitalisation within the framework of associated linguistic. Contrasting with the concentration of property in global media enterprises and the depletion of public media, community media (Third Media Sector) are remarkable instruments for cultural and linguistic diversity. The third media sector has been a useful instrument for minority cultural groups in terms of expression and information, a tool for intercultural dialogue that strengthens cultural and linguistic diversity, social inclusion and local identity (European Parliament, 2008). Community media promote intercultural dialogue through the education of audiences and play a significant role in training programmes and in the provision of media literacy to citizens through direct participation in the creation and dissemination of content (Lewis, 2008; Lema Blanco, 2015). In the absence of public and commercial media in certain European regions, community media provides the main source of information in the local language, becoming

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the only voice and source of local news and information in many areas, acting as local public service media. As commercial radio reduce its local content, uses news agencies and syndicated productions and tends towards media concentration, community media constitute a key tool in ensuring pluralism and diversity in media. (Lema Blanco, 2014)

Third Media Sector in Europe faces three very specific problems approaching regional minority language radio stations in Europe: funding, frequencies and rights. “Many regional minority language communities are facing a systematic contravention of their rights to a radio station in their own language which is a matter that needs to be addressed urgently” (Hicks, 2014, p. 25). Due to the lack of support by national and regional authorities in most European countries, the sector struggles to survive with very little resources and support, “the standing of community media has deteriorated in the issuing of licenses or frequencies to Community Broadcasters” (Galiana in AMARC Europe, 2014). As AMARC reported, community media sector is facing technical and financial restrictions that do not apply to commercial and public local services: restrictive catchment areas for broadcasting licenses (e.g. in Spain), imposition of a cap on community media budgets (in France) or draconian regulation that lead to the closure of community stations (Hungary). Also, the role of the European Commission is being discussed: despite the positive effects that community media have on media literacy and cultural and language education (all of these are European Union goals), AMARC claims that the European institutions establish technical and financial requirements that rules non-profit community radio out of applying for European funding. Moreover, there is no common framework in the European Union that recognizes and guarantees the right of access to media in equal conditions within the UE context, as well as the right of development, growth and sustainability of community media projects, as the next section will explain (AMARC Europe in Hicks, 2014, pp. 36-38).

Audiovisual regulation and community media. The Spanish case in the European context.

The new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), social networks and participatory journalism are bringing to light news and opinions aside the usual and well-known “gatekeepers”. This situation reveals the contradictions of the official discourses delivered by traditional politicians, parties and media. A good example of this are the videos streamed in real time by alternative or community media, showing facts and actions that the authorities deny the next day in the front page of the top selling newspapers (Díaz Muriana & Meda González, 2015, p. 271).

Nowadays, since this kind of media has become an essential part of the democracy and the information system is absolutely necessary to create a legal framework within the EU context (regional, national and also international), which protects and regulates this activity. Indeed, different international regulations and recommendations have addressed this topic:

- Freedom of Expression Rapporteurs of the UN, OAS, OSCE and the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR),

International Declaration on diversity in broadcasting (12 December 2007).

- European Parliament Resolution of 25 September 2008 on Community Media in Europe (2008/2011 (INI)).
- World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC): Declaration of principles for regulatory frameworks on community radio broadcasting (2008).
- Declaration of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue (11 February 2009).

Specific regulation is needed in every country, but that is not enough. Political will is also essential. Let's explain this concept with few examples. We have to establish a separation between the theory (regulations) and practice (how these regulations are implemented, or not). Regarding community media, we have found (Meda González, 2015, pp. 408-409):

- Countries without specific regulation about community media, but its development and reach are high (like Netherlands or Austria).
- Countries with specific regulation since a few years ago that has not been implemented yet for the most part, so the community media sector remains unsteady and with an uncertain future (like Argentina or Spain).
- Countries with specific and well-implemented regulation, providing community media with great stability and development, without daily legal problems and dedicating most of the time to the public service, production of alternative contents and training (like Denmark or Norway).

As we can see, the presence, recognition and treatment of the Third Media Sector in the national regulations does not always result in its implementation in the social and business reality. We can quote here the words of Klaus-Jürgen Buchholz, one of the audiovisual authorities in Hannover, Germany (Meda González, 2015, p. 401): "A good practice to promote community media needs not really a thorough regulation and laws, but political will". We consider that this political will has two main aspects: the concrete knowledge about the field of the communication rights and the priority of this issue above others, being the latter a consequence of the former. When different governments approach either the creation or implementation of a new audiovisual regulation, if they are ignorant of the basis it is possible that they will not prioritise it above the big amount of issues

that they always have to deal with. In the case of Spain and its different regions, the concerns of the politicians are focused in the financial and economical control of the community media. The Audiovisual Communication General Law (2010), article 32, contains the national regulation on the matter. Out of the seven points that address community media, four of them are about economical or business issues, while only one is about the obligations of the central State regarding this kind of media (radio spectrum availability). The deregulation of the audiovisual field in Spain is historical, but also in the European Union, which is very reluctant to approve binding directives for the audiovisual and communication sector. We can see the current situation of this country in the next table:

Region	Number of community radios	Regional regulation	Number of legal frequencies granted
Galicia	9	Law 102/2012 impugned	0 (licenses tender of 2011 cancelled)
Asturias	12	None regulation after 2010	0 (none licenses tender after 2010)
Cantabria	0	None regulation after 2010	0 (no licenses tender after 2010)
Euskadi	28	Law 231/2011	0 (licenses tender of 2012 cancelled)
Navarra	2	Law 5/2012	3
La Rioja	0	Law 64/2012	0 (no licenses tender after 2010)
Castilla y León	10	Not regulated after 2010	0 (licenses tender of 2011 suspended)
Aragón	9	Not regulated after 2010	0 (none licenses tender after 2010)
Catalunya	28	Not regulated after 2010 (only modifications of Law 22/2005)	0 (no licenses tender after 2010)
Extremadura	2	Law 134/2013	0 (no licenses tender after 2010)
Madrid	21	Not regulated after 2010	0 (no licenses tender after 2010)

Castilla-La Mancha	3	Not regulated after 2010	0 (none licenses tender after 2010)
Comunidad Valenciana	11	Not regulated after 2010	1 (licenses tender of 2011 without resolution yet)
Baleares	2	Law 5/2013	0 (licenses tender of 2010)
Murcia	5	Not regulated after 2010	0 (licenses tender of 2012 cancelled; licenses tender of 2013 without resolution yet).
Andalucía	20	Not regulated after 2010	0 (no licenses tender after 2010)
Canarias	5	Law 80/2010	0 (licenses tender of 2010).
Ceuta	No data	Not regulated after 2010	0 (no licenses tender after 2010)
Melilla	No data	Not regulated after 2010	0 (licenses tender of 2013 cancelled; licenses tender of 2014 without resolution yet)
Total	166		4

Table 1: Regulation and licenses tender after the Audiovisual General Law (Source: Meda González, 2015, pp. 260-261).

We think that without a proper legal structure and recognition by the European, national and local authorities, the creation of strong communication projects that can broadcast in minority languages will be impossible. It is very difficult to create a real alternative option to the traditional media system under the current situation. Without legal structure, legal licenses, proper tenders, balance, training and professionalisation, community media projects are unfeasible and they are condemned to perpetual *amauterism*, economical problems and staff troubles. As an example of all this processes, a report by the Industry Department (the Spanish organism in charge of the audiovisual matters) was leaked on October 14th was (see the independent online media). This report includes a governmental recommendation about community radio and television: “we must eliminate this audiovisual status. The shortage of frequencies is what justifies it, but they have possibilities with Internet digital media”. The same report also recommends the “rejection of radical left

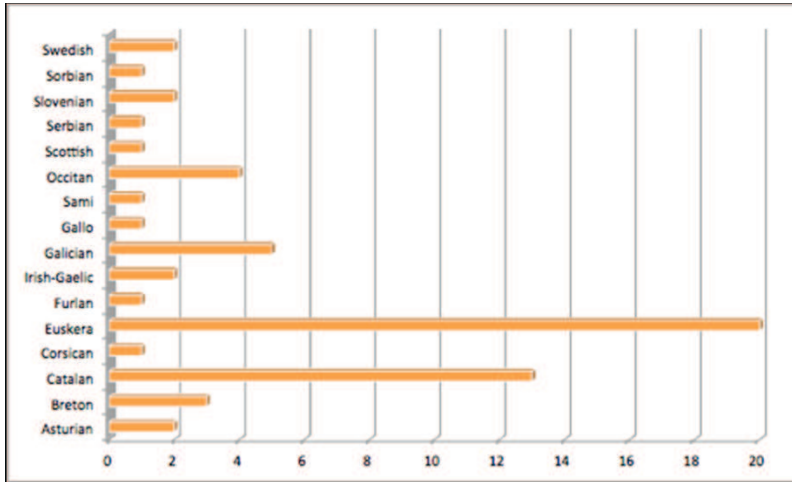
parties”. More than this, the recent report *The state of press freedom in Spain: 2015. International Mission Report* (International Press Institute, 2015), highlights the vulnerability of local and alternative media “that lack the legal and financial resources of their more established counterparts” (p. 32) and, confirms the example of the Industry when it states that “Spain lacks a dedicated national broadcast regulator, despite the fact that a law passed in 2010 foresees precisely such a body (...) Broadcast licenses are allocated directly by the government” (p. 8).

Mapping regional or minority language in the European community media sector. An ongoing project

This paper aims to introduce the ongoing project launched by the *Minority Language Working Group* of the European federation of AMARC with the aim of promoting, supporting and developing minority-language community radios in Europe. With this goal, AMARC have developed a number of related activities in the last years, like the “Radio broadcasting in Regional or Minority Languages” Conference organised in Brussels in October 2013 and hosted by the European Parliament. This conference gathered radio activists from across Europe and America, experts in culture and languages from UNESCO and Members of the European Parliament to discuss the challenges faced by many minority languages community radio stations and propose future solutions (Hicks, 2014). Moreover, as a result of this meeting, the European Parliament made a set of recommendations “for supporting minority languages and local cultures through community media” that were presented in Strasbourg as part of a session hosted by the European Parliament in January 2014 (AMARC Europe, 2014; Lema-Blanco, 2014).

The mentioned working group is also conducting an action-research project (“mapping the use of regional or minority language in European community radio sector in Europe”) with the aim to create a database of community media on minority languages. This will enable the creation of a European network of community radio stations that broadcast on minority languages, supporting community media and sharing knowledge and good practices between radio activists. The project will provide qualitative data regarding experiences, knowledge and social learning emerged from the participation of civil society in community media. The work-in-progress mapping activity has been carried out at a European level with a particular focus on the Spanish context, where community media seem to play a relevant role in promoting regional and territorial cultures and languages, despite the weak recognition of community media in the audiovisual communication regulation that we mentioned before. The study has approached a total of 60 European community radio stations (only radios) that conduct radio programmes in regional or minorities languages such as Slovenian -in Hungary

or Austria;- Euskera (Basque language) – in France and Spain; Breton, Corsican, Catalan, Occitan or Gallo in France; Furlan in Italy; Sorbian (Sorbisch) in Germany; Irish-Gaelic, Irish or Scotch, in the United Kingdom; Galician, Euskera and Catalan in Spain; Lappish in Norway; Swedish in Finland; or Serbian in Romania.



Graph 1: Presence of regional or minority languages in community radio in Europe (Source: Lema, I. based on the analysis of 60 European community radios)

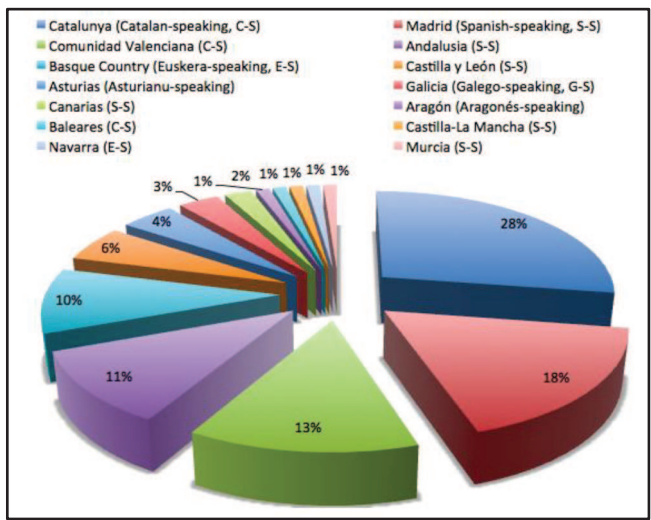
The project will also analyse the different practices developed in community radio, studying its impact and educational potential. In previous sections, we have presented some examples of community media as an educative tool regarding minority languages and cultures. For example, Raidió Fáilte is the only station in Belfast (Northern Ireland, UK) providing broadcasting services in Irish to the Irish language community of the city and to those interested in the Irish culture and traditional Irish music. Raidió Fáilte provides good quality Irish language broadcasting, including speech based and music based programmes produced for and by the Irish language community 24 hours a day. In Hungary, the Slovene minority has established its own community radio, “Radio Monoster”, which broadcasts daily for eight hours. Established in the region inhabited by the Slovenian minority, the radio strengthens the minority presence in the domestic media market. In A Coruña (Galicia, Spain), the local community radio CUAC FM has developed two good practices for minority language: broadcasting a Galician language course that teaches the language in a funny and attractive way “Isto e Galego” (www.istoegalego.org), as well as a collaborative agreement with Galician schools that allows teachers and students to produce a live radio broadcasting programme on regional culture, music and Galician literature. The programme (“A Fume de Carozo”) offers young people a first contact with media and

enhances the use of Galician language in this significant experience and learning process. With these and other experiences, our goal is to create a “toolbox” for learning and dissemination of the intellectual outcomes of the project. AMARC aims to promote the creation of a new European network of minority-language community media that would work in synergy to promote local languages and cultures within Europe.

Succinct approach to the use of regional and minority languages in the Spanish third media sector

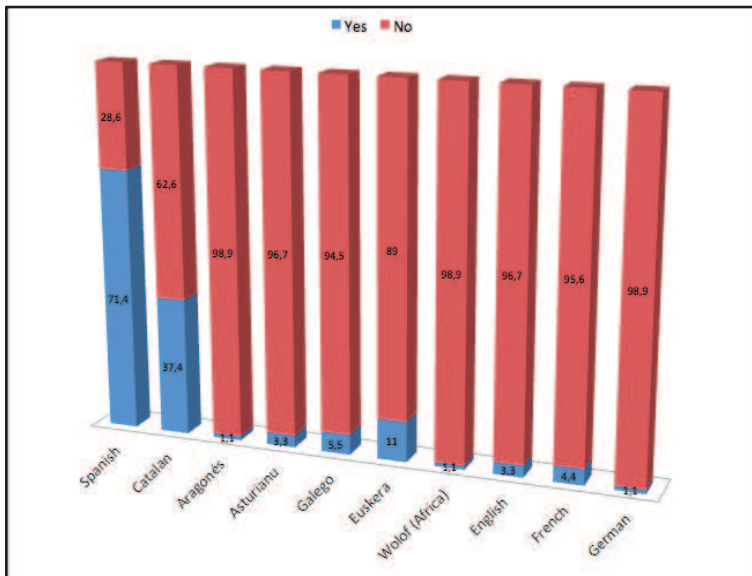
Within the project “Youth and third media sector” (Barranquero, 2015), the researchers mapped the third media sector in the Spanish territory, comparing the main characteristics shared by free and community media. This research approached a total of 92 community media (radios, TV, press and online media). Some of them broadcast in Basque, Catalan (and Valenciá language), Galician, Aragonese and Asturianu. This approach shows a total of 53 community media which use a minority language to inform or to communicate with their audiences (either full-time or together with the Spanish language). Out of all media interviewed (92), 66 of them recognise the use of Spanish, which shows the supremacy of this language above all the other official languages. For a better understanding, the image below shows the origin of the media analysed and the different languages spoken in each of the Spanish regions:

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Graph 2: Origin of the media analysed (Source: prepared by the authors)

Below are the languages that these 92 community media use to broadcast and inform (in percentage):



Graph 3: Languages used in Spanish community radios (Source: prepared by the authors)

Conclusions

Today, the European Union is the home of 450 million people from diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The linguistic patterns of European countries are complex – shaped by history, geographical factors and mobility of people. At present, the European Union recognises 20 official languages, while about 60 other indigenous and non-indigenous languages are spoken over the geographical area. The European Union fosters the ideal of a single community with a diversity of cultures and languages, encouraging language learning and multilingual societies, as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages states. However, according to the study *Endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union* (Alfonsi, 2013), minority languages have a limited influence in society because the member States are responsible for the educational and linguistic policy. Therefore, it is necessary to look for other non-formal strategies and education that uses innovative methods with high quality results.

Despite the globalised world we live in – especially since the widespread use of the Internet – has a direct and detrimental impact on minority languages and linguistic diversity, community media can be a tool that reinforces pluralism and diversity, not only through radio content production,

but through participatory and democratic processes that support and reinforce identities and cultural wealth through the use and promotion of minority languages. The impact that media has in aspects related to education and training is broadly known (Cortés, 2005; Kraidy, 2002; Silverblatt, 2013). In this sense, community radios were born in the last century with the goals of literacy and citizens' education. The positive sociolinguistic effects of community radio in terms of language revitalisation are highlighted by a number of experts (Hicks, 2014; La Rue, 2010a, b) and European Institutions (Council of Europe, European Parliament). The present study also offers some indicators of the level of presence of regional and minority languages in European community radios and examples of cultural and educative radio broadcasts in minority languages.

Achieving the mentioned goals also implies reinforcing the role of community media in the European context, as AMARC have claimed in several public interventions (AMARC Europe, 2014). In this sense, experts and activists agree in the need of establishing a common European framework that would guarantee the development, growth and sustainability of community radio projects. For instance, the Third Media Sector claims for a frequency reserve of the 33% of the spectrum for community radios as well as access to frequencies in equal conditions with other local media (either public or private). Also, to ensure the sustainability of community radio, budget restrictions must be eliminated and public institutions should provide public funding at local, regional and national level.

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