Radio Adelaide: A case study of community radio change and resilience within the non-profit industrial complex

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Abstract

The Australian community radio sector is a rich source of information for researchers, activists and practitioners working to support and develop community broadcasting worldwide. With a 46-year history, it represents an established and enduring third tier of independent local broadcasting with over 450 non-profit radio services legislated to provide opportunities for community engagement and participation. This article focuses on the political, economic and institutional factors involved in a change of ownership and management of Radio Adelaide, the country's longest running community radio station. The process illustrates the impact and effects of the non-profit industrial complex as stations struggle for financial survival and independence in an increasingly competitive, corporatized environment. It is a case study which questions the contemporary understanding of a strong and resilient sector, highlighting themes to inform community media research and practice internationally.

Keywords

Community media, alternative media, community radio, neoliberalism, non-profit industrial complex

Introduction

The Australian community radio sector provides a rich source of information for researchers, activists and practitioners working to support and develop community broadcasting worldwide. Over 450 non-profit radio services are legislated to provide opportunities for community engagement and participation, representing an established and enduring third tier of independent local broadcasting. The 46-year history has always been one of change, disruption and innovation. Currently, stations are redefining their services to reflect the changing ways in which radio is made, distributed and listened to (Dubber, 2013). The process is compounded by the impact and effects of the non-profit industrial complex as stations struggle for financial survival and independence in an increasingly competitive, corporatised environment. This article focuses on the political, economic and institutional factors involved in the change of ownership and management of Radio Adelaide, the longest running community radio station in Australia. It is a case study which questions the contemporary understanding of a strong and resilient sector, highlighting themes to inform community media research and practice internationally.

Community Radio as Neoliberal Resistance

A global movement of community radio has continued to grow in recent decades. The diversity and scope of activity is demonstrated by the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters,

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listing almost 4,000 members and associates in 150 countries (AMARC, 2018). Where models differ worldwide, the sector is broadly defined by its non-profit status and a focus on community participation and accountability (Jolly, 2014). Such principles represent a stark contrast to the profit motives of global mass media. Increasing concentrations of corporate ownership have colonised mainstream media, reducing the numbers of voices heard, limiting the diversity of media products available, and decimating the public sphere function of media as a site for informed political debate. As a response, a range of non-commercial, alternative and community media have continued to flourish (Waltz, 2005).

Radio plays a prominent role in the process. In a rapidly changing mediascape where consumers have seemingly limitless options through which to personalise their choices, and many media institutions are struggling to survive, radio has risen to the challenge most successfully. Outlining the challenges of understanding the 'moving target' of radio in the digital age, Andrew Dubber (2013: 50) describes the continuing role it plays in furthering democratic principles through strengthening communities, representing a site of political activism and providing a tool for development. Remaining relatively affordable to make, transmit, and listen to, it has retained an enduring position as the most pervasive and democratic media worldwide (Hendy, 2000).

As Kerrie Foxwell (2012) argues, the community radio movement represents a significant global mass media, driven by an international population of active citizens and communities united by the desire to communicate to communities of interest and geography. Mass media and communications play a fundamental role in reinforcing and perpetuating the global capitalist agenda. Dominated by global commercial media corporations, mass media commands the audience sizes necessary for public sphere debate while limiting the range of available discourses to those which reinforce dominant neoliberal values. In contrast, community radio participants are subverting mainstream media organisation and practices through the production of their own media, 'replacing the homogenising tendencies of mainstream media with a positive cacophony of voices and interests, representing diverse interests and places' (Foxwell, 2012: 138).

Foxwell's analysis is helpful for establishing the status of community media as neoliberal resistance. Activity is organised, regulated, funded and operated in different formats worldwide. Yet whether participants explicitly intend to or not, the very existence of the sector is subversive, challenging the power of commercial forces to colonise media production and distribution. As Foxwell (2012: 138) states, 'Community radio as a significant global mass media, challenges the global hegemony of neoliberal dogma on a number of fronts'. A key example of such challenges relates to the concept of ownership. In direct contrast to mainstream devotion to private ownership of media resources and the pursuit of individual wealth, collective ownership of media and the generation of social capital feature heavily within community broadcasting. Relating the issue to property rights, Kitty van Vuuren (2006a) describes community radio stations as 'commons regimes' where ownership is determined by cultural orientation, norms and values, rather than by market or state. A key theme in the concept of social capital (Putnam, 2000), collective norms and values underpin the voluntary and cooperative management of community radio stations (van Vuuren, 2006a: 389-90).

The survival of the sector is connected to the ability to continue this resistance as neoliberal rationalities progressively dominate all arenas of social life. As Foxwell (2012: 142) argues, where practitioners are primarily concerned with serving a community of interest and representing marginalised groups, the role of community radio researchers is to highlight the ways in which these media challenge the neoliberal political economic order. She draws on Robert McChesney's account of the political economy of the media to draw parallels with the effects on the wider non-profit sector:

> Neoliberal democracy, with its notion of the market uber alles, takes dead aim at this
> sector. Instead of citizens, it produces consumers. Instead of communities, it produces

shopping malls. The net result is an atomized society of disengaged individuals who feel demoralized and socially powerless (McChesney, 2008: 286).

In contrast, community radio brings people together, empowering them to produce their own media and represent themselves in their own terms. As van Vuuren's (2006a) research shows, the value and purpose of the sector lies in this community development function. Beyond non-profit status, community radio stations share characteristics in common with the wider third sector, including volunteer involvement and the centrality of organisational norms and values (van Vuuren, 2006a: 381). As such, the challenges faced by community radio stations are equally shared with the wider sector, subject to the same pressures of increasing bureaucratisation, professionalisation and corporatisation.

The non-profit sector encompasses a vast array of activity from large national and international organisations to grassroots and community-based groups, all with different interests, ideologies and focus, and with varying capacity, infrastructure and access to resources. Collectively, they represent a major contribution to national economies. In 2000, US non-profits controlled over 1.59 trillion US dollars in financial assets with expenditure of over 822 billion US dollars (National Council of Non-profit Associations, 2000). In Australia, the sector reported income totalling AU$103 billion in 2013-14. This figure was equivalent to 3.8 percent of gross value added to the Australian economy, greater than the three percent contribution of the information, media and telecommunications industries (Cortis et al, 2015).

The 'Incite!' anthology, *The Revolution Will Not be Funded* (2017), provides valuable observations on the emergence and effects of the non-profit industrial complex. While focused on developments in the US, the collective writings demonstrate the impact of global capitalism on changing forms of social welfare and social change. As with its military and prison antecedents, the critique refers to the impact of introducing the profit motive into the 'business' of providing social care and instigating social change. The industrial complex model provides a framework for understanding the political and economic processes through which we live and resist. Yet as Soniya Munshi and Craig Willse (2017) argue, it is important to differentiate between structures, form and content. Both the prison industrial complex and its military predecessor are regimes of violence, explicitly functioning to repress dissent. The non-profit model manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus, operating as soft control to reinforce the direct control of the state. Critiques of the military and prison industrial complexes highlight the futility of reform and increasingly call for the abolition of systems of violent oppression. In contrast, the non-profit sector remains a space where lifesaving resources are shared and communities strengthened. The challenge lies in moving beyond the restrictions and confines of the non-profit industrial complex to think about the independent modes of social organisation available (Munshie & Willsie, 2017).

Scope and Approach

As Munshie and Willsie (2017) observe, the non-profit sector is a key site through which neoliberal social and economic reforms are both constituted and contested. This is clearly demonstrated through community broadcasting, an arena characterised by the friction between communitarian and commercial imperatives since its inception. Within the contemporary digital media environment, the status of community radio is more precarious than ever as projects struggle for survival in the face of technological change, reduced government support, and increasingly commercialisation. Minimal operational budgets inspire innovation, and stations are often at the forefront of technical experimentation, developing content and services for digital and online platforms. Yet at the same time, government funding is withdrawn as traditional arguments for public media are undermined by 'celebrations of the participatory and democratic functions of mobile digital communications and the internet' (Fox, 2017: 46). Where neoliberalism equates

democracy with free market, profit and individual wealth, the value of community radio is redefined.

This article examines the current state of play through a case study of Australia's longest running community radio station. It asks if the collectivist principles of community broadcasting are to survive the expansion of neoliberal individualism, then what are the resilience factors involved? The Australian sector is often turned to as a model of community radio worldwide. Fully established as a legitimate third tier of broadcasting by 1978 (Gordon, 2012), it continues to play a major role in the nation's media landscape, with the latest figures showing that 5.3 million people listen to an average of 15.4 hours per week (McNair, 2017). Historically, the model and experiences of the sector have been influential in the establishment of comparative systems. As Peter Lewis (2012) shows in his account of the hard fought and long running campaign for community media in the United Kingdom, the Australian experience was useful for highlighting the obstacles that needed to be overcome, including legislation, frequencies, finance, regulatory structures and political will.

Together with its longevity, community radio in Australia is notable for the amount of national empirical research which has contributed to the understanding of its audiences, stations and volunteers. The sector has been assessed from many angles, from *Community Media Matters*, the most comprehensive review of audiences to date (Meadows et al, 2007) to more recent case studies on institutionalisation (Anderson, 2017) and counter-hegemonic media production (Fox, 2017). The range of available research represents a rich resource for those interested in supporting community broadcasting internationally. Yet in the current environment, as the value of social initiatives are continually brought into question, such resources need to be updated regularly in order to reflect the fast pace of change.

The first community radio station in Australia, Radio Adelaide began broadcasting as 5UV in 1972, founded through a bequest to University of Adelaide to provide educational radio services. While run semi-autonomously, the university continued to provide the station with premises and support services for over 40 years. It was a level of support which contributed to Radio Adelaide's ability to innovate, becoming the first community station to broadcast on FM and stream online, as well as instigating firsts in Indigenous and ethnic services. It was an operational model which Janey Gordon (2012) presented as an example of the resilience of community radio. Yet, less than three years later the University of Adelaide began to extricate itself from Radio Adelaide following the decision to sell the station premises.

As Gordon (2012) argues, university support has played a prominent role in the start-up of grassroots and alternative media around the world, representing a 'natural environment' for the aims of community radio. Equally, there is a history of hostile separation, with some of the most enduring stations navigating difficult transitions to financial and political independence. Examples include the forcible eviction of 4ZZZ by the University of Queensland in 1988 and the 1995 relocation of WMFU freeform radio in the United States at the end of a 37-year partnership with Upsala College. In the era of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), the withdrawal of financial support for non-profit, community initiatives is unsurprising. However, the way in which events unfolded at Radio Adelaide warrants further examination, providing a contemporary case study which raises questions about the changing meanings and functions of community broadcasting.

This research is an attempt to document what proved to be a complex, fraught and challenging separation for both parties. The approach is primarily ethnographic, drawing on the experiences and observations of the author. I have been involved with community media since the mid-1980s, both in the UK and Australia, and continue to be inspired by radio's ability to give a voice to the most excluded, underrepresented and misrepresented people in society. As a long-term Radio Adelaide volunteer and trainer, I was closely involved in the early stages of the

transition, including short periods in managerial roles and on various committees and advisory groups. It is an insider research position which provides insights, observations and access to information which might otherwise be unavailable. As Helen Cunningham (1998) argues, the position adds legitimacy and validity to the process, and an ability to access more focused and in-depth information than starting from scratch as an outsider. Equally however, I have positioned my knowledge as a community and alternative media researcher in order to achieve a degree of analytical distance. To this end, ethnographic observation is combined with analysis of media releases, news coverage and campaign materials, and supplemented by interviews with key people who remain involved with the station. The result is to piece together a timeline of events for the period in which Radio Adelaide relocated to become a solely independent operation.

Campaign

In November 2014, the University of Adelaide announced the decision to sell the Radio Adelaide building as part of a broader consolidation of assets to fund the major development of a new medical school alongside the opening of the new Royal Adelaide Hospital. It was a prime street-front location in the central business district across from the main university campus. The home of Radio Adelaide since 1984, it had become a prominent and well-known feature of the city's cultural life. Together with the location, it was also relatively well equipped for a community radio station, boasting three spacious on-air studios, two production studios, open plan offices, and a communal production space.

At that point in time, Radio Adelaide was a sector leader, with 450 volunteers producing over 100 hours of original programming each week for FM, digital and online platforms. Originally established through one of the last remaining 'E-class' educational broadcast licences, the focus had remained high quality speech content, combined with a diverse range of arts and cultural programming. Positioning itself as an independent voice in the local media landscape, Radio Adelaide described itself as:

> A real radio alternative for people curious about ideas, issues and music. We are as diverse as the city we live in, with music programs across the spectrum, arts and culture, current affairs, issues and ideas, along with many programs presented by local community groups in their own languages (Radio Adelaide, 2015).

In addition to audio production and broadcast services, the station was home to the longest running Registered Training Organisation in the sector, offering a range of accredited qualifications to community radio stations and individual volunteers across the country. This was combined with a subcontract arrangement with the university to deliver two courses within the Bachelor of Media degree programme.

As Gordon (2012) shows, the ability to provide opportunities for students to develop employability skills represents the one of the most enduring factors behind university partnerships with community radio, one which continues to play a significant role in the journey toward Radio Adelaide independence. While the announcement to sell the building was a shock to the station's community of staff, volunteers and listeners, the decision initially came with a commitment to relocate. However, a needs analysis and planning exercise conducted by the station demonstrated the costs involved in re-establishing a radio station of comparative size and complexity, and by May 2015 the commitment was put on hold.

The university's financial contribution equated to around one fifth of the Radio Adelaide income per year (Gordon, 2012: 376). Together with the building and support services, the financial administration, human resources management, station broadcast infrastructure, computer network and hosting of a website containing hours of podcasting and streaming services were all linked to the university systems. This included the payment and administration of staff

salaries for around 13 positions at any time, ranging from full to part-time. The then long-term General Manager highlighted the challenges of the arrangement:

> Core staff are paid by the University, and the salaries are high compared to staff at other community stations […] but our costs are prescribed by the university, which can be difficult and the financial systems cumbersome. Operational practicalities mean that we are not always mobile and reactive (Welch, 2006 in Gordon, 2012: 382).

In June 2015, the building was sold and demolition scheduled for 12 months later. The announcement sparked an intense period of uncertainty, rumour and controversy as the future of Radio Adelaide became increasingly precarious (ABC News, 2015a). In order to define the costs and complexities of disentanglement, the university commissioned an independent review conducted by community broadcasting consultants Kath Letch and Anne Tonks. Both had extensive experience of the changing dynamic between community radio and university partners, Letch through a 14-year role as 3RRR Station Manager in Melbourne, and Tonks as former Station Manager of 6RTR in Perth. Together with Letch's former role as General Manager of the national sector peak body, the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) and ongoing co-ordination of the sector's digital radio strategy, their involvement ensured that the investigation was informed by a knowledge and experience of community radio regulation, standards and practice.

The full report was never published. Instead, a series of recommendations and options were analysed and costed by external auditors and released on 1 December 2015 (Radioinfo, 2015). *5UV – Radio Adelaide and the Future* was distributed as 'a briefing inviting response from key stakeholders' together with a call for feedback within 10 days (University of Adelaide, 2015a). In the introduction, the then Vice Chancellor, Professor Warren Bebbington, cites the financial constraints of the university in the face of decreasing Commonwealth funding:

> Universities who host or sponsor cultural and community activities are increasingly faced with difficult choices, in which they must put the survival of their core activities – of teaching and research – ahead of long-cherished external programs (Bebbington, in University of Adelaide, 2015a).

The Briefing Paper outlines five options for the future of Radio Adelaide, ranging from relocation and maintenance of existing funding to closure in June 2016. Bebbington's media statements on the day reiterate the financial imperative, restate the university's sole ownership of Radio Adelaide and for the first time, posit the idea of selling of the station: 'I think this is a moment where we need to find out whether there are other people in the community who would like to share this' (Bebbington, in ABC News, 2015a).

The university held the broadcast licence, owned the building and contributed to the annual running costs of the station, all factors which demonstrate ownership. Yet as an independent non-profit operation run semi-autonomously for decades, the concept of 'ownership' is uniquely defined. Community access and participation form the basis of community media organisation, functioning and survival. In Australia, community radio licences are explicitly legislated and regulated to ensure community participation in the operations, programming and provision of services (Broadcasting Services Act, 1992). While the university had remained the holder of the broadcast licence for over four decades, Radio Adelaide had evolved independently to reflect the needs of its community of interest, shaped by its volunteers, listeners and community partnerships with other non-profit, arts and cultural groups.

Of the five operational options outlined in the Briefing Paper, Letch and Tonks recommended a transitional approach to the withdrawal of university involvement over a three to five-year period (University of Adelaide, 2015a: 4). This would maintain most elements of the service and operations, protect existing income streams, and enable the incremental reduction of university

support. Negotiations to transfer the broadcast licence to a separate non-profit entity working to represent and support the existing station community would help to create an independent and sustainable model.

However, on the day of the Briefing Paper's release, conflicting announcements illustrated a stark contrast between the approach and priorities of both Radio Adelaide and the university. Where the independent review recommended a cooperative transitional option, Bebbington's comments suggested otherwise, with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) news website reporting, 'Future of Radio Adelaide in doubt as University of Adelaide considers selling the iconic station' (ABC News, 2015a). After months of uncertainty and speculation, and with the demolition of the building only six months away, the news marked a further breakdown in the relationship between both parties. Characterised by volunteer involvement and direct participation in decision making, the non-profit sector is 'necessarily fraught with conflict' (van Vuuren, 2006a: 381). Yet as van Vuuren (2006a) suggests, functioning is dependent on shared organisational norms and values, and where they break down, the principles of democratic participation are undermined.

The events contributed to the launch of Radio Adelaide's *#SaveRadAd* campaign to raise awareness and support, including a social media campaign, an online petition, on-air announcements and a stand-alone website. The mobilisation of the station community of volunteers and listeners is notable. Where alternative and community media involvement suggests radical political activism, permanent sectors such as Australia, and latterly the UK, tend to be relatively conservative in organisation and content. When Radio Adelaide first went to air as 5UV in 1972, it was the first step in a long period of lobbying for a national community broadcasting sector. Then known as 'public radio', the movement expressed a clear need for alternative broadcasting, anti-commercialism, democratisation and localism (Bear, 1983: 23), aims which suggest a commitment to progressive politics and social issues. Yet the diversity of the groups involved shows a wider range of motivations and objectives – classical music enthusiasts, ethnic groups, universities and colleges, and radical political groups (Forde, Meadows & Foxwell, 2002a).

There are stations which have remained firmly committed to their radical political beginnings, such as 4ZZZ in Brisbane with its mission to 'Agitate, Educate, Organise' (Anderson, 2017), and 3CR in Melbourne which actively seeks to 'resist and subvert social injustices' (Fox, 2017). Yet as Susan Forde, Michael Meadows and Kerrie Foxwell (2002a) show, the Australian community media landscape has experienced a shift to the right of the political spectrum in recent decades, coinciding with a growth in regional areas and an increasing commitment to commercial goals. Radio Adelaide prides itself in providing an alternative, independent voice, committed to diversity and localness. Yet rather than radical activism, the station identity had remained based in the arts and intellectual focus of its original educational remit.

Furthermore, as a longstanding station, the operational structure and processes did not lend themselves to independent organisation. Volunteers were accustomed to a high level of training, guidance and technical support delivered by a relatively large team of staff. Staff levels reflected the station commitment to professional, quality, speech content, with many posts funded through specific contracts and projects. This included two part-time producers for *The Wire*, a national community radio current affairs programme run in partnership with 2SER in Sydney and 4EB in Brisbane, and my own role as manager of the Registered Training Organisation which generated an average 25 percent of the station income per year.

The majority of community radio stations in Australia operate in regional areas, run solely by volunteers. Forde et al (2002b) report that 30 percent of stations do not employ any staff and 35 percent employ three people or less, with the majority of paid positions focusing on sales and administration. In contrast, Radio Adelaide was representative of a small group of metropolitan stations, including 3RRR in Melbourne and 2SER in Sydney, initially established through university partnerships. Demonstrating the resilience and potential growth of the sector, they had

evolved and survived through developing diverse income streams and an ongoing focus on providing independent quality media services.

The *#SaveRadAd* campaign attracted significant national and local media attention, raising awareness of the risks to the future of the station and achieving over 6,000 online petition signatures of support within two weeks. On 6 December 2015, this included a motion carried in the Legislative Council of the South Australian Parliament, with members from all political parties expressing the need to support the continuation of Radio Adelaide. The station was recognised for its central role in the cultural life of the state, particularly in relation to the contribution to the arts and local music industry, and as a significant platform for Indigenous and multicultural programming (Hansard, 2015).

Concurrently, the university received 168 written responses to the Briefing Paper by the deadline. On 14 December, the University of Adelaide issued a media release announcing a new ownership structure of Radio Adelaide, with details to be confirmed early in the new year. The Vice Chancellor's comments acknowledge the preferred transition to an independent entity while indicating a handover to an external organisation:

> Since we began public consultation two weeks ago, several organisations well positioned to operate a community radio station have stepped forward with proposals to take over Radio Adelaide … We are now in negotiation with these parties. Over the next 10 days we also welcome registrations of interest from other organisations with the capacity to take a significant financial interest in the station (Bebbington, in University of Adelaide, 2015b).

The announcement increased tensions further, with Radio Adelaide representatives noting the lack of consultation and raising urgent concerns about the future. Speaking to the ABC, station volunteer Casey Briggs stated:

> I'm a little bit shocked. The Radio Adelaide community wasn't really consulted or involved in what happened in the announcement today … It seems we're not allowed to know who the interested parties are, or what they're interested in doing with the station (ABC, 2015b).

On the same day, the university issued an "*Invitation to Register Interest for: The Community Broadcasting Licence and associated activities currently operating as Radio Adelaide*" (University of Adelaide, 2015c). Within two weeks, the document required registrants to demonstrate legal status, capability and experience, and governance and organisational structure. A group of Radio Adelaide volunteers had started the process to formally establish an independent entity, RadAd Station Workers Association Incorporated (RASWA), yet the timeframe excluded new organisations from involvement.

It was a move which illustrates striking differences in the understanding of the function and purpose of community radio. Free access to the broadcast frequency is the primary differentiation between commercial and community sectors (Order, 2017). Where commercial radio licences are paid for, community licences are issued at no cost on the basis of non-profit status and community representation, guided by a code of practice. The registration of interest process acknowledged that any agreement would need to meet the requirements of the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). Equally, it introduced a language of ownership and transfer of assets into the business of community development, one which conflicts with the traditional understanding of collective, collaborative, community media practice.

Transition

On 19 February 2016, The University of Adelaide announced that it had 'signed a deal' with a separate community broadcaster (Founten, 2016). In an unprecedented move, Fresh 92.7 was to

manage the transition of Radio Adelaide to an independent non-profit organisation (Anon, 2016). Local news announced, 'Future of Radio Adelaide safe after shacking up with Fresh 92.7' (Kelton, 2016) while Fresh 92.7 General Manager, Troy Sincock, heralded a new era for community radio collaboration: 'We are in a unique position to assist to build the capacity of community radio, to share facilities and training opportunities for the benefit of Adelaide' (Sincock, in Kelton, 2016).

The language of the announcement indicated a return to the transitional option recommended by Letch and Tonks, with 'Radio Adelaide set to become independent' (Founten, 2016). Yet the surprise introduction of another community broadcaster suggested otherwise, with Radio Adelaide representative, Nikki Marcel, commenting on the lack of consultation:

> We're shocked and stunned by the idea that Fresh is going to take over Radio Adelaide … There's been absolutely no consultation with the Radio Adelaide community. We are willing and able to do this ourselves. We've got the expertise and we've been advocating for that all along (Marcel, in Founten, 2016).

Fresh 92.7 is an established, metropolitan, youth-focused community radio station specialising in electronic, dance and urban music. They have a large listener base and a reputation for successfully raising sponsorship revenue. Under the arrangement, the two independent stations were to share premises, the university was to fund the facilities and relocation, and Fresh 92.7 would manage the process. Located centrally, within walking distance of the university campus, the ability to continue the provision of the university media courses was instrumental in the move, yet the details on which organisation would be responsible for the courses remained unclear. Highlighting the continuation of the Radio Adelaide educational mission, the Vice Chancellor commented, 'The media training provided to our media students and the community will continue and likely expand' (Bebbington, in Founten, 2016).

One month later, the university announced the appointment of a 'Transition Manager' to oversee the process of adapting and equipping and the new facilities at Fresh 92.7 to accommodate the two independent stations. Managing Director of Musitec, a creative hub sponsored by the State Government and Fresh 92.7 among others, David Grice had a background in music production (Washington, 2016). The role was also to include the co-ordination of establishing a new non-profit organisation to take on the broadcast licence, subject to approval by the ACMA. The announcement represented the first practical step towards the continuation of Radio Adelaide services.

However, lack of consultation continued as a theme, with station representatives referring to a 'secret deal' between Fresh 92.7 and the university (Washington, 2016). RASWA Chair, Nicky Page, commented on fears that the arrangement indicated the 'slow death' of Radio Adelaide due to lack of studio space, reduced staff, and the resulting impact on the ability to deliver projects and contracts which represented significant portions of the station income (Washington, 2016). Page reiterates the willingness of the station staff, volunteers and supporters to participate in the process, pointing out that the transfer of licence conditions requires the new licensee to 'meet the expectations of the existing community, and involve them in the transfer process … So far this has not occurred' (Page, in Washington, 2016).

A reference group of Radio Adelaide staff and volunteers was quickly convened to work with the Transition Manager and Fresh 92.7 General Manager, meeting weekly to advise on the building, refit, installation and planned relocation in three months' time. In May 2016, the University of Adelaide established a new non-profit organisation, Educational Broadcasters Adelaide Incorporated (EBA) and appointed an external Board of Management to be responsible for the operations and strategic development of the station. The board was to be chaired by Iain Evans, a former conservative Liberal Party politician who had held several ministerial positions in

the South Australian Parliament. New to community broadcasting, his interest was in raising revenue and building a 'solid economic base':

> We will have to go out like any other business and source new sources of revenue … we've got a three-year window to come up with a sustainable business model and that'll be the challenge of the board and the staff and the volunteers (Evans, in ABC News, 2016).

The university committed to funding the relocation with financial support decreasing on a sliding scale over a three-year period. As long-term staff and volunteers, both Nikki Marcel and I agreed to positions on the board in order to support the process and represent the experience and interests of the existing Radio Adelaide community. However, the roles lasted a short time and were soon resigned due to differences in outlook and approach. On 28 June, Evans announced the appointment of new General Manager, Rob Popplestone, citing the value to the station of his volunteer experience and corporate connections (Henry, 2016). With radio presentation experience in both the commercial and community sectors, Popplestone specialised in sports broadcasting, commenting that:

> The Radio Adelaide community is broadly respected for its passion and commitment to delivering a real radio alternative for South Australia and beyond… What lays ahead is an exciting opportunity to deliver even more community-based programs to an even larger audience whilst also being commercially independent (Popplestone, in Henry, 2016).

Two days later, Radio Adelaide vacated the university premises, five staff contracts came to an end, and the station switched to automated music programming while the new facilities were completed. Within one month, the station had returned to live programming, begun inducting volunteers in new station operations, and re-started the university courses, marking a major success in a challenging process.

A strong governance structure is essential for the operation and strategic development of any volunteer organisation. In community broadcasting, the ability to demonstrate board responsibilities and processes is a central requirement of the ACMA licence application and renewal process. Where a board of management is appointed externally rather than elected by members, accountability becomes problematic. As van Vuuren (2006: 385a) demonstrates, community radio stations operate as 'commons regimes' through social and cultural organisation based on a system of membership rights and a collective commitment to preserving the sustainability of the resource. She turns to Elinor Ostrom's (1990: 15–17) analysis of collective action, describing commons management as ultimately concerned with the self-governance of those who have voluntarily committed themselves to cooperative strategies, and connected to the rights and duties associated with the use and sustainability of a particular resource. The success or failure of these strategies relate to factors internal to a group:

> These include its communicative structures, differences in the individual exercise of power, and the ability to develop trust and common norms among group membership – in short, the group's decision-making processes and cultural orientations (van Vuuren 2006a: 386).

The tensions between the incumbent station community and externally appointed board and management became apparent within the first month of operations at the new premises. Local media reported the decision by the General Manager to cut two longstanding daily programmes from the schedule without warning (Dexter, 2016). Reduced resources and production capability indicated that programming changes were inevitable in a new independent model of operations. Yet the abrupt and rushed manner in which the jazz and classical programmes were removed

raised the latest 'alarm bell' in a series of developments (Dexter, 2016). RASWA members sought clarification on the cancelled programming, calling for involvement in further changes: 'We've had no assurance that the board or management is committed to establishing mechanisms for participation in these decisions' (Page, in Dexter, 2016).

Despite the concerns raised, the ACMA approved the transfer of licence from the University of Adelaide to Educational Broadcasters Adelaide Incorporated in December 2016. In order to meet the licence requirements, the development and submission of a membership policy and a community participation policy indicated plans to work with all five universities within the Adelaide region. This satisfied the ACMA that the educational community in the licence area would be able to continue to participate in the operations and programming of Radio Adelaide. In addition, the licence confirmation was subject to the development and submission of a community consultation strategy and a structured engagement programme to be submitted and implemented within three months (Henry, 2016b).

The justification for proposed programme changes related to the need to develop a new business model and increase revenue. As the General Manager argued, the existing schedule of diverse shows resulted in a disjointed listener experience, stating the need to improve programming consistency (Dexter, 2016). The aim reflects standard commercial radio industry practice to maximise advertising revenue potential. Yet equally, it is possible to achieve a level of standardisation while adapting and building on the unique strength of community radio where listeners value the ability to tune in to specialist programming. 'Appointment listening' increasingly has the potential to attract specialist sponsors, while reflecting wider radio industry practice in the digital media age, demonstrated through a shift towards podcasting, listen again and streaming services.

Further Radio Adelaide programming changes were announced in February 2017 with the introduction of a new weekday sports show. The recruitment of two known local sports commentators was designed to increase listenership and sponsorship, raising the number of paid presenters to four, including those of the flagship programmes, *Breakfast on Radio Adelaide* and *Local Noise*. The General Manager described *Midday Sport* as a move to attract listeners who would normally get their sports coverage from commercial stations. Equally, he rejected the suggestion that the station was leaning towards a more commercial broadcast style: 'We're definitely not anything to do with those [stations]' (Popplestone, in Siebert, 2017).

Outlining the funding challenges and dilemmas of Australian community radio, Simon Order (2017) highlights the impoverished, self-funded nature of the sector. While government assistance has only ever represented a small fraction of its revenue (Forde et al, 2002b), the reduction of core funding has led to the adoption of broadcasting practices that are more typical of commercial radio, including programming schedules and formats, and the recruitment of sales personnel (van Vuuren, 2006b). Yet as van Vuuren (2006b: 29) argues, an increased reliance on sponsorship income and accompanying need to maximise audiences, places the sector in direct competition with commercial radio, raising questions about 'the principles of community broadcasting, its relationship to the commercial sector, and the effectiveness of the current regulatory regime'.

Government policy indicates a tacit support for the shift toward commercial trends in community broadcasting (van Vuuren, 2006b: 29). Where the withdrawal of state support indicates a shift towards financial independence, it equally represents the co-option of social action, as stations are increasingly required to compete for funding. As Andrea Smith (2017: 10) asserts, the non-profit industrial complex promotes a non-cooperative, competitive and non-collaborative culture which limits the potential for significant and sustainable social change. The need to focus on 'outcomes' and successes in order to attract funding encourages inward-looking, niche operations that lose sight of the bigger social aims.

The struggle for financial survival has been a prominent and ongoing theme in the history of community broadcasting, characterised by the need to balance the requirement for community participation with the economic imperatives of staying afloat (Jolly, 2014). As Order (2017) suggests, the relative poverty of the sector requires a financial pragmatism which is often at odds with the core values of community representation and participation. Federal funding contributes less than 10 percent of the sector's income (Forde et al, 2002b) with the rest provided by a mix of fundraising, sponsorship and direct listener support in roughly equal proportions (Thompson, 1999: 25). Rather than an over-reliance on any one source, it is a formula which helps to retain community broadcasting's independence from both the market and the state (van Vuuren, 2006b: 39).

In August 2017, just over one year after the initial relocation, the realities of the financial position became apparent when all but two of the last remaining staff positions were cut. This included that of the General Manager employed to develop and implement the station changes (Washington, 2017). The Board Chair commented that the station had fallen 'well short' of its revenue targets, predicting an impending revenue shortfall of about $400,000 when university support was phased out. As current spending would not be sustainable over the next year, immediate expenditure cuts were required (Evans, in Washington, 2017). Within the six months, only 18 months after the initial appointment, the remaining two members of the EBA Board stood down and a new Board of Directors recruited from the station membership was appointed prior to election:

> Radio Adelaide held its historic first Annual General Meeting on Friday 9 February, appointing its first community-elected Board of Directors and completing its transition to independence (Radio Adelaide 2018).

Future

The future of Radio Adelaide remains uncertain. However, with the election of a new independent board, events have come full circle, returning to the initial aims of the station community and realigning station governance and practice with that of the wider sector, based on a commitment to community access and participation. Long term Radio Adelaide volunteer, and one of the two remaining staff members, Nikki Marcel (2018), claims that the station has been 'knee-capped' by an unnecessarily fraught process, describing the need to rebuild from ground zero.

Radio Adelaide now operates as a scaled down version of the original model, yet has continued to provide quality, independent, local content, through maintaining and recruiting a strong community of volunteers, listeners and supporters. When asked why the station has survived so far, former long-term Training Manager and RASWA Chair, Nicky Page (2018), indicates the strength of the volunteer body. This is combined with a commitment to core values of innovation, skills development and ongoing mutual support. As Page highlights, Radio Adelaide has a long history of community involvement based on the principles of diversity and inclusion. Where community support represents the station's greatest resource, she feels that its value was not fully understood:

> the EBA strategy of spending money to make money, employing broadcasters with no understanding of the station, failed to make use of the commitment to the station amongst existing volunteers (Page 2018).

The ability to balance seemingly conflicting communitarian and commercial objectives lies in the ability to acknowledge and build on the unique value of the sector. Together with sponsorship, listener subscriptions represent a significant income source. For example, 3RRR prides itself in being a 'listener supported station', where the community of interest contributes to the organisation's financial sustainability based on shared values. As Gordon (2009: 74)

demonstrates, there is a clear correlation between clear station objectives and successful funding. Examining community radio stations in Australia and the UK, she links effective fundraising to an awareness of why funding sources are appropriate. Financial support is increased where sponsors and subscribers recognise the extra value of associating themselves with the ideals of the station.

Where Forde et al (2002b: 99) describe a 'creep of commercialisation' within the sector, the Radio Adelaide case represents an attempted coup. As Marcel (2018) highlights, the results show the futility of mimicking a commercial model, and instead the sustainability of the station relates to its value as a resource for personal and community development: 'bringing diverse people together is what makes it so special'. She describes the need to recover and rebuild from a prolonged period in crisis mode. The original three-year financial transitional support package from the university was severely diminished during the station's foray into commercialism, with financial pressures further compounded by the effects of a restructure of national community broadcasting funding (Order, 2017). Yet the mood remains hopeful, with the station keen to move forward to a new, creative and independent future (Marcel, 2018).

This article set out to document the rapid and challenging process of disentanglement from university support for the longest running community radio station in Australia. Informed by ethnographic observation, interviews and media coverage, it presents a contemporary case study of community radio crisis and change. The process of rebuilding of an independent Radio Adelaide has only just begun, and future research on the longer-term effects and results would provide valuable insights for the broader sector on the sustainability factors involved. Yet what can be concluded at this stage is that the 'community' in community radio remains its most valuable asset.

As Clemencia Rodríguez (2001: 161) argues, the market incursion into community media is a 'predatory' move, one which incorporates and undermines the community development function of the sector (van Vuuren 2006b). The challenge of balancing communitarian and financial aims has been a central feature of community media since its inception. Yet the onslaught of economic rationalism in all arenas of social functioning has shifted the value of community broadcasting from social impact to financial independence. Instead, the resilience of the sector is linked to its resistance against neoliberal individualism, based on the communitarian aims of collective action. Where commercialism conflicts with the community media principles of access and participation, the ability to build on, nurture and develop the unique strengths and values of the sector remains central to its financial sustainability.

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