Editorial

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A long established presence across American, Canadian, Australian and British campuses, student-led university radio stations have been an outlet for experimentation of new radio formats and the broadcast of alternative content to local public and commercial radio (Gordon 2012). In the last two decades, student radio stations have been spreading at a fast pace also in Asia and Africa and, all over the world, adapted dynamically, often with scarce resources, to the convergent media landscape where they have experimented the integration with web-based forms of radio broadcasting and podcasting.

Radio stations based on university campuses are arguably as old as the medium itself, as experimental and educational broadcasts took place in Canada (NCRA 2011) and the US as early as the 1920s (Wall 2007; Waits in this issue). They have been called college, university, campus and student radio stations depending on national circumstances, with the emphasis put either on the host institution, the geographical location/outreach, or those leading and running these projects.

Free from commercial imperatives, student and university stations have been described also as inclusive, egalitarian, and open-format (Sauls 2000), in other words 'forms that are on a smaller scale, more accessible and participatory, and less constrained by bureaucracy or commercial interests than the mainstream media and often in some way in explicit opposition to them' (Dowmunt and Coyer 2007: 1). Scholars have also discussed the role of university and student radio stations as alternative media outlets, and providers of training and radio

laboratories for students in Italy (Perrotta 2005 and 2009; Cavallo 2009) and the UK

(Fleming 2002; Wilson David, in this issue).

Student radio stations have claimed to be a training ground for future broadcasters aiming to

enter the mainstream industry and a space for experimentation with new formats, as well as a

way of enhancing project management skills by frequently offering unpaid positions as

station managers, programme controllers, heads of marketing or news, producers and

presenters (Scifo 2007, see also see Reilly and Farnsworth in this issue). Given that these

stations are run chiefly by students, issues that are of interest to them – such as university

services and music reviews – feature as the main speech content. Specialist music

programming is seen as one of the most important reasons to join because 'they are music

aficionados and feel they need to share their music, spreading their appreciation around'

(Wallace 2008: 55, see also Fauteaux and Rubin in this issue). Student radio stations are seen

as a 'stepping stone towards some other destination (...) a means for enjoyment and for

learning radio skills as media message-producers' (Wallace 2008: 61).

The programming is often run exclusively by students, with some stations opening their

schedules to the local community (see Wilson David in this issue), and adopting an 'open

format' model. In smaller college/student radio stations, they usually have live shows at their

peak during the term periods, with vacations periods often relying mostly on automated

programming. Waits has also remarked how college radio is a 'fascinating example of

underground culture, as they often exist in philosophical opposition to commercial,

mainstream radio' (Waits 2007: 83). In the context of mergers and acquisitions that have

made local stations in the US much more homogeneous, 'college stations have had an even

greater opportunity to fill the void by providing airspace for underground, unsigned,

experimental and outsider musicians on independent record labels' (Waits 2007: 84). In other words, college radio 'usually provide the main alternative to traditional format radio' (Wall 2007: 35). In organisational terms,

> At many college campuses, radio stations are run by students, with little to no involvement by the school, meaning that DJs and staff have more artistic control than at profit-driven commercial radio stations. (...) DJs and staff are often volunteers, and so much of the work is done for the love of the music and the station, often creating a loyal and outspoken group of individuals. (Waits 2007: 84)

College radio stations have a strong history of radicalism and affiliation with social movements in the Americas and Europe. In the US, they have 'played a key role in organising student involvement in the civil rights movement' (Coyer 2007: 232) and against the war in Vietnam and Iraq, and also helped students' uprisings against repressive regimes in Latin America (ASCUN 2005). In France, student radio has been an activity connected with social movements since the late 1970s and whose activities are discussed in historical accounts of the community radio sector during those years (Lefebvre 2008). In countries as Poland they played an important role as a space for students to exercise their freedom of speech, becoming later an alternative to local public and commercial radio broadcasting (see Doliwa in this issue).

Compared to other countries, US college radio has received more attention from academic researchers, including authors such as Sauls (1995, 2000), Waits (2007), Wall (2007) and Wallace (2008), and this is reflected also in this issue (see Rubin and Waits). However, college, student and university radio is an area that has been overlooked by radio studies.

Wallace, in reference to Sterling and Keith's three-volume *Encyclopaedia of Radio* (2004), has stated that there is only one entry on this sector and that 'No specific college radio stations are mentioned in the index; it is a very minor format treated under larger rubrics' (Wallace 2008: 62). Indeed, college radio has been 'rarely' and 'infrequently' studied (Waits 2007: 95; Wall 2007: 35).

With scholars usually tending to study three 'types' of radio, namely public, commercial and community radio, student/college radio research has been overlooked despite being a common presences on American as well as British campuses: 'this radio 'type' is often ignored because college radio lacks influence in the mainstream media and is not seen as a site of community radio empowerment' (Wallace 2008: 46). However, readers of this issue will be able to find evidence of the empowering potential of university and student radio as a form of community radio through the contributions to this issue. In my own doctoral research, several students that volunteered at that time at Canterbury's CSR FM explained at length how their student radio station had become a very important tool for those who participate in it

> I think that everyone that has been here has fallen in love with the station…everyone does whatever they can to get it done. It's something that everyone is involved in and very passionate about and obviously if someone is not passionate, it tends to grow in them. That's because I…I have just joined on a whim and thought that this is going to be fun! I will have just a show! When I realised what was going on, I thought this was amazing! (...) I was never a confident person at all. I can't believe that I am actually on a radio broadcasting my voice across a network that anyone can tune into, or listen to. It's amazing that

anyone in the area can tune in to my voice on a Monday and Friday morning. I

never imagined myself doing that kind of thing. It does shock me to think what I

have learned to do since I have been a member of CSR. (Gradidge, Interview,

2007, in Scifo 2011: 302)

Making radio can make students feeling more confident, boost their self-esteem and give

them the possibility to speak about their cultures, their social groups and their lives, and can

help to provide a local view on global issues. In this context, I would like to discuss the

concept of empowerment within a broader contemporary debate and connect this with David

Gauntlett's *Making is Connecting* (2011). Gauntlett does not include student radio in his

book, but the reference to Do-It-Yourself (DIY) cultures and the social meaning of creativity,

I would argue, are relevant in this context. The thousands of volunteers that take part in

student radio stations signal, I believe, the presence of a 'making and doing' culture in

student radio broadcasting and indeed, 'this orientation rejects the passivity of the "sit back

model" and seeks opportunities for creativity, social connections and personal growth' (2011:

11). In other words, the simple act of deciding to dedicate time as a volunteer to make a radio

programme, or to help to run a radio station, is not just a hobby or simply amateur-ish and

trivial. Such a choice also has wider political implications as people decide, in my opinion, to

do radio 'themselves rather than just consume' what is proposed to them (2011: 19). In all of

the visited stations, volunteers enjoyed their activities and got satisfaction from what they do

by the process of doing radio and by connecting with other people, either at the station, in the

local community, on air or via their program's website.

To conclude, apart from aiming to make a small contribution to an overlooked area of radio

studies, of potential interest to academic researchers, I also hope that this open-access issue of

Interactions: Studies in Communication and Culture will be of direct relevance to those working or volunteering in the student radio sector. As Clemencia Rodriguez has argued

> academic service should be *at the service* of praxis; in other words, that the knowledge we produce within academia is most valuable if and only if it becomes useful for those in the field trying to make our societies better places to live (2010: 133, emphasis in original).

I hope that this issue will be a small contribution in the direction pointed by Rodriguez and used as a means of allowing students and practitioners engaged in radio broadcasting in schools, colleges and universities across the world to reflect on their histories, their practices, as well as their achievements and their failures

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