

Alternative media producers and their professional identities Freie RadiomacherInnen und professionelle Identität(en)

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Austrian Alternative Radio will be celebrating its 10th birthday next year and different success stories show the impact of the importance of this 'third sector'. In a brief introduction, we will give you an overview on the 'official' role of radiomakers in the stations and their pathways to the radio. We will also talk about their professional identities, motivations and strategies they use to cope with their limited resources.

As you might have noticed, lots of free radio workers are around on the conference and several communications were held or are to be held today and tomorrow: Literadio, ORANGE, FRO, etc. We invite all the professionals to intervene whenever they feel the wish to and add their experiences

As for the role of us, we currently are not - and have rarely been - radio makers on our own, so our look might be one from the outside. We founded the *Austrian Radio Research Group* last year because we wanted to create a space of discussion and knowledge about radio and radio research. The *ARRG* is a place where practitioners, researchers and media teachers meet and share experiences. Travelling around this year and getting to know lots of different alternative radio stations and radio makers for an alternative radio study funded by the Austrian Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting (RTR) gave us an impression of what might be important issues for radios and radio makers, what are the material conditions and meanings of their work.

We would like to underline that we try to do research *together* with the alternative radios and their members. research is perceived and structured by us as an interactive process in which meaning is co-constructed. we are not neutral nor do we judge or evaluate our interlocutors. the knowledge we will present here doesn't come from us, but emerged in discussions with the experts we had the pleasure to interview. we tried to structure it and assemble issues which emerged in many or all radio station during the discussions with volunteer radio makers and radio staff.

Austrian CR and broadcasting

The 15 members of the Austrian Association of Free Radios (VFRÖ) are active radio stations and radio projects on the internet. The size of the stations ranges from 2 actives to more than 500 radio makers at Radio ORANGE in Vienna.

Most of the radio stations are organized in associations that are adjudicated the radio licences – in some of them the radio makers are invited to join the association, in others the radio makers just sign a broadcasting agreement (so-called Sendevereinbarung) which regulates the responsibility of the individuals and the station. Association members are asked to vote for the chair persons and do have to pay member fees (in some stations). Other associations, schools etc could become members of the radio association too and are encouraged to do so by the radios. however, religious groups or political parties are not allowed to become members by law.

Pathways to the radio

Most radio programmers make their way into the radio station via workshops – they offer the possibility to get to know the place as well as to acquire the necessary knowledge (in technical, journalistic and cultural terms) to start their own radio career. Lately, the public of these workshops changed at least in some stations. We were told that more and more listeners/individuals are interested in the functioning of a radio who don't necessarily want to begin a radio career. As most free radios tend to see the spreading of media literacy as one of their central competences and aims, they also welcome people to the workshops who are interested in the functioning of radio as a medium, but don't aim at having their own broadcast.

While before people used to come to the radio with a precise idea of their broadcasting, now they start with the workshops and eventually develop an idea on their way.

The term Community radio seems to have a reference to communities that are to be served by the radio station. But alternative radio in Austria presents itself rather as a place for individuals and small groups of friends. In several stations we discovered this characterization which is related to the heterogeneity of producers as well as to the routines of radio production processes: not all people have to meet at the same time in the same place to make a radio, and broadcasters don't necessarily have to show up in the studio at all.

interviewees at one radio station observed:

i find, wir san garned so des gruppenradio, und i find da gibts a an ziemlichen bruch, weil . es gibt ganz vü einzelne leit, die kumman, [Hel,25]

The question of accessibility of the radio stations was central in all our interviews. the radio stations are aware of the lack of involvement of various communities, although they try to offer open access. Mainly hierarchies and issues of gender and ethnicity were mentioned as problems that could constitute obstacles to the participation of specific communities.

The strategies to invite new members to join the radio are diverse – even if most of the radio stations deny having a special strategy. Also, the target groups of special recruiting have changed over time: While in the beginning, “every one” was free to participate, now the restrictions in time and space lead to a selection process for the attribution of broadcasts, mostly effectuated by a board of radio makers. The central target groups of free radio - organisations, marginalised groups and interests, subjects not or rarely represented in other media are given priority over contents already present in the radio or in other radio stations. Tendencies are that word is given some priority over music, lesser used languages over German and women over men.

One exemplary strategy of invitation a radio station applied in the very beginning during the late 90ies was, that the radio left its space in order to meet people where they were:

wir wollen, dass die frauen ins radio kommen, dabei sinnvoll, zuerst das radio rauszutragen, diese damals super schweren schnittstationen, aus dem medienzentrum,

rauszutragen und an die orte zu gehen, wo frauen sind, von denen man gern hätte, dass sie sich beteiligen, [OR, 147]

Most of the recruitment is made through face-to-face contact, through personal relationships and friendships. Established associations, NGOs, cultural and social organizations are sometimes addressed and invited explicitly.

rm1: gekommen zu fro sind wir über die [name], mitarbeiterin von fro, die hat uns damals gefragt ob wir nicht lust hätten etwas zu machen

rm2: das war noch dazu anlässlich einer reportage über den weltaidstag, da haben wir gleich eine ganze sendung gemacht.[FRO, 36C]

Some radio stations state this as an official policy and do it frequently and on purpose. Their success, still, is limited. The assumed reason for the non-participation of NGOs is their general lack of resources, especially of time. Due to under-payment and struggle for resources a great part of these organisations, according to our interview partners in the radio stations, do not have enough resources for broadcasting.

Advertisements for participation are made on air with jingles and online on the radio stations' own websites. Finally, also editorial groups of specific broadcast tend to recruit their own members. These editorial groups introduce their new members to the principles of community radio and also provide their formation. This is possible because in most cases only one person in a broadcast group is required to have completed the workshops at the radio station and is held responsible vis-à-vis the radio station.

In the case of a news team we/I interviewed, new members are recruited via posters at the university. About 6 new members join the team per year, not all of them stay. they are guided through their first contributions by an experienced member of the team who introduces the newcomers to research, audio taping and technical processing until the final audio file. However, whenever this group receives an e-mail sent out by their radio station on upcoming workshops, they forward this information to the new members, but they do not oblige them to take part.

These customs (among others) contribute to the fact that the radio staff can't be aware of all the

persons contributing to the programs and their fluctuation.

Now, having introduced and set the scene, we would like to come to our main foci for today: what are the objectives and motivations of radio makers to engage with alternative radio? how do they perceive themselves and their work and what strategies do they develop in order to compensate obstacles?

Why engage for (the existence of) alternative radio?

Speaking all the time of radio makers, we should say that we differentiate between production of the broadcasts and program and organisational occupations. In many cases, individuals engage in both areas. This was particularly true in the past, during the foundation of the radio stations. In the meantime, a certain professionalization has taken place and tasks are divided between paid organisational work and technical support on the one hand and unpaid broadcast production on the other. Still, there are many individuals who do both. Often, a person's interests evolves from making their own broadcasts to engaging in organisational work.

When speaking to those actives in the radio stations, they often express one or more of the following interests:

- building alternative media structures
- giving voice to the voiceless
- making themselves and important issues heard
- doing something they really like
- enriching the media landscape of a certain (local) surrounding
- working in a field of alternative, social economy
- contributing to the development of open access technologies, including its application to radio studios

This list is of course not exhaustive. And in the beginning of alternative radio in Austria, the political aim to break the state's media monopoly was also a driving force.

für mi die hauptargumentation für die existenz von am freien radio die is, dass es a demokratiepolitische notwendigkeit ist, dass es einfach strukturen braucht, wo leute ihre meinung äußern können, [frad, 127]

weil ich finde in der heutigen zeit muss es sowas auch geben und also von einer technischen seite her, bin ich im open source bereich unterwegs aufbau von system offenen programmen und das passt für mich insofern auch als freies radio ich verfolge da auch diese politik [hel, 22]

A very important reason according to these professionals for their efforts are their own interests: they want to contribute to the existence of a media environment, where their own broadcasting can be effectuated:

na also in erster linie . engagier i mi für helsinki, damit so sendungen, wie i sie mach, möglich san, glaub i, aiso i denk ma des war a mei motivation überhaupt an eigenen radiosender aufzubauen, war der, zu sehen, dass es ... dass es für sowas, des ich produzier, und des san oft recht experimentelle sachen, einfach kan platz gibt in österreich, [Hel, 24]

They say, organizational work and broadcasting need to be balanced: one of our interviewees expresses his conviction, that when his broadcasting starts to suffer from his lack of time due to organisational work, then it's time to stop that and concentrate more on the own project. This can be an example of successfully dealing with limited resources and staying motivated year after year.

The love for the medium, its freedom of expression and the satisfaction coming from these facts is one of the main reasons for many radio makers. As a rationale for radio making it was very common and explicit in the interviews:

I love the medium...

*und des medium radio lieb i .. allgemein. also des is genau des richtige für mi. [Hel, 23]
weil i mittlerweile hab i schon a versucht mi anders auszudrücken, aber via radio und via
akustischem medium is es doch am leichtesten. [Hel, 23]*

Along with the ‚general‘ love for the medium, there is also a sense of gratification from the radiomakers due to the involvement with radio and the people they interact with in the field. Several different radio makers stress the enriching function of the occupation with broadcasting.

*es ist echt ned sehr schwierig und extrem klass uns erfüllend, also schon total super, auch
die anerkennung und so, von den arbeitskolleginnen, volle fans von mir, die hören und
schreiben dann auch [FRF, 49]*

*aber es ist ganz toll, für mich es geistige nahrung, weil wo kann ich über ungarische
literatur, theater, kunst reden, man kann heut schon so diskutieren aber so bissl tiefer rein
zu gehen hast du keine möglichkeit, [FRO, 36H]*

Radio is an important space for the people who speak on the airwaves: it allows to speak to a public but it is at the same time a very intimate space which permits anonymity and protects the broadcasters‘ and their guests‘ privacy. As well it is a space which is appropriated by the radio makers and which allows them to develop in a safe environment which they can control.

The public aspect shows in accounts like these:

*grad für betroffene, sich selber dann zu hören, das hat sie immer wieder gesagt, eine ganz
andere wirkung, weils dann ausgesprochen ist, [RF, 111G]*

Enrichments

*und, ja, diese möglichkeit zu haben, mit relativ wenigen mitteln einfach da rausgehen zu
können, ah, ich finds auch ganz toll, dass man sich die sendungen jederzeit anhören kann,
dass mans runterladen kann, dass mans als cd weitergeben kann, [RF, 111E]*

The radio makers become experts in their own fields and interests and want to share their knowledge and opinions with others:

irgendwann wird man auch selbst expertin, um ganz ehrlich zu sein, i wollt mi dann irgendwann ned mehr so zurückhalten [...] also die leute, die das podium besetzt haben waren für mich ganz interessante, tolle menschen, die eben was gscheites zu sagen haben und das hat sich mit der zeit geändert, [...] dann hab i irgendwie meinen eigenen standpunkt entwickelt und i wollt dann net nur zusammenfassungen von irgendwas machen, sondern auch irgendwie eigene, richtige berichte machen [OR]

Dream jobs

A last important reason to become involved with community radio is the fact that for some, being a radio moderator or a journalist was a dream already as a child. But as biographies develop, the realization of dreams is not always easy. For some of the interviewees making radio is a life's vocation.

ich wollte schon immer radiomoderator werden. ich bin von sender zu sender gegangen hier in vorarlberg, aber niemand war interessiert. ich könnte das nirgends sonst machen, das geht nur im freien radio. [PRO]

So far, we have seen that the third sector in radio allows for a social forum and discussion of self expression, education and countless other possibilities.

But these possibilities are limited to the realities of financial constraints and individual resources over which the radio makers have little or no control.

There are obstacles and conflicts in radio work. The first of which is determining the levels of audience participation. Usually community radios don't know how many listeners they reach during a particular program. Additionally, the coverage of community radio stations is low and

doesn't equally service all parts of an area.

Audiences

Radio makers become creative and resourceful in dealing with these problems. In order to gauge listener participation, the announcer may pose a question and invite audience participation. Additionally, mistakes in dates and days are very likely to provoke immediate calls. Also the editorial groups' other activities allow radio makers to meet listeners at an event since it was announced on a program.

ja, aber man könnte schon, aber man muss schon gedanken machen, wie könnte man in sendung irgendwas reinbauen, womit die leute dazu gebracht werden, dass die anrufen und bei uns zumbeispiel passiert das immer, wenn irgendjemand irgendeine fehler sagt, dann sofort schon rückmeldungen [FRO, 36D]

However, some listeners are well known. Most radio makers have family, friends or colleagues who listen to the broadcasts and give feedback. These people are invited to listen by the programmers via e-mail or personal reminders:

rm1: wir reden mit alle bekannten, verwandten

rm2: dann schick ma auch email aus aber es ist halt des problem, a paar leut kennens ned empfangen, dann geht des internet ned aber ich find die weite gehört weiter, ich hörs ned amal bei mir daham in walding und ich find des schon schad [FRO, 36C]

Strategies

Radio makers often have high standards and ideals, however due to insufficient resources and money, they must contend to do with what is available to them.

Although there may be severe financial shortcomings, radio makers develop appreciation of the radio's strength and build on their personal and social resources:

Radio makers find support through different sources: family, friends, like-minded people, old and new networks and acquaintances and so on.

und einfach so angefangen ein paar leute haben gesagt toll, wir machen das und sind mit einem plastiksackerl mit ein paar cds reingekommen und haben eine stunde da halt irgendwas gemacht [FRO, 36G]

Also the radio stations support their programmers with flyers, technical advice and support, presentations on the website and archiving the broadcasts to the Cultural Broadcasting Archive (CBA), to give some examples.

Furthermore, material constraints affect the productions of broadcasts: Radio makers often have full time jobs leaving only a limited time and energy for the production of broadcasts. In the group discussions they shared some of the strategies to overcome this obstacle.

The richness of abundance in issues, communities, skills, knowledge in editorial teams and in the radio station is appreciated by the participants, also as a form of support:

weil das radio hat je ein irsinnig großes potential einfach von de leit, de was herkommen und jeder kann irgendwas verschiedenes, jeder bringt si dan ein. und es manchmal so situationen, wos echt ausschaut, jetzt gehts nimmer, aber es geht immer. irgendwie. und des is wirklich a großes potential. [Hel, 24]

Through learning by doing, increasing quality is achieved very quickly and is a more casual way of dealing with the radio. This allows them to creatively use the radio's opportunities and to become more daring.

aber das ist das, nicht jede strebt in richtung professionelle sendung aber entweder muss man professionell werden oder sich beschränken in seinen ansprüchen [FRF, 50]

Radio makers find over time a casual way of doing their work while maintaining a high level of professionalism toward their work and their interviewees.

sendungen verändern sich schon, am anfang ... schema f, jetzt, die gesprächsbasis einfach

*leichter, kann auflockern, unverfängliche atmosphäre schaffen, viel zeit einplanen,
schneidetechnik hat sich verbessert, brauch nicht mehr so lang [RF, 111F]*

Networking

In General, radio makers are satisfied with their work and the radio station, although they would like better coverage in terms of quality and expanse for the station as well as better advertising.

During interviews we heard several times that networking amongst the radio makers is (too) infrequent or even non existent, even inside a radio station.

During the group discussions radio makers didn't only answer to our questions, but also started to talk with each other. They openly shared knowledge about being a volunteer radio maker, discussed problems and obstacles which they experience and talked about their relations with their audience. Furthermore, they compared motivations and goals and they assured each other of the importance of their work and their radio station.

Discussion:

Benefits of research?

For radio makers? For researchers? ...

- Exchange between radio makers
- Circulation of knowledge between teams
- Effects on researchers
- Networking as a repeatedly discussed issue

Circulation of research outcomes?

Please note that this contribution is still work in progress – a paper will be published in spring 2008 and will be available on the ARRG website <http://radio.forschungsraum.net>