

Lobbying for Community Radio in Britain

Abstract

This article, within the context of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Community Media Association (CMA) in 2023, and its role within the context of British radio history, will draw on grey literature from the CMA digital archives, including policy statements, policy briefings, and background material for the lobbying actions in the period 1997-2007. First-hand material to be discussed will draw on interviews with key actors involved in policymaking until the introduction of Community Radio into legislation, as well as on press releases, statements and policy documents of the regulator Radio Authority and the Office for Communication (Ofcom), policy statements and documents published by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), statements from the BBC and commercial radio representatives and parliamentary records of the debates on community radio legislation. The analysis and discussion of this material will help to establish the role of the main players in policymaking and regulation and how events unfolded between the outcome of the 2nd May 1997 elections, when the Labour party took power, and 20th July 2004, when the Community Radio Order (CRO) was approved. It will also trace the development of the lobbying action of the CMA, the discussions and the tensions preceding the Government's approval to go ahead with a new sector. It will argue that, despite having the merit of introducing a new sector in licensed radio broadcasting, after three decades of community media activists campaigning, the Labour party fell short on its promises of funding the sector in its initial phase, denying it a solid and sustainable start.

Introduction

We always need to ask why this policy is in this form now and in whose interest is it designed? Neither policies nor their presentation should ever be taken at their face value. (Garnham, 1998: 210)

This article traces the development of the lobbying action of the CMA, the discussions and the tensions preceding the Government's approval to go ahead with a new radio broadcasting sector, a pilot project, and the introduction of Community Radio into British media policy and then law. It will argue that, despite having the merit of introducing a new sector in licensed

radio broadcasting, after three decades of community media activists campaigning, New Labour fell short on its promises of funding the sector in its initial phases, denying it a solid and sustainable start. Even if the community radio sector benefitted from a generally helpful social, cultural, and political context in the second half of the 1990s, the path towards the approval of the Community Radio Order in July 2004 was not a linear one. It has left a debatable legacy in terms of overall long-term sustainability in the community radio sector. The sector and the evaluator of the pilot project that preceded the introduction of Community Radio agreed that a solid start, with substantial funds available for the early years of operation, to cover core costs (administration and management), was crucial to ensure success for this new sector. However, the lobbying action failed to secure the millions of pounds that had been envisaged for it – in the end, only a meagre £500,000 was destined for the Community Radio Fund.

The operational context of Community Media Association's lobbying action

In 1997, to better reflect the changed technological context, the CMA adopted its new name, after having been the Community Radio Association (CRA) for 14 years. This involved opening its membership base to community television stations and an increasing number of web-based practitioners and projects. This was reflected in the approval of a Community Media Charter in Edinburgh on 25 October 1997 (CMA, 1997), a document that shares many elements with the AMARC *Community Radio Charter for Europe* (1994). A development of this document then became the Community Media Manifesto (CMA, 2001).

Australian scholar Ellie Rennie argues that the CMA managed to make ‘the most of Blair government’s community rhetoric’ from 1997 (2006: 151). Indeed, the Information and Communications Technology Learning Centres initiative had been launched by the Government in 1999 through a Capital Modernisation Fund and the New Opportunities Fund, and the CMA had successfully argued for an integrated approach to ICT learning, incorporating wider cultural practice as well as business skills (Buckley, 2007). By 2003 CMA staffing, mostly based at their headquarter offices in Sheffield, also reached a peak: ‘We employed 25 members of staff, there was substantial growth of the sector, of membership, and growing political recognition,’ observed Buckley (ibid, 2007).

Advancing media policy: 1997-2001

The 1990 Broadcasting Act established the Radio Authority (RA) and the Restricted Service Licences (RSL), which had been ‘energetically grasped’ by community groups; this provided an ‘invaluable “nursery slope” for those unfamiliar with broadcasting and helped to demonstrate the potential of community radio for local people’ (Everitt, 2003: 17). It also enabled the sector to ‘develop its thinking and refine its policies’ (ibid., 17). The 1990 Act promised to increase the range of possibilities and services but apart from the RSLs, the benefits to the community radio sector were limited to a small number of community groups that had obtained licences in rural areas.

In November 1998, in a response to the Green Paper on Regulating Communications promoted by the DCMS/DTI, the CMA asked for permission to use the RSL licensing category or to establish a separate category of local radio service altogether, to enable the RA to ‘issue a limited number of community radio pilot licenses over a two-year period in advance of new legislation’ (CMA, 1998). Moreover, the CMA asked for a relaxation of the public funding restrictions present in Schedule 2, Part II of the 1990 Act because allegedly, they had the ‘effect of preventing access by local radio licensees to public funding programmes for social and economic development even though these funds are widely used to support other radio training and short-term broadcasting projects’ (ibid., 1998).

Up to October 1999, however, the RA was still evidently against this idea, on the grounds that this decision would breach the terms of the 1990 Broadcasting Act (ibid., 1998). In July 1999, the CMA also met with representatives of the DCMS to inform the policymaker about the underdevelopment of the UK community radio, in comparison to a range of European countries, but most importantly, on how community radio had the potential to contribute to policy objectives that had a high priority on the Government's agenda. These included tackling social exclusion, promoting lifelong learning, providing community access to new information and communication technologies, promoting community involvement in local development and regeneration, and encouraging volunteering and active citizenship. The CMA claimed that ‘with the right policy framework it could play a substantial role in the delivery of many of the recommendations in the DCMS led report to the Social Exclusion

Unit (PAT10)' (CMA, 1999c).

Maintaining constant pressure on the Radio Authority by responding to all the relevant consultations, the CMA pursued another important objective, to achieve its media policy objectives. It tried to convince lawmakers and the Government of the suitability of community radio to help achieve social policy objectives that were high on the list of priorities of the New Labour governments at the time. In doing this, it showed the potential demonstrated by hundreds of RSL projects across the country and envisaged what could happen if a new and distinct sector were introduced in the UK.

The new Chief Executive announced by the Radio Authority in July 1995 was Tony Stoller, who had previous senior experience in radio at the IBA, the commercial radio body Association of Independent Radio Companies (AIRC), and as Managing Director of Thames Valley Broadcasting. His latest recollection of the community radio sector was one of a polarised and ideological movement, where 'political militancy had done a disservice to themselves' (Stoller, 2010b). Stoller's first meeting with community radio activists in his new role took place at the CRA annual conference in Sheffield on 15 September 1995:

I was listened to perfectly courteously and I gave what I thought was the 'party line'. But it is interesting, for me, that the conversations I had around the edges with the people there sort of got me thinking. And nothing changed quickly. But that was for me, I think, part of the catalyst for changing my own mind.' (ibid., 2010b)

However, relations remained cool for a while. The Authority still believed that small-scale ILR was indeed community radio and that a new sector might have been a way to get a commercial radio licence by the back door (ibid., 2010b).

The state of the relationship between the CMA and the regulator, then, was one of deep dissatisfaction on the CMA's side. This can be seen from a letter dated 20 May 1999 and addressed by the CMA to the RA's Chief Executive:

Given the depth of dissatisfaction with the current local radio licensing system and the

negative impact which has resulted to [sic] many Community Radio groups from competing in a system weighted towards commercial business models, the CMA Council is no longer prepared to endorse any recommendations for inclusion in Radio Authority local licence working lists. You are well aware from our previous discussions of the aspirations of most of our radio members to run full time free-to-air community radio services. Despite the many developments in radio broadcasting in recent years they still have no way of meeting this aspiration. The Radio Authority has a statutory responsibility to license “a range and diversity of services” yet Community Radio continues to be largely excluded from full time licensing. (Community Media Association, 1999b)

However, at the government level, things were beginning to change: ‘Soundings from DCMS officials, and from ministers during 1999, suggested that they would welcome a move from the Radio Authority to re-open the community radio issue’ (Stoller, 2010a: 318). At the same time, the Authority was growing concerned about the loss of localness and increased consolidation of ownership in local commercial radio.

In 1999, the Davies Committee on the future funding of the BBC, also requested that any additional revenue given to the BBC (because of a supplement on the licence fee), be used to develop digital services in an increasingly converging media sector. The CMA used the consultation promoted by the DCMS to make the case for a Community Media fund, to support local public service broadcasting initiatives outside of the BBC system. The suggested share for a subvention was 1% of the licence fee, approximately £20 million of funding, at that time. The CMA claimed that both the BBC and the commercial sector were failing in the delivery of very local provision, stating that no local radio stations were present in the Nations, apart from England, and few ILR stations had by now a true public service ethos. Reflecting the new, multimedia nature of the organisation, the CMA proposed that the funding should be made available to any possible platform, radio, television, and Internet projects; it illustrated the case of the community media sector funding scheme in the Netherlands in what is called ‘local public service broadcasting’ (*lokale omroepen*), proposing it as the best practice to inform the UK debate (CMA, 1999a).

In January 2000, Richard Hooper, after having served at the Radio Authority since its foundation as part of the Board, was appointed as new Chair of the Authority. Buckley

acknowledged that Hooper proved to be much more open-minded on this issue: ‘He was prepared to shake things up. That was important for us when we had the opportunity to meet him’ (2007).

So, by the start of the millennium, the policy context seemed to turn more favourable to the CMA’s requests. The change at the top levels of the regulator, an increased concern by the RA on the loss of localness and public service remits in the commercial sector, and an interest by government officials to re-consider plans in view of a new Communications Act, looked promising for the future.

The struggle for definition: access vs. community

In line with Stoller’s intentions the Authority decided to name the proposed new sector Access Radio. This term was included in a submission to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), outlining the RA’s principles for ‘Radio Regulation in the 21st Century’, submitted in June 2000 (DCMS, 2000). It confirmed that the new ‘Access Radio’ sector would use radio ‘to assist in the broader aspects of education, social inclusion and social experimentation’, with the ‘purpose to enable public access to radio in a new and imaginative way’, also motivated by ‘evidence of demand from potential operators and of interest from the voluntary, educational, and training sectors’ (Radio Authority, 2000: 17).

The RA expressed the wish to experiment with several initiatives ahead of legislation and, if the White Paper on Communications accepted the principle, ‘not least to learn more about the practical implications of an innovative notion’ (ibid., 20). The Authority also proposed the establishment of a Radio Fund, to be coupled with enabling legislation for the new sector. This could provide start-up and non-recurrent funding for stations with social and programme ambitions, which would be wholly different from the commercial sector. The fund would be used either to pay fully for, or to initiate, programming of particular social value (which the commercial sector would be unlikely to produce), and to support the archiving of radio materials. The variety of sources that could be used for the fund included central, local and European government funds, lottery funding, revenue drawn from the cash bid payments made currently by INR licensees, a percentage levy on the national radio advertising revenue

of ILR services, a percentage of the BBC licence fee for public service broadcasting, social funds, including the Gaelic Broadcasting Fund, and charitable foundations (ibid., 19).

It is notable that the RA submission never used the words ‘community radio’ throughout its document, except in two critical remarks: ‘We do not entertain any doctrinaire approach to self-styled ‘community’ radio’ (ibid., 12)’, and ‘The proposals which we now put forward are much more radical and innovative than the old style approach to non-profit-distributing free-to-air “community” radio service’ (ibid., 34). Stoller’s memories of community radio in the 1980s brought back a very ideologically charged, and left-leaning sector, and this move seems to have been an attempt to empty the definition of its ideological notions, offering instead a more ‘benign’ term.

The much-contested use of this term, and the meanings associated with it, can be seen as a continuation of what had been happening in British radio for some time where both public and commercial stations claim to have done some form of ‘community radio’; the possibility of this being appropriated by a whole new sector arguably brought both sectors to pressure the RA to make use of another term. This led to considerable discontent in the community radio sector, as expressed by the then Director of the CMA, Steve Buckley:

Hooper found a way around the political obstacles by not calling it community radio because he knew that if we called it community radio, some people would say no. They called it access radio and they wrote this ridiculous paper where they claimed that access radio was not some sort of doctrinaire self-styled, community radio thing, but was a new and innovative idea, which it clearly wasn’t, where not for profit organisations would be able to take the airwaves, just what we had been asking all along! (Buckley, 2007)

Although the cause of some dissension, practical progress was being made, as confirmed by Hooper’s proposal of an ‘Access Radio Fund’ to provide seed corn, experimentation money. In December 2000, the White Paper, ‘A New Future for Communications’, included Access Radio in its section 4, titled ‘Maintaining diversity and plurality’. However, a different tone can be noted here. While the White Paper does indeed use ‘community radio’, it keeps interchanging the use of this term with ‘access radio’, perhaps to please both community

media activists and public and commercial broadcasters concerned about the appropriation of this term by someone other than them. An excerpt from section 4.5, titled, ‘Community broadcasting’ and including proposals also for community television, illustrates DCMS/DTI’s approach at that time:

We seek views on extending the diversity of radio services through ‘*Access Radio*’ (...) the constraints on access to non-commercial funding for permanent services have inhibited the growth of a strong *community tier of radio* (...) We would therefore like views on whether the benefits of *community radio* would justify greater public intervention. Some possible benefits are that: *very local community based radio* can help increase active community involvement, and local educational and social inclusion projects; *small radio stations* can provide a nursery for the next generation of broadcasters – providing hands-on training and experience (...) In order to provide more scope for such *community radio services*, the Radio Authority has suggested the establishment of an ‘Access’ Fund (...) (DCMS, 2000: 39-40, emphases added)

Community radio campaigners might have felt encouraged by the fact that the competent government departments had not written their definitions in stone. They felt able to ask for changes at a later stage. On 12th February 2001, the Radio Authority promoted an ‘Access Radio Seminar’ in London to which interested parties in the radio industry were invited to give their views about the future actions planned by the RA, where it explained more clearly why the new sector was going to be called ‘Access Radio’:

We chose the term ‘Access Radio’ because it emphasized the broadening of access to the right to broadcast at a time when ownership consolidation was continuing. We did not choose the term ‘community radio’ because good ILR stations are community stations reflecting the locality and its concerns. (Radio Authority, 2001e: 3)

What the regulator demonstrated on this occasion was good intent, but it ignored much of the thinking in the White Paper itself, and the views of sector, where the term ‘community radio’ had been used without difficulty since the 1970s. In other words, with an emphasis on pure

and simple access to broadcast, for communities, ‘A further difficulty arises in that the term ‘Access Radio’ can be seen to describe a very different type of radio service, where the station is not primarily a broadcaster, but operates as a ‘publisher’ of programmes’ (Price-Davies and Tacchi, 2001: 60).

At the Access Radio Seminar, commercial radio representatives seemed to have diverging perspectives on the possibility of introducing a new tier of radio. Phil Riley of the Chrysalis Radio group was very much against the introduction of Access Radio for a variety of reasons. For example, based on the claim that community radio would have been beneficial in tackling social exclusion, he argued that ‘a lack of radio choice could not be blamed for social exclusion in the UK’ (Radio Authority, 2001e: 14). Not admitting that licensed commercial radio was still neglecting a wide range of audiences, and ignoring the legitimate claims of all of the communities still was not covered by their own local or community of interest station, he added that ‘legitimising pirates would not help’ (ibid., 14) and that anyway, ‘genuine market failure should be addressed either by the BBC or by some other form of proactive regulation’ (ibid., 14), not by introducing a new sector.

The empowering possibilities, including the acquisition of media and digital skills in an information-oriented society, were dismissed with the argument that ‘there was no shortage of media graduates’ (ibid., 14) and by questioning ‘why radio training should receive funding ahead of other concerns, also given that RSLs already provided practical experience, and that commercial radio stations provided formal training too’ (ibid., 14).

Here, Riley was overlooking the fact that an RSL could be active only for a very limited period and that, overall, it had high rental costs for equipment and that it partly expressed demand for more licences, as the applications for a full-time Community Radio licence would later demonstrate. It was also questionable for Riley to assume that media training should be a domain exclusively for graduates. Further, in forecasting that the proposed ‘Access Radio Fund’ would result in ‘dull as ditchwater programming as it had in the 1980s’ (ibid., 14), Riley also ignored the fact that only part of this would have been used on funding programmes that commercial radio would not have produced due to its nature of maximising profit. He disregarded the fact that a large part of these funds would have been a one-off to cover administrative positions, to help a station get off the ground in its early stages and that by any means – historically, socially and culturally – this was a very different Britain, and potentially

a very different sector, than the one in the 1980s. In the view of representatives of the commercial radio sector, who ignored RSL experiences and a changing political context, Community Radio had not changed over the last two decades. But, as the forthcoming 'Access Radio' pilot project would confirm a few months later, the sector no longer consisted merely of a very ideologically charged and left-leaning group of activists but also included an increasing number of practitioners and stations coming from very different backgrounds.

How representative these claims might have been, of the feelings of the commercial sector, is reflected in documents released by the CRCA in this period. Here, it is important to record the 'slightly' different position of GWR's Ralph Barnard, who was evidently more open to the introduction of a third sector:

This new addition must be given room to grow without being overshadowed by commercial radio or the BBC. Some communities of area or interest will really benefit from having their own radio service. Therefore, GWR supports the creation of a third tier of stations (...) A third sector of stations should attract a third sector audience and be funded from a third set of resources (...) Broadcasting to a small audience is not irrelevant and (...) community radio has a vital role to play. (Radio Authority, 2001: 16)

He also agreed with the CMA's objection to the use of Access Radio, favouring 'community radio' instead: 'I'll tell you what I think Access Radio is. I think it's a title dreamed up by someone who hasn't the first idea of how radio stations, any radio station[s], operate. Someone who doesn't like the term community radio' (Everitt, 2003: 29). With reference to Barnard, Buckley says that 'they were not being entirely philanthropic about this. They saw the opening as a way of extracting some concessions from [the] government, so that they would allow greater concentration. For them, this was a bit of a strategic balancing act. They put a bit of weight behind what the Labour Party wanted to do, and what we had been pressing for a long time, in return for some concessions that would improve their businesses' (2007).

In other words, representatives of the sector were more friendly during this debate, to obtain other concessions on ownership and further deregulation of the sector, hence the move towards less hostile positions in the debate. Overall, there was even less agreement on how Access Radio was going to be funded, with industry representatives very worried about

possible top-slicing of the BBC licence fee or an imposed levy on INR/ILR stations.

Shortly afterwards, on 2nd March 2001, the RA confirmed its proposal for the establishment of a third sector in a submission to the government. It recommended that Access Radio should be permitted mixed funding from both public funding and commercial support, and called for the establishment of a Radio Fund, the administration of Access Radio by the forthcoming regulator Ofcom, and for an indication of whether it wished to proceed with Access Radio. If yes, ‘the Authority will structure a range of experiments, which will need to be carefully researched and monitored, in order to establish a clear potential approach which OFCOM will be able to adopt when the new legislation is passed’ (Radio Authority, 2001a).

So, where the definition of their own sector made practitioners rather uncomfortable with the RA’s choice, Community Radio’s introduction also had the ‘blessing’ of the two other sectors, although with very different opinions among the commercial radio operators, and a proposal of the regulator on the government’s table. As the CMA had wished, this included a pilot project to be conducted as soon as possible, from which lessons could be learnt and passed on to the forthcoming legislation.

The possible principles of the pilot experiments were then outlined publicly by the Chief Executive of the RA, Tony Stoller, at the Celtic Radio and TV Festival in Truro, on 31st March 2001. Highlighting that at the 12th February seminar, ‘there was a widespread feeling that Access Radio was an idea whose time had come’, and following the approval of DCMS Secretary Chris Smith and the Broadcasting Minister, Janet Anderson, Stoller stated that what the regulator wanted to achieve,

(...) is to test the various models, technical platforms and administrative approaches, in order to make sure that, just as soon as the new legislation takes effect, the regulatory body (...) has done all the testing it needs in order to get ahead straight away with the new services. To do that, we need to be sure that the pilots embrace a wide enough range of approaches, covering different parts of the UK and varied types of area socially, in order to allow an all-embracing regime to be established. (Radio Authority, 2001b)

Among others, the principals conducting the experiment had to attempt to replicate the approach, patterns and structures that might have governed the new sector, Access Radio, and ‘contain examples of the types of socially regenerative and educational links, and of training and development of local community capacity’ (ibid.). The content proposal, it was suggested, should reflect the diversity present in British society, ranging from the more rural to the more urbanised communities, also aiming at communities of interest within localities, ‘not just all-embracing neighbourhood services, with the intention of establishing their role in serving minority groups and sustaining minority linguistic cultures’ (ibid.).

The diversity among the stations that would have been involved in the pilot project was envisaged as crucial to spotting the implications of very different funding models, as well as helping to inform the forthcoming regulator Ofcom on ‘how it should take account of the local broadcasting ecology in deciding how to protect existing small-scale services from unsustainable levels of competition’ (ibid.). Finally, the pilot licences had to be given for a fixed term and not interfere with the continuing award of RSLs. Importantly, the experiment had to be monitored and researched to provide a sound basis for its evaluation and future arrangements.

The emerging model of Community Radio, arising from the discussions continued to present a terminological problem, even if it did not ultimately block progress. Rather than being a model for an *alternative* to the duopoly, what seemed to be emerging from this critical process of lobbying was a concept of Community Radio as *complementary*, and as a tool to deliver community involvement and development, gaining skills for the information economy and contributing to social inclusion. This placed Community Radio firmly in the social policy realm. What starts to become clear here is that, if approved, such a model of Community Radio would have favoured regeneration projects rather than very local community radio, pure and simple, which would have benefitted less from such a context.

At this time, though, the focus was on getting the legislation through. Speaking on behalf of the whole sector, the CMA therefore continued its efforts to push for a pilot project, to inform the policymakers in advance of legislation. With the road now paved for the pilot experiment starting as early as 1st January 2002, on 24th May, the RA invited interested applicants to submit letters of intent. These would be shortlisted and then applicants invited to apply in full. Excluding areas where ILR licences had been recently awarded, the authority specified that

applicants had to be prepared to start broadcasts by early 2002 and fulfil the characteristics outlined by Stoller in his Truro speech (Radio Authority, 2001c). 193 letters were received, and 15 groups were then shortlisted to submit a full application to be considered for a pilot licence, to be issued later in the autumn of that year (Radio Authority, online, 2001d).

In November, the Radio Authority announced the appointment of Professor Anthony Everitt as the evaluator of the pilot project. Significantly, in the same month, the government formally announced the introduction of the third sector, in its response – on the White Paper – to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee:

We recommend that, as a matter of urgency, the Radio Authority identify pilot schemes for expanded *community radio* projects for launch in advance of the introduction of legislation to give effect to the proposals in the White Paper. We are convinced that there is both a strong need and an overwhelming case for the establishment of a permanent *community radio* sector in the United Kingdom, distinct from and complementary to commercial radio. (DCMS, 2001: 10, emphasis added)

The response also gave further details about the ‘Access’ Fund and the way the ‘Access Radio’ pilot project had to be carried out and evaluated. At this point, the ‘testing’ phase of Community Radio could begin and the RA issue licences. The CMA did not intervene directly in giving suggestions as to which stations might need to be ‘privileged’ in the pilot, as this would have meant giving priority to some members before others. But on the selection process, Buckley commented, ‘The RA selected a diversity of types, including some groups not with [a] strong track record, resulting in some cases (...) [in the production of] some odd things and a waste of licenses. However, the stations provided the evidence needed for the project’ (2007).

The RA’s justification for choosing groups without proven records was ‘to ensure a variety of funding and administrative structures and geographical spread across the United Kingdom’ (Everitt, 2003: 21). The RA believed, at this stage, that the pilot project should have followed the legislation. But the CMA insisted, successfully, that this should be carried out *ahead* of legislation to inform it and to learn from its outcomes before drafting the final bill.

The analysis of the submissions reveals some details about the spread of knowledge, about the possibility of 'Access Radio' across the UK, at this moment in time. For example, in line with RSL licences, only four letters of intent were received from Wales and among the communities of interest, only one requesting a licence for the Afro-Caribbean sector, compared with 27 for the Asian community. Indeed, as outlined by Khamkar in interviews with key figures of the Asian radio movement in the UK, while the nationwide *BBC Asian Network* helped to cater to national demand, 'there was still demand for local Asian radio services in their own languages' and that 'the Access Radio project helped in encouraging volunteers to use their own language and style' (2023:133)¹. Given the high levels of involvement in pirate broadcasting, and the traditional distrust of the regulator, the Afro-Caribbean community appears to have become disillusioned by the real possibilities of this opportunity. Indeed, the degree of involvement of Black communities in illegal broadcasting suggests that this is the case: 'The reason they're doing pirate radio is because there is no other option for them in their communities' (McTernan in Lewis and Scifo, 2007). In fact, Everitt too partly attributed this to the high number of unlicensed pirate stations run by members of the Black community (2003: 20). Overall, most of the submissions (more than 100) came from geographically based groups that wanted to serve all the communities in a particular area. The bias towards geographical, rather than ethnic or interest-based meanings of community, might have been a result of the scarcity of frequencies, especially in urban areas. This prompted diverse groups living in an area to come together and potentially increase the chances of getting a licence.

Whereas the selection process run by members of the RA's Access Radio sub-committee ran smoothly, difficulties were found in the process of clearing frequencies to make space for the pilot process, with the authority's expectations proving to be too optimistic. The requirements set by the Radio Authority, on behalf of which the Access Radio Sub Committee had to judge the applications, included the demonstration of evidence of social gain and/or public service aims, to serve either a community of place or interest, to be distinct from ILR and to have existing expertise, so as to be able to start by 1 January 2002 (Radio Authority, 2001e).

In retrospect, it can be said that the evaluation of the Access Radio pilot stations strengthened

¹ Interviews with key figures on this matter conducted by Khamkar (2023) includes, among others, the one with Asian community radio campaigner Salim Salam.

the case for the introduction of the sector. The use of the term 'Access Radio' was justified in the evaluation, on the basis that this would avoid the confusion 'between radio which serves a community and that which belongs to a community' (Everitt, 2003: 30), the first being 'what commercial radio does at its best and the latter is what Access Radio aims to provide' (ibid., 30). Moreover, it would be 'unhelpful to give a third radio tier a title which embodied any ambiguity, and which failed to draw the clearest of distinctions' (ibid., 30), between the two sectors.

Anthony Everitt concluded that the stations had fulfilled their promises of social gain delivery in three areas that were also at the core of the New Labour Government's social policy: a) individual empowerment and enhanced employability through the acquisition of transferable skills; b) boosting of community spirit; c) contribution to the delivery of public services and information, especially to 'hard to reach' groups (2003: 151). In short, Access Radio promised to be a positive social and cultural development and it was recommended that it should be introduced as a third tier of radio in the UK.

The Communications Act 2003 and the Community Radio Order 2004

Following the results of the evaluation, then, it was clear that the introduction of Community Radio in the legislation was just a matter of time. Since the 1997 election, the CMA had been developing the support available in Westminster, culminating in the formation of the All-Party Community Media Group (APCMG), to help in lobbying for a good final draft of the bill. This had been kick-started by a parliamentary reception hosted in 1997, followed by a corporate meeting in 2000, and encouraged by the MPs themselves. Community Radio was then included in the Communication Act 2003 (paragraph 262), with specifications to be outlined in an order approved subsequently by Parliament. Paragraph 359 also introduced the possibility of grants for community radio stations, to be administered by the new media regulator, Ofcom.

Once the Bill was published, the CMA familiarised itself with the membership of the Parliamentary Committee, and approached 'friendly' MPs of the Labour, Liberal Democrat, and Plaid Cymru groups. Buckley (2007) recognises that some significant concessions were achieved via the House of Lords, with the crucial support – among others – of Lord Bragg and

Lord Puttnam, where the CMA was able to push forward changes, such as the re-definition and re-naming of Access Radio to Community Radio, and the increase of the scope of the Access Fund, so that it supported not only radio but also multimedia initiatives. At this point, Buckley adds, once the government had a substantial majority on this matter, 'it was clear that it was going to push this through' (ibid.). Putting this achievement in an historical context:

We got a reasonable piece of legislation in this country (...) it shouldn't have taken so long. It took so long because we were in the wrong political environment to achieve our aims. It could have happened five, 10 or even 20 years earlier (...) probably it would have been difficult earlier, but there could have been a possibility in the early years when Thatcher was not so ideological. (...) You see, the experiment was cancelled in 1986, but in 1985, they were still ready to go for it. By 1986, with the end of the miners' strike, Thatcher was at her ideological highpoint, and nothing was going to happen. It took a long time to get beyond that. There is a lesson there and it is that these opportunities are intensely political. (...) The existence of [the] BBC has probably contributed to holding back development of community radio, particularly because it has [a] network of local radio stations, but [this] didn't prevent demand. (...) BBC local radio stations are not really local. Here, in Southern Yorkshire, it targets four major urban centres and thousands of villages. (Buckley, 2007)

The Community Radio Order (CRO) was approved on 19-20 July 2004. Lord McIntosh of Haringey, the Minister for Media and Heritage, had presented the draft order in the House of Lords, on 16 July, on behalf of the government and requested its approval. Having then the legal instrument to do so, Ofcom opened the first round of licensing for full-time community radio stations on 1 September 2004 (Ofcom, 2004).

Conclusion

After a journey that lasted almost three decades, Community Radio became the third pillar of the UK radio broadcasting system. Although the legislation was clearly workable, when compared to contemporary regulations across Western Europe and North America (Price-

Davies and Tacchi, 2001), the commercial radio lobby had managed to ambush the Community Radio Order in the concluding stages, drawing on more powerful and experienced lobbying tools and then including a protectionist measure for their existing, smaller stations:

OFCOM shall not grant a licence to provide a community radio service in any case where the licence, if granted, would overlap with another local licence for a service, other than a community radio service, the potential audience of which includes no more than 50,000 persons who have attained the age of 15 years. (UK Parliament, 2004)

This set severe limits on advertising for stations with potential audiences between 50,000 and 150,000 adults. For a sector that had traditionally championed the free market, and had pushed for further relaxation in ownership, this was an undoubtedly protectionist measure. At that point, it would have been expected that the Community Radio Fund, which had been changed at the last minute by the CMA to also include television and digital media, would have compensated for such measures. With a meagre £500,000 destined to cover part of the core costs of a station in its early stages, the legacy of the Labour Government in bringing Community Radio into British media policy was henceforth risking being somewhat limited. However, despite this limitation, on Saturday 28th October 2023 the CMA celebrated 40 years with a vibrant community media sector event that took place in Leicester (CMA 2023) and, at that date, the fact that there are still 317 licensed full-time terrestrial community radio stations, broadcasting across the UK (Ofcom, 2023) is a testament to the resilience of the sector, despite overall weak financial foundations set in 2004.

This article, then, drawing on the analysis of policy documents that have been overlooked in the existing literature on British Community Radio, and supported by interviews with key actors, has unveiled the details of the lobbying action by the CMA, which led to the introduction of Community Radio as a third sector of radio broadcasting in Britain. In looking ‘holistically’ at the community media environment, I hope to have given a sense of the interactions and the dynamics between the players in the policymaking process, and to have contributed to enhance the historical understanding the development of Community Radio in the UK, under New Labour, between its General Election victory in 1997 and the approval of the Community Radio Order in 2004.

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