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 2009). In the last two decades, student radio stations have also been spreading at a fast pace in Asia and Africa and have adapted dynamically all over the world, often with scarce resources, to the convergent media landscape where they have experimented with 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 United States 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, 2009; Cavallo 2009, 2013) and the United Kingdom (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 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 time during the term periods, with vacation 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 2008: 83). In the context of mergers and acquisitions that have made local stations in the United States 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 2008: 84). In other words, college radio ‘usually provide the main alternative to traditional format radio’ (Wall 2007: 35). In organizational 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 2008: 84)

College radio stations have a strong history of radicalism and affiliation with social movements in the Americas and Europe. In the United States, 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 work is discussed in historical accounts of the community radio sector during those years (Lefebvre 2008). In countries as Poland these stations 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 (2008), Wall (2007) and Wallace (2008), and this is also reflected in this issue (see Rubin and Waits). However, college, student and university radio is an area that has been largely 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 2008: 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 presence 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 journal 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 who 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 2007 in Scifo 2011: 302)

Making radio can make students feel 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 amateurish 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 student radio stations I visited, 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 programme’s website and social media profiles.

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
& 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, original emphasis)

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

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National Conversations
Public Service Media and Cultural Diversity in Europe

Gavan Titley, Karina Horsti and Gunilla Hultén

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Public service broadcasting is in the process of evolving into ‘public service media’ as a response to the challenges of digitalization, intensive competition, and financial vulnerability. While many commentators regard public service as being in transition, a central dimension of its mission – to integrate and unify the nation while respecting and representing plurality – is being reemphasized and re-legitimated in a political climate where the politics of migration and cultural diversity loom large in public debate. Through a series of thematic chapters and in-depth national case studies, National Conversations examines the reshaping of public service media and the concomitant development of new guiding discourses, policies, and program practices for addressing difference and lived multiculturalism in Europe.

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