



On the edge. AMARC Europe between ‘movement entrepreneurs’ and the grassroots. Notes from the Bucharest meeting

Stefania Milan *

European University Institute, via dei Roccettini 9, I-50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI), Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 June 2009

Accepted 12 June 2009

Keywords:

Community radio

AMARC Europe

Bucharest

‘Movement entrepreneurs’

ABSTRACT

The (re)founding conference of the European chapter of the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC) took place in Bucharest, Romania, in December 2008 (http://www.amarc.org/conference_europe/index.html). About 60 community media practitioners from 18 countries in Eastern, Central and Western Europe, took part in the four-day meeting. Items on the agenda included the debate on current ‘hot issues’ such as the digital switch-over, the foundation of the European chapter of the AMARC Women’s International Network, skill-exchange workshops, a plan of action for the coming three years, and the election of a new board. The conference was crucial in fostering networking among radios, and enhanced the relationships with other players, such as the UNESCO and the news agency Inter Press Service. But should it have been more than that? This article takes a critical look at the Bucharest conference, and analyses what AMARC Europe has done so far, its potential role for community media in a pan-European continent, and the perspectives for the future.

© 2009 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1. Introduction

December 2008. In a hotel at the outskirts of Bucharest, the capital of Romania, about 60 community radio practitioners and sympathizers from 18 countries in Eastern, Central and Western Europe are meeting for a four-day conference on community radio in Europe. The poster of the meeting shows a stylised map of Europe with a few antennas rising from the land. A thin man is walking over the map, on a rope stretched between the antennas, precariously holding a huge microphone. It is a perfect metaphor for the conference theme, “Broadcasting on the edge. Supporting positive change in Europe through the expansion of community”. In fact, there are many edges to be found in the field of European community media, one of which is the difference between the well-established community radios in most of Southern and Western Europe, and the absence of community media and an unclear legislative framework in many Eastern European countries.

The meeting is the first conference of the newly (re)founded European chapter of the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC from its French acronym). Items on the agenda included the debate on current ‘hot issues’ such as the digital switch-over, the foundation of the European chapter of the AMARC Women’s International Network (WIN), many skill-exchange workshops, a plan of action for the coming three years, and the election of a new AMARC Europe board of directors. Many steps forward were taken. However, many of us felt that not enough had been achieved.

This article provides an overview of the AMARC Bucharest meeting from the point of view of a ‘engaged researcher’ of community radio. Facts and personal impressions presented here are the result of participant observation at the Bucharest meeting, integrated by my earlier participation in other AMARC activities such as AMARC 9 (<http://amarc9.amarc.org/>), the ninth world conference held in Amman (Jordan) in November 2006, and a couple of meetings of the AMARC Europe board of

* Tel.: +39 333 2309945.

E-mail address: Stefania.Milan@EUI.EU

directors. Occasionally I will also quote interviews I have gathered in the framework of a three-year research project on emancipatory communication practices (Milan, 2009).

The article is divided into three sections. Section 1 briefly reconstructs the (pre)history of the present European section of AMARC, recalling the birth of the 'international' AMARC in 1985, and the experience of an earlier European chapter, founded in the 1990s, which had intense but short life. It also recalls the establishment in 2004 of another European network, the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE), which emerged out of the vacuum left by the collapse of the first AMARC Europe, and the renewed enthusiasm at the AMARC 9 conference around the idea of re-building a European division. Other contributions in this issue will deal more in depth with the histories and policies of these community movement organizations. Section 2 summarizes the many achievements of the Bucharest meeting, focusing in particular on the development of joint projects and campaigns such as the partnership with the international news agency Inter Press Service (IPS), the growing awareness of policy issues, and the excitement surrounding the foundation of the European chapter of the Women's International Network. The last section raises a series of questions, in order to shed light on the challenge of building a community radio grassroots movement in Europe: the pitfalls and the difficulties of (re-)building a pan-European community radio association, and the possible scenarios for interaction between AMARC Europe and the CMFE, and between the sector and policy-makers. It also sketches out the perspectives for the future, seeking to provide constructive suggestions on how to move forward.

2. The (pre)history of the new AMARC Europe

It all started when, in 1983, a group of community radio activists met in Montreal, Canada to discuss Canadian issues related to low-power radio stations. In 1985, at their second meeting, in Vancouver, it was decided to set up an organisation in view of building a movement in support of community radios worldwide. This initially spontaneous movement became a non-governmental organisation under the name of *Assemblée Mondiale des Artisans de la Radio Communautaire*, whose purpose is "to defend and promote the development of community radio worldwide" (AMARC, 2006). Currently, AMARC focuses on policy advocacy and funding.

AMARC is a membership organisation and has a light and decentralised structure, with only four staff members, based in Montreal. The main governance body is the International Board (IB), elected every four years, whose 13 members are not salaried. Since the very beginning, AMARC has promoted the development of regional chapters. Each region is independent (also financially), can set up its own office and governance structure, and organise regional assemblies. There are six regions, namely: North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and Pacific, and the recently added Europe and the Middle East region.

In 1992, in Mexico, Steve Buckley of the UK Community Radio Association (CRA) was elected to the AMARC IB as the new Western European representative, with the mandate to establishing the European section. AMARC Europe was funded in 1994, with headquarters in Sheffield, hosted by the CRA. It was largely depending on project funding, with little paid staff (which shrunk even more when funding expired), and suspended operations in 1998 for bankruptcy. For a while, after the collapse of the European chapter, there was no pan-European association for the community radio sector. In November 2004, a group of community radio practitioners met in Halle, Germany, at the Bundesverband Freier Radios Assembly hosted by Radio Corax. They recognized the lack of participation of community media in the European policy debate. The Council of Europe had just issued a call for public consultation on media policy issues in view of its periodical inter-ministerial conference on mass media policy issues, to be held in Kiev, Ukraine, in 2005.¹ The CMFE was created in response to the Kiev policy arena, as an umbrella organisation to represent and strengthen the participation of the 'Third Media Sector' in European policy-making.

Contrary to AMARC, the CMFE is not a membership-based organisation but an "action-oriented network focused on advocacy" (interview no. 14, Budapest, May 14 2007) and "an organisation that identifies its allies and establishes coalitions spontaneously in the light of specific activities, targeting specific issues. In that sense it is really an expert group, mediating on different levels and in various spheres" (personal communication, December 14, 2006). The CMFE can be seen as an 'epistemic community', that is to say "a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area" (Haas, 1992, p. 3). Since Kiev, the CMFE has been very active lobbying the Council of Europe, where it obtained observer status in 2008, and the European Parliament, enabling its members to bring up their concerns on the European level.

In the meantime, something was moving also on the AMARC front. In November 2006, at the AMARC 9 conference in Amman, about 15 people from Ireland, Moldova, Germany, Italy, Hungary, France, United Kingdom and Azerbaijan, met to discuss whether there was a common interest in re-founding AMARC Europe, taking advantage of some funding opportunities. Also CMFE members participated in the meeting. Participants were in favour of the creation of a membership-based organisation, devoted to exchange of content, best practices and training. The objective was to strengthen relationships between radios, to create a network supporting community media at the grassroots, rather than a lobbying structure. Headquarters were based in Rome, and an interim board of directors was elected to ensure the transition to the first founding conference. Mariano Sanchez, from the Madrid-based Radio Vallekas, was elected president, while Francesco Diasio, from the Italian radio agency AMISnet, was appointed as secretary. A trilingual website (<http://europe.amarc.org/>) was created within the AMARC international website.

¹ For a detailed account of the CMFE participation in the Kiev process (see Milan, 2009).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/466115>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/466115>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)