

**V CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL DE RADIOS Y TELEVISIONES  
LOCALES PÚBLICAS Y ALTERNATIVAS  
“UN SOLO MUNDO VOCES MÚLTIPLES”  
(SEVILLA 23, 24, 25 y 26 de FEBRERO 2005)**

**Community Radio in Ireland: Ten Years after Licensing, How Alternative is it?**

**Introduction:**

The theme of this conference “Many Voices, One World” asks an important question of those engaged in alternative media everywhere – just how alternative are these media in practice and in philosophy? What does it mean to be “alternative”? One of the ways in which the mass media can be transformed into alternative media is through the facilitation of the human right to communicate. The democratisation of communication is fundamentally radical and alternative but how widespread is its facilitation? In the twenty five years since the MacBride report (MacBride, 1980) many declarations and calls which urge the facilitation of participation by the people in the mass media have been made (Milan, 1998; Quito, 1995; the AMARC Europe Charter, 1994, see appendix; AMARC 1988 and the People’s Communication Charter). Several authors have commented on what this might mean to and for society (Fisher, 1981; Fisher and Harms, 1983; Raboy and Bruck, 1983; Splichal and Wasko, 1993; Hamelink, 1994; Corcoran and Preston, 1995; Servaes, 1999; Splichal 2002) but to what extent are these high minded ideals being realised on the airwaves? This paper looks at this single marker of alternativeness and investigates how the community radio stations of one country, Ireland, attempt to achieve this goal.

**History:**

There are 18 licensed community radio in Ireland today. As in most of Europe, some of these began as pirate stations in the 1970s and 1980s. Other groups were attracted when licenses were first offered in 1993-4 and more have emerged as the movement has grown in Ireland and as existing stations function as role models for what is possible.

In 1988, the then minister for communications, Ray Burke, succeeded in passing an Act to license independent radio. He appointed the first commission of the IRTC to supervise the licensing process but, unfortunately for community radio, there was no definition in the legislation for community groups as opposed to private business. Commercial stations were licensed immediately but pleas for community radio licenses fell on deaf ears for the next five years. This convinced Irish community radio activists of the necessity of getting a definition of community radio into Irish law so that the provision of community radio licenses would not be at the whim of a politically appointed licensing authority. There is still no definition of community media in Irish legislation. Successive government ministers have been advised by their department officials that this could harm community radio; community radio activists continually tell them they require a definition as a protection of their existence.

A change of government in 1994 led to a change in the composition of the board of the broadcasting commission (then known as the Irish Radio and Television

Commission (IRTC), today known as the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI)). The new board was given the brief of licensing community radio but was extremely worried about the economic viability of such stations.

11 community radio groups were granted licenses to take part in the broadcasting commission's pilot scheme. They each had different histories and indeed had very little in common regarding their aims apart from wanting to use radio as a tool to enhance and improve the life of their communities and of individuals within them. At this stage some people involved were radical in orientation and were connected to the global movement of AMARC, to community development groups and to other new social movements (NSMs). Most people involved lacked any sense of a political dimension to their work but thought that community radio sounded like a good idea even if they were not too sure how to go about it.

Consequently, community radio in Ireland had an inauspicious beginning but a disunified and unfocused group of community activists and community broadcasters were transformed into the vibrant sector which exists in Ireland today by the establishment of the Community Radio Forum of Ireland (CRAOL, the Irish verb "to broadcast"). This may have happened naturally but the broadcasting commission's decision to monitor their pilot scheme and their choice of person and his interpretation of his role was crucial to this development. Ciarán Kissane was appointed as Community Radio Development Officer and he took this job title seriously. He decided his remit was not only to report to the commission but also to assist every station to develop and to facilitate that development by encouraging the stations to connect with each other.

The commission funded six meetings of all of the stations over the eighteen month period and during this time delegates got to meet, to share and to comprehend that they shared the same problems. The education process which occurred in those forum meetings was hugely important for the growth of the participants and for the growth of a new movement in community media and public expression in Ireland. Meeting people who spoke about human rights such as the right to communicate, inviting people from the community development sector and from the community arts sector to address the forum meetings, all of these helped Irish community radio activists to see themselves as exactly that and to organise themselves on that basis and articulate themselves in these ways. There were a few leaders in this group who had been involved in community development and with AMARC for a number of years and both of these factors helped individual participants to find ways of solving practical problems which quickly led to them adopting both community development practice and philosophy and the principles of the community radio movement globally for themselves and their stations

Time was set aside at each of the meetings over the 18 month period to thrash out a workable definition which could accommodate a range of differences but would not be so open that it could become abused as an avenue for commercial stations or for stations catering purely to a specific taste in music to gain licenses. Initially each new station was more concerned about survival than about definitions, mission statements and philosophical questions. However over time Irish community radio stations have had reason to be grateful for this discussion and for the definition which was arrived at by consensus.

The definition states that

A community radio station is characterised by its ownership and programming and the community it is authorised to serve. It is owned and controlled by a not-for-profit organisation whose structure provides for membership, management, operation and programming primarily by members of the community at large. Its programming should be based on community access and should reflect the special interests and needs of the listenership it is licensed to serve. (IRTC, 1997a: 2; BCI, 2001:3).

This declares that any station which wishes to be granted a community radio licence must be representative of their community in ownership, management and programming and operate on a not-for-profit basis. It must be open to participation at the levels of membership, management, operation and programming and it must be able to define the community it serves.

This is considerably less prescriptive than the AMARC-Europe Charter, (see appendix) which lays an emphasis on workers' rights, on editorial independence and on the promotion of peace and of democracy in society in general. It is also less politically motivated than the AMARC-International declaration of aims which aspires to develop communities through social change. However the expectation is that all Irish stations will at least fulfil the IRTC/CRF (BCI/CRAOL) set of criteria and most of those of the AMARC-Europe Charter.

The AMARC Europe Charter provided a strong reference point for the forum debates in drafting a definition of community radio for Ireland and informed the definition substantially. The formulation of the definition in itself demonstrates at least three important points in relation to the way Irish community radio stations work.

1. The definition is wide enough to include a variety of different types of structure and content provision while insisting on core principles of ownership by the community, representation of the community specified on the air and in management
2. The definition was developed over a long period of hard debate and lengthy reflection and discussion and it was passed and therefore endorsed by all of the existing, licensed community radio stations in Ireland at the time.
3. The definition was adopted without any change or amendment by the commission of the Commission as their policy document on community radio (BCI 2002; IRTC, 1997) and it remains their policy statement today. This means that despite the absence of any actual definition of community radio in Irish legislation today, the regulatory authority have a clear definition of what a community radio station should be that was drafted by community radio activists themselves. This has been invaluable in ensuring that community radio licences are granted to community oriented groups who share the philosophy and ideals of community radio globally

**Aims:**

How well do Irish community radio stations fit into the general model for community radio globally? Specifically can we see Irish community radio stations as part of the global NSM AMARC? A simple cross comparison in the table below between the aims identified from The AMARC declaration of principles, the AMARC Europe Charter and the Irish definition of community radio clearly shows that Irish community radio stations are considerably less radical in their goals in relation to

social change and levels of participation than their counterparts elsewhere, yet they do hold certain key basic principles in common.

Figure I. Table 1. Aims of Community Radio:

AMARC-International	AMARC-Europe	BCI/CRAOL (IRTC/CRF)
Be owned democratically by the community	Be representative of their communities in ownership, management and programming	Be representative of their communities in ownership, management and programming
Be not-for-profit	Be not-for-profit	Be not-for-profit
Encourage participation and access	Promote and facilitate access to the airwaves for everyone	Be open to participation at the levels of membership, management, operation and programming
		Be able to define the community it serves
Be responsible to the needs of the community		
Develop the community through promoting social change		
Promote democracy through communication	Promote peace, tolerance, democracy and development.	
	Be editorially independent and informative	

A general consensus on the minimal elements which are required to be able to describe an Irish radio station as a community radio station can now be shown to be that it

- be representative of its community in ownership, management and programming
- be not-for-profit
- be open to participation at the levels of membership, management, operation and programming
- knows and can define the community it serves (BCI/CRAOL definition)

From the BCI/CRAOL definition only, adherence to these aims would qualify a station as a community station at the minimal level. Added to this are the wider aims of the AMARC-Europe Charter, to which all stations adhere and the aims of AMARC-International to which all Irish community radio stations are affiliated and which would indicate that Irish community radio stations should also

- Develop the community through promoting social change

- Promote peace, tolerance, democracy and development through communication
- Be editorially independent and informative (AMARC definitions).

Adherence to these aims qualify a station to be and to act as a community radio station at a higher level in some sense, almost on a superior moral plane.

Part of the research conducted into the work of 6 Irish community radio stations over an eight year period (Day, 2003) investigated individual stations' own understanding of their aims. In addition to the bullet points above, Irish community radio stations aim

- To build the communities they serve
- To facilitate participation in the communication process
- To promote multi-flows of communication (Irish community radio stations, Day, 2003)

To what extent do the attempts to realise these aims facilitate the human right to communicate? Do Irish community radio stations, indeed community media anywhere actually democratise communication? Do they enable and encourage the participation of people in communication networks which achieve this end? Do they operate as a new social movement (NSM) and in conjunction with other NSMs to achieve this?

### **Democratisation of Communication:**

By facilitating participation in the communication process, community radio stations provide the ideal opportunity to create a space approaching the Habermasian ideal construct of a public sphere. This ideal public sphere allows each individual equal access and the right to be heard on the basis of the opinions offered rather than be excluded from participation on the basis of wealth or education. Elsewhere I have explored the notion of "the public sphere" as a series of multi, micro-public sphere (Day, 2003: 56-80). These operate at the local or community level and many different voices outside of the mainstream, hegemonic order can be heard. The potential to become a counter-public sphere exists when it articulates points of view which oppose that hegemonic order (Fraser, 1992). In the context of Ireland's community radio stations it is to be expected that each of them provide a micro-public sphere through their primary aim of being a communications link for their communities. This is fundamentally political as, despite the democratic nature of the Irish state, the opportunities for self expression and the extent of formal debate in society have lessened rather than grown and developed over the last fifty years.

NEAR Fm provides an example of a station which actively promotes the human right to communicate and is fully conscious of the political dimension of this work. Historically, the chairperson of NEAR was one of the main authors of the AMARC-Europe Charter which lists the right to communicate as the first objective of community radio. The station has very close links with AMARC- International. People from NEAR have been abroad on exchanges with other community radio stations and have attended AMARC conferences, some of which dealt specifically with the human right to communicate and how community radio can play a role in this for example AMARC 7, Milan, 1998. The commitment to actualising this right is evident in their strategies for the promotion and facilitation of widespread

participation and also in their programming itself. The volunteers' handbook states this aim very clearly when it says

We are attempting to democratise the communications media.

and

Community radio...aims not only to participate in the life of the community, but also to allow the community to participate in the life of the station. Only Community Radio is based, unequivocally, on this reason for being. This is why it should always be distinguished from commercial and state radio – neither of which seeks public participation, except when it suits them to do so. Other stations offer ready-made programmes; community radio offers democratic access to the activity of programme-making itself. Rather than being communicated at, people are offered the opportunity to communicate themselves. (NEAR, 1999: 2)

As regards the creation of multi, micro-public spheres, NEAR again states how this is to be achieved in their handbook for volunteers

This Community Station is established on two grounds

1. To assist broad community development
2. As an alternative to other media operating in our area.

Therefore, the underlying premise of all our programming will reflect this by:

- Being proactive in support of marginalised people and issues
- Challenging all discriminatory, communally divisive or destructive ideas or actions
- Supporting positive community development perceptions and movements, and
- Opposing all forms of intolerance and exploitation

In practice this will mean that while all points of view have a right to be aired, it is station policy to encourage the emergence of a tolerant, consensual, society.

While guests may articulate intolerant, divisive opinions, station personnel should challenge such opinions and seek more tolerant reflection. (NEAR, 1999: 10)

Connemara Community Radio have been members of AMARC since 1988 and are clear about the political dimension of their work. The awareness of human rights in general and of the right to communicate in particular, is palpable on encountering the station and its staff for the first time. They are very much aware of the philosophical and political debates surrounding media use and communication as a two-way channel. They quote a previous minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht who launched their station and who is, himself a keen supporter of the universal human right to communicate and a reader of Habermas, in the preface to their application for a renewal of their licence in 1998, when he asks

The key question... is whether in the future we become passive consumers of a product manufactured and distributed by some distant conglomerate or are we to be active and in control of our culture and our means of expression? (Higgins, in Connemara Community Radio, 1998: i)

The current station chairperson sees community radio as essentially interactive. He believes that it becomes a very powerful tool once people are able to use it to express

themselves openly, competently and to address the issues which concern them in their own way and to discuss them with their own people

Connemara Community Radio believe that they function to provide a public sphere in which all members of their community can communicate and they use the term itself in their literature (CCR, 1998: 14). Their approach to programming and to access is a planned provision of the public sphere; it does not happen by chance, as is the case in some of the other stations in the original study.

Connemara Community Radio is aware that it is not sufficient to provide access to the channels of communication but as Enzensberger (1970) recommended it is necessary to level the playing field by providing the skills, education and other resources to ensure that people coming from an unequal or disadvantaged position in society can participate on an equal plane with others. This is how the ideal speech situation proposed by Habermas (1975, 1983) can be created. This is recognised in their original application for a licence where they state a commitment to balancing 'experts' with 'the people' and to provide training in a far broader range of areas than broadcasting skills alone.

It is provided for in practice through funded training programmes and through carefully considered strategies for enabling participation which I have detailed in my thesis (Day, 2003: 225-243). As they say themselves in their application to the broadcasting commission of license renewal

The station actively promotes training and personal empowerment through all of its activities, and uses community radio and new technologies with innovative teaching methods, the project aims to increase media competence and access to the public sphere for disadvantaged groups (Connemara Community Radio, 1998: 14)

Connemara Community Radio recognises that where people cannot be physically present in studio to participate in the debating process which constitutes the public sphere, the public sphere must be taken to them. The strenuous efforts it makes to be accessible to those in the community who live in remote and inaccessible areas were observed over time. These include the establishment of an on-air studio on one of the offshore islands, training and off-air equipment for the other island and for the town of Clifden and regular outside broadcasts from all communities in the area

West Dublin Community Radio completely reoriented and reorganised itself shortly after coming on air in order to facilitate the participation of the widest and most varied range of members of its community as possible. However no evidence was found that anyone in the station was thinking in terms of a political agenda or of a wider dimension to their work. Those interviewed tend to focus on the day-to-day running of the station and are happy working almost as a family unit. Neither the rhetoric nor the concepts of communication as a human right and of the democratisation of communication seem to be a concern for people in this station. This is strange, as they enable both in practice. However, there is very little further philosophical discussion or awareness of the multi-flows of communication. Rather it is just part of what they do and seems so obvious to them that it does not require any discussion. The person who runs the rehabilitation programme for drug addicts through radio in the station, sees the role of community radio as something much deeper than broadcasting to listeners, getting feedback from them or granting them

access to the airwaves. She sees it as something deeper, more radical and more powerful, but one which operates by necessity at a micro-level

In terms of listenership, I would prefer to talk in terms of involvement and deep community involvement. If you make a difference to a few people's lives at a very deep level I think that is more an achievement of community radio than your babbling at a pile of people that are half listening to you.

While the term 'public sphere' does not figure in the language used by anyone involved in the station, there is a clear understanding that the provision of a space for debate should be provided. Furthermore the station believes in the provision of multi, micro-public spheres, though again the term is not used, and seeks to enable groups to talk about their own issues amongst themselves, targeting those most marginalised by society. It would appear that the people in West Dublin Community Radio actually create and facilitate multi, micro-public spheres but are not fully aware of the theoretical and radical dimensions of this practice.

### **Communication Networks:**

One of the ways in which community radio acts as a tool for the community activists in its community is by creating and facilitating multi-flows of communication. Community radio is ideally placed to facilitate the formation of communications networks. This is done explicitly in the broadcasting of programmes to target groups in the community which helps those who are similar to bond. It also helps when marginalised people present themselves to the wider community on their own terms, as is the case with Traveller and Gay programmes in several stations. In Connemara Community Radio, one of the primary aims of the station is to combat the isolation and loneliness of many people. In other stations, it is a case of enabling people to hear their own voices and through this to become engaged in the life of their community. Many of them try to employ the community development practice of enabling people to identify their shared needs through dialogue. They then facilitate further debate so that the people themselves can identify the solutions to their self-identified problems and set about collectively implementing the necessary changes.

All the stations see themselves as forming the central node or nexus for a number of communication networks which benefit their communities (Day, 2003: 167-171). Connemara Community Radio express this most clearly and are taken as the primary example here.

The chairperson of Connemara Community Radio summarises the aim of providing a communications link to people and the attitude of those working in community radio stations to this as follows

Community radio is driven by the community. I mean it's there to be used. If the community have a valid reason to use the radio, they'll be on air. They'll get the time. No commercial radio could work that way.

The station believes that the communication facilitated can build the community and sees it as providing many of the tools of community development through this way of broadcasting

A well organised and run community radio service can make a significant contribution to the development, especially in a rural area like Connemara, because it is capable of providing critical elements of the development mix –

information, stimulation, debate, pride, discussion. Its programming should reflect not only a local dimension but also a form and type of relationship with listeners, which promotes dialogue and exchange. (Connemara Community Radio, 1994: 3)

The chairperson explains the station's understanding of how two-way flow communication is enabled by radio

I think anybody that's involved in community development in a rural area, one of the biggest obstacles you face is information and communication. So, we would have seen the need for some tools or some form of communication for years and years before the radio began. Several attempts were made – newsletters and fliers but regular communication with other groups and other parts of the community – that was missing and we always saw the radio, it was always felt that radio would be the way to do that. Radio is interactive, I mean a leaflet or a pamphlet comes in the door and nine times out of ten it's in the waste-bin before it's read.

He sees the potential of community radio as a two-way channel for communication, a way of bringing people together into dialogue and on to working co-operatively to improve their community. He believes that radio is the perfect tool for this

I don't see, there's nothing as personal or as intimate again as radio. It's interactive, it's people dealing with other people and thinking about it and airing their views on it and their opinions so I don't think there's anything there to replace it.

Connemara Community Radio is concerned with giving local people a voice, in many cases for the first time. Coming from a community development perspective, they believe that when people hear themselves articulating their problems they can then begin to find their own solutions to these

Networking and community building appear to take priority over broadcasting standards for West Dublin Community Radio. The station manager would like to see this element of the station's activities being developed further and for the station to serve as a catalyst for awareness in both constitutional and social politics. He elaborates

I'd love to see it becoming the centre of a network, it is sort of, where information would come through and fighting issues that are important to the community. The turn out in elections, even in local elections, is very low and politicians are too far away from them. We see it as a tool which can raise awareness about things that are happening in the community. To highlight it and to promote it and I suppose also it's to promote these people who work in the community that don't get recognition for what they do. People are starting to know who's involved in what issues, so it's starting to work.

This echoes the claim made by Wright (1980) that a truly local radio station could bear dividends in the struggle to get people to take an active interest in politics, both local and national, for example in turning out to vote.

The findings discussed so far demonstrate that community radio provides a practical manifestation of Enzensberger's hopes for the emancipatory use of media (Enzensberger, 1970; Day, 2003). Emancipatory media is decentralised - each receiver is a potential transmitter. Community radio is located in its community and

the listeners are to be the broadcasters. Community radio mobilises the masses and elicits the interaction of those involved thereby engendering a political learning process. It is produced collectively and social control is by self-organisation. Irish community radios were found to fulfil each of these aspirations. The research (Day, 2003) shows that Irish community radio stations are owned and controlled by their communities and they are based on the fundamental principles of open access and participation at all levels. The data testify to their aspiration of building their communities and the individuals within them through this participation in the communication process as equals. In doing this they not only provide examples of multi-flow communication through the mass media, but they provide the opportunity for individuals and communities to exercise their human right to communicate. They form multi, micro-public spheres and connect globally to other NSMs to further the democratisation of communication.

### **New Social Movements NSMs:**

If Irish community radio stations provide a space for public debate, for micro, even multi-micro public spheres to exist and they do this by providing themselves as the communications tool or network, do they provide a channel for new social movements (NSMs) to work through and more importantly can they be seen to operate as an NSM themselves? An NSM operates from a grassroots basis, organises itself non-hierarchically and organically. It works from cells which freely unite for specific purposes and periods and then disassociate to form other links with similar organisations as it suits them (Cohen, 1984, Melucci, 1989, 1996; Scott; 1990; Halcli, 2000). Irish community radio stations are far more organised than community radio stations in most countries, given their membership of CRAOL which was fostered and founded by the BCI. They are connected to the world NSM of AMARC-International. They are unusual because of their legal status as entities licensed and regulated by a government body and they are cautious and conservative in many ways. Yet, they can be quite dynamic and alternative in terms of community development and in their programming, although I'm not going into any detail on either here today. Again, many are not aware that this is what they are doing or that this kind of work and way of working has political and social implications.

Most Irish community radio stations have links to other NSMs. They facilitate members of other NSMs to broadcast their own special interest programmes for example ecology programmes run by the Greens. They highlight areas of concern to other NSMs, for example anti-globalisation and the plight of refugees world wide. They all benefit from their involvement in other NSMs, most particularly women, who have been influenced by the feminist movement.

One example of this is NEAR FM. NEAR sees itself as a major catalyst for community radio as a movement, both in Ireland and abroad, and it is justified in doing so. Its chairperson is a former president and founder of AMARC-Europe, an author of its charter and of several other texts propounding the right to communicate and the need to network in order to facilitate social change (Byrne, 1988, 1990, 1997). NEAR was the driving force behind the community radio movement in Ireland in the 1980s and has played an important role in CRAOL since its foundation in 1995. This includes drafting many of the policy documents which guide CRAOL, in particular the definition which became adopted by the BCI as its definition of what community radio is. NEAR state their commitment to belonging to a global movement and

operating on a world stage in the first page of their handbook for volunteers when they explain to new recruits that

In becoming a 'community radio volunteer' you have joined a global movement which is emerging on every continent. People are coming together to make the airwaves a real public place. Community Radio goes by many names. In Latin America it is called popular or educational radio; in Africa, rural or local radio, in Australia, public or community radio; in Europe, free associative or community radio. All names describe the same phenomenon that of gaining a voice and democratic communication on a local community scale. (NEAR, 1999: 1)

There is a keen awareness in NEAR Fm of the station as part of a global movement and of their ability to carry the messages of other NSMs, particularly of those groups which are anti-globalisation oriented. The station chairperson explains their vision in this way

I think it's a part of networking with the other agencies with the other organisations but I think it's a huge resource and I think if it's used properly it can be a clearing house for all these ideas. It can help people to meet so that there isn't duplication of the ideas, that there's a co-ordination of activities that mobilises and I think the international links are terribly important. I'd love to think that more people, like we did with refugee radio, I'd love to have people in North East Dublin being more aware of what's happening in Agoni land. How understanding that if people in Darndale feel disenfranchised that there's people in Agoni land feeling the same and in the suburbs of Australia, you know, in the ghettos there, that they're not alone. There's people all over the planet being disenfranchised and left behind by this global economy that's emerging and I think that there's tremendous power, if they could organise that and link with each other.

West Dublin Community Radio does not display much of a sense of being a part of a movement, let alone being part of a NSM. The former-station manager realises that as a station they do not pause to reflect on the political or on the long term impact of their daily work. She seems to take pride in this and prefers to operate on a concrete level rather than accessing a philosophy of communication which could inform their practice

I'd say we set out with very woolly ideas of where we were going but now, because you're forced to translate them into reality, like I think the one thing that has been good about us is – we're action people. It kind of happens on the ground therefore very quickly. Something or someone will correct anything that goes wrong as long as you're active. Whereas if you're very involved in theory, I think you can theorise all you like and the theory can be very different to the reality. In actual fact we are forced to be pretty realistic. Now sometimes that can be a bit of a disadvantage in that it's hard to see your goals ahead whereas you're so preoccupied with the day to day of whatever you're doing and I like, I sometimes see other stations that seem to have more maybe ideas in some ways but we, I find it very hard to have time for loads of paper work and this sort of thing because I'm so busy on the day to day with people, with that end of it.

However they do, as a station connect regularly and meaningfully with local elements of other NSMs for example the ecology movement and the women's movement and the community radio movement itself.

### **Some General Conclusions:**

The democratisation of communication - 'giving the people a voice' - is a primary motivating factor for every Irish community radio station. The founders of these stations are aware of this radical political dimension to their work in broadcasting but unfortunately this has not always been passed on to other participants. As regards networking internationally, many of those interviewed explained that they had never heard of community radio or of such a movement when they started. They set up pirate community stations back in the 1980s without realising that such a way of working had been tried elsewhere. They were acting out of principle and a feeling that this could work. They were delighted to find that there were many thousands of others engaged in the same work world-wide and to learn from and network with them. Interviewees frequently expressed disappointment that their station was not functioning as a public sphere as they had hoped, although they generally did not use that actual term.

The following observations can be drawn from this disappointment.

- These people are politically aware and work from a strong sense of social justice, indeed from a moral conscience.
- They believe that the human right to communicate should be facilitated and that it can be a powerful force in society.
- They are idealists, they want far more than they can possibly achieve and they want it far sooner than it can possibly happen.

Irish community radio stations want to enable people to communicate with each other and they may function in an empowering way but

- they need to be conscious that they are doing this.
- they need to educate themselves as to the debates surrounding the democratisation of communication and to see how they play a role in it.
- they then need to alert the wider community which they serve to these rights, to their importance and to how these can be realised through their community radio station.

It would appear that the logical home for community radio is within the realm of civil society. Community radio, given the tiny size of the audience with which it interacts, must logically form and operate within one of many multi, micro-public spheres. Community radio is only one of many channels through which marginalised groups and those in opposition to the mainstream can express themselves. Other alternative and radical media (Downing, 2000), NSMs (Melucci,1989, 1996; Cohen and Arato,1992), and the manipulation of mainstream media (McLaughlin, 1995) also provide opportunities for this and help to build this forum or space. However the space itself, the orientation of the other actors within that space and the norm of democratic communication make the nexus of these micro and counter-public spheres within civil society the ideal location for community radio. Community radio provides a real opportunity to act on the normative theory suggested by Enzensberger (1970), Mills (1956), Habermas (1989) and others.

Irish community radio stations operate in emancipatory and truly participative ways enabling people to exercise their right to communicate through the creation of multi-flows of communication. However, the full and radical potential expected of these ways of broadcasting cannot be actualised as long as the majority of participants in those stations are unaware of the political and social implications of their operations. The potential is there but education and consciousness raising are needed to begin to utilise that potential if it is to truly transform lives and communities. Irish community radio stations are in tune with the global NSM of AMARC International. They operate in many ways as an NSM in their organisational structures and in the fact that they work to promote the democratisation of communication, indeed they actively facilitate people to exercise their human right to communicate. It is time for the Irish community radio movement to articulate this more clearly to itself and to ensure that all participants in all Irish community radio stations become aware of the global and political dimensions to their work.

Some Irish community radio activists already express themselves in philosophical, even poetic terms as this quote taken from NEAR's Volunteers' handbook shows. Paraphrasing Ireland's Nobel prizewinning poet, Séamus Heaney and reminding their volunteers that they are part of a new social movement which is concerned with communication and other human rights, the handbook declares

In this way, we are linked through aspirations and technology to similar community groups across the planet in an organically growing web committed to human rights, environmental rescue and cultural diversity

Let go, let fly, forget.  
You've listened long enough.  
Now strike your note.

You are fasted now, light headed,  
Dangerous,  
Take off from here...

...it's time to swim out on your  
own and fill the elements  
with signatures on your own  
frequency... (NEAR, 1999: 24)

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**Websites:**

<http://www.amarc.org>

<http://www.craol.ie>

<Http://www.bci.ie>

**Appendix:**

**AMARC Europe Charter, adopted Ljubljana, 1994:**

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

Community Radio stations:

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

See website: <http://www.amarc.org>