

-

Bicycle Highway

BICYCLE HIGHWAY

*Celebrating Community
Radio in Ireland*

Edited by
Rosemary Day

The Liffey Press



Published by
The Liffey Press
Ashbrook House, 10 Main Street,
Raheny, Dublin 5, Ireland
www.theliffeypress.com

© 2007 Rosemary Day
and individual contributors

A catalogue record of this book is
available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-905785-37-7

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying and recording, without written permission of the publisher. Such written permission must also be obtained before any part of this publication is stored in a retrieval system of any nature. Requests for permission should be directed to The Liffey Press, Ashbrook House, 10 Main Street, Raheny, Dublin 5, Ireland.

Printed in Ireland by Colour Books

Contents

1. Introduction: Community Radio, What Could be Simpler? 1
Rosemary Day, Wired Fm

Part 1 – History

2. If Community Radio is the Answer, What is the Question?
The Birth of Community Radio in Ireland, 1975-1995 11
Jack Byrne, NEAR Fm
3. From Pilot to Policy: The Development of a Community Radio
Movement, 1989-199729
Ciarán Kissane, BCI
4. From a Forum to a Force: The Development of CRAOL,
1998-200737
Nessa McGann, Wired Fm

Part 2 – Aims and Issues

5. Community Radio and Community Development55
Rosemary Day, Wired Fm
6. Empowerment through Community Radio: NEAR Fm as Example.....69
Sally Galliano, Ciarán Murray and Jack Byrne, NEAR Fm
7. Women in Irish Community Radio.....88
Nessa McGann, Wired Fm

8. Adult Education through Community Radio: The Example of Community Radio Castlebar	103
<i>Pat Stanton, CRC Fm</i>	
9. An Ghaeilge agus An Raidió Pobail: The Irish Language and Community Radio	111
<i>Lisa NíChoisdealbha, BCI</i>	
10. Student Community Radio.....	123
<i>Catriona Chambers, Cork Campus Radio</i>	
11. Support for Community Radio Stations	133
<i>Stephanie Comey and Margaret Tumelty, BCI</i>	

Part 3 – Personal Reflections

12. CRY in the Afternoon: Early Days in Youghal	149
<i>Noel Cronin, CRY</i>	
13. Community Radio Memories, Dublin South Fm.....	155
<i>Mike Purcell, Dublin South Fm</i>	
14. Raidió na Life: Raidió na Réabhlóide.....	171
<i>Fachtna Ó Drisceoil, Raidió na Life</i>	
15. Dialogue not Monologue: Connemara Community Radio.....	177
<i>Mary Ruddy and Pat Walshe, CCR</i>	
16. Agitate, Educate, Organise: Dundalk Fm 100	199
<i>Alan Byrne, DWR</i>	
17. Northern View: Raidió Pobail Inis Eoghain	205
<i>Jim Doherty and Jimmy MacBride, ICR</i>	
18. Going on Air: West Limerick 102.....	213
<i>Ciarán Ryan, West Limerick, 102</i>	
Appendix: AMARC Europe Charter	221
References.....	223

Introduction: Community Radio, What Could Be Simpler?

Rosemary Day

It's a summer's day and I'm freewheeling along, passing all the traffic that's backed up to God knows where. I'm getting where I want to go and I'm enjoying the ride. My bike won't take me all around the world today but I don't want to go there, I just want to get around my home town. My bike cost me very little to buy, it's actually second hand and quite old. It costs nothing to run – just a bit of energy and the belief that if I keep pushing I'll get there. Sometimes I cycle on the road with the cars and trucks. Other times I can go up on the pavement or off down a boreen that takes my fancy. I'm free, I go at my own pace; I meet up with others. We wave, sometimes we stop and chat or we travel together for a while. I'm not alone. I know there are many others cycling along like me, all over the country and throughout the world.

What is a bicycle highway and what does it have to do with community radio in Ireland? Community radio is a movement which seeks to build the communities from which it springs and which it serves. It does this by depending on the members of those communities to do it themselves. That means volunteers who work for no money and often on old equipment costing

them little or no money at all. So the analogy of the bicycle is a useful one. In the days of high-tech gizmos, the information highway and motorways built to deliver people, goods and services at high speeds, the very notion of a bicycle highway may seem an anachronism. However, we find today that the bicycle is a useful way to get around in cities, often quicker than in cars or by public transport. The bicycle is cheap to buy and to run. Using it makes a person healthier and protects the environment – it is ecologically sound. It may not be great for getting you across the entire country or for transnational travel, but for getting around in your own neighbourhood there is little to beat it. In the last few years in Ireland we see second-hand bicycles in use by new immigrants, by the ecologically aware, by the well educated and affluent, by the young and by the active retired – much like community radio. A highway is designed to connect people and places directly and speedily, without obstruction or delay. Community radio connects people in communities with the minimum of mediation; the people speak to themselves, immediately and effectively.

Community radio is cheap, accessible and it works well in a small space or for a small group. Why have a digital platform that can reach millions and costs you millions when you only want to reach 10,000 people? Community radio is small-scale and easy to use. Radio is the first broadcasting medium, but it still works. Despite the rise of iPods and MP3 players, radio is the most widely-used broadcasting medium in Ireland today. It is the medium of unconscious choice and of inconspicuous consumption. The reach of community radio is also wider than that of newer technologies. Listening to the radio does not require computer literacy or indeed any type of literacy, it is truly a basic medium. To hear a radio programme does not require broadband, a PC or any special training. Most households in Ireland have several radios – in different rooms, in cars and in tiny portable forms. Radio costs so little for the listener and for the broadcaster that like the humble bicycle we often take it for granted.

Community radio, it seems to me, is a bicycle highway because it connects people locally, in a lane that goes at a different pace from most other media today. It's a lane anyone can travel along, regardless of age, education or income. Anyone who can talk (and even some who cannot) can go on air in a community radio station within minutes of arriving at the station door. Being enabled to make your own programmes takes a little longer, but not nearly as long as it takes to learn to shoot a video or to participate in an electronic forum. Community radio stations broadcast on a daily basis to the people who live near them and so, like bicycle lanes in some cities, community radio can often be the most direct and efficient way of getting a message from A to B for certain types of people. As Liora Salter, a Canadian community radio activist in the 1980s once said, "it's two-way traffic on a one-way street". Radio may not have been used as a means of connecting individuals who speak as well as listen, but that does not mean that it cannot become one, just as Brecht and Ensensberger dreamed of long ago. An imaginative use of the medium can turn it from being something you listen to into what one African community radio station claims it does in its slogan: "*Le radio qui vous écoute*", the radio that listens to you! With a little imagination and a lot more energy, the radio can become the place where you speak for yourself.

The authors of this book are all active in community radio in Ireland. Some have been involved right from the very start, agitating for licenses and taking to the airwaves in the pirate era. Since that battle was won, many others have joined the ranks. Some work as paid members of staff in stations, others are employed by the regulatory authority (first the Independent Radio and Television Commission, IRTC, now the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, BCI). The vast majority, however, are volunteers in their own community radio stations, working from an idealistic vision of how life should and could be better for their communities.

This book is sponsored by CRAOL, the Community Radio Forum of Ireland, and is funded by the BCI to tell the story of the evolution and development of the community radio movement in Ireland. The book is a celebration of licensed community radio in Ireland. This story is so positive that it warrants celebration, and indeed publication, but it is also hoped that some readers may find this book both an inspiration and a road map to begin their own journeys in, for and with their communities on the airwaves.

Part One, "History", charts the development of community radio in Ireland from its early days as unlicensed or pirate community radio to the present. The history of community radio in Ireland in the late 1970s is discussed in Chapter 2, "If Community Radio is the Answer, What is the Question? The Birth of Community Radio in Ireland, 1975-1995". Written by Jack Byrne, one of the founding fathers of the community radio movement in Ireland and Europe and former chair of NEAR Fm, his chapter is a reflection on the lessons learned during those early days and suggests the seeds of a philosophy of community radio.

The Broadcasting Act of 1988 set up a regulatory authority, the Independent Radio and Television Commission (IRTC, later the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland, BCI) to establish and oversee the independent broadcasting sector. Raidió na Life and Anna Livia came on air in 1993 but 1994 marks the real birth of licensed community radio in Ireland when 11 groups took part in a pilot project to test the viability and potential of the community radio idea. Ciarán Kissane was appointed community radio development officer by the IRTC to monitor and support the pilot project. Now the Head of Broadcasting in the BCI, he reviews those early days in Chapter 3, "From Pilot to Policy, The Development of a Community Radio Movement, 1989-1997". He stresses the importance of evaluation for the community radio project and describes the emergence of a strong forum to represent the fledgling stations, to shape and to develop the sector.

That forum became the representative association known today as CRAOL, responsible for sponsoring this book. Nessa McGann, former chairperson, takes up the story of Irish community radio from 1998 to the present day in Chapter 4, “From a Forum to a Force: The Development of CRAOL, 1998-2007”. She discusses the development of the community radio movement in Ireland into a cohesive force for networking, lobbying, training and development.

Part Two, “Aims and Issues”, looks at the aims, issues and main concerns of community radio in Ireland today. Each chapter explores an area of major importance for community radio activists and uses the example of one or more of Ireland’s community radio stations to show how these issues are approached in practice. In Chapter 5, “Community Radio and Community Development”, Rosemary Day assesses the value of working in a community development manner for community radio stations.

Chapter 6, “Empowerment through Community Radio: NEAR Fm as an Example”, describes some of the strategies employed to ensure the meaningful participation of marginalised groups in a community radio station. Introduced by Jack Byrne, the chapter explores what empowerment means in a community radio station. Ciarán Murray and Sally Galliano of NEAR Fm and the Dublin Media Co-op draw on their experiences as station and project managers in the North East of Dublin city to bring us a variety of examples of the empowerment process at work, ranging from recently released prisoners to immigrants newly arrived in the country.

Ensuring the inclusion of women from all walks of life and at all levels of production and management is a priority for community radio activists who work to bring those who are marginalised into the communication process. Nessa McGann, former station manager of Wired Fm, now Programme Director of Spin 103, draws on her postgraduate research to provide us with examples of how this is accomplished in two Irish community radio stations,

NEAR Fm and Radio Corca Baiscinn, in Chapter 7, “Women in Irish Community Radio”.

Chapter 8, “Adult Education through Community Radio: The Example of Community Radio Castlebar”, describes how community radio can be the ideal vehicle to deliver adult education. Pat Stanton, Mayo VEC’s Adult Education Officer and one of the founders of Community Radio Castlebar, describes their innovative and successful adult literacy project.

Specific programming can fit the needs of particular target groups in a community. The former Irish language officer of the BCI, now the Chief Executive of the Independent Broadcasters of Ireland (IBI), Lisa Ní Choisdealbha, describes the work done through the community radio sector to bring programmes in the Irish language to fluent Irish speakers and to learners of the language in Chapter 9, “An Ghaeilge agus an Raidió Pobail: The Irish Language and Community Radio”.

Chapter 10, “Student Community Radio”, looks at communities of a different kind, those of students who broadcast to themselves on campus-based stations in Ireland. Catriona Chambers, station manager of Cork Campus Radio, describes this specific community, its needs and its ambitions and gives examples from the three student community radio stations: FLIRT, based in Galway, Wired Fm in Limerick and Cork Campus Radio in her native city of Cork.

The final chapter in Part Two, Chapter 11, “Support for Community Radio Stations”, looks at two important concerns for all community radio stations – finance and training. BCI officers Stephanie Comey and Margaret Tumelty describe the sources of funding throughout the entire sector and give an overview of the development of training programmes in Irish community radio stations over a 12-year-period.

Part Three, “Personal Reflections”, is a delightful freewheel down memory lane. People who have been working in Irish community radio stations, some since the 1970s, get the chance to

reminisce about their lives as community radio activists and in the process they showcase their own home stations. Noel Cronin was one of the founders of the very first community radio station in Ireland, Community Radio Youghal, or CRY as it has always been known. He describes the thrills and the promise of the pirate days on the coast of East Cork in Chapter 12, “CRY in the Afternoon: The Early Days in Youghal”.

In a similar vein, Mike Purcell, veteran of the oldest Dublin community radio station, Dublin South Community Radio (DSCR), provides a lively description of the trials, tribulations and triumphs of Dublin’s very first community radio station in Chapter 13, “Community Radio Memories: Dublin South Fm”.

In Chapter 14, “Raidió na Life: Raidió na Réabhlóide”, Fachtna Ó Drisceoil reflects on the contribution Ireland’s only Irish language community radio station has made to the Irish language revival, to the mass media in general and to his own career as a broadcaster in RTÉ in particular. This chapter is written in Irish with a short summary in English for those who are not fluent in the language.

The early days of Ireland’s smallest community radio station, Connemara Community Radio, are described by their first station manager, Mary Ruddy, in Chapter 15, “Dialogue Not Monologue: Connemara Community Radio”. A strong force in the Irish community radio movement and a former member of the AMARC Europe General Council and of the IRTC, Mary also reflects on community radio as a movement and stresses the importance of the relationship between the station and all of the members of its community. The current station manager, Pat Walshe, captures the breadth of experience which this tiny rural station in North Connemara has garnered in his description of their Outside Broadcasting Unit at the end of the chapter.

In Chapter 16, “Agitate, Educate, Organise: Dundalk Fm100”, Alan Byrne recalls the difficulties of getting a community radio sta-

tion started, the help received along the way and the development of the station today.

Jim Doherty and Jimmy McBride introduce us to the most northerly station, Raidió Pobail Inis Eoghain, in Chapter 17, “Northern View: Raidió Pobail Inis Eoghain”. They recall the usual ups and downs of getting started but infuse their story with the particular difficulties experienced by a border community on an isolated peninsula. Never ones to whinge, however, their story is one of the joys of working collaboratively to build a community and with it a fine community radio station.

Ciarán Ryan, former Training and Development Officer with West Limerick Community Radio, gives us an insight into what is involved in preparing a station for its first days on air in the final chapter, “Going on Air: West Limerick 102”.

As this book goes to print there are 21 licensed community radio stations on air in Ireland, with more expected to follow shortly. The representative association of community radio stations in Ireland, CRAOL, works as a network but also as a resource to its members and to groups who are thinking of setting up their own community radio stations. If you want to go beyond the experience of reading about community radio in Ireland, if you feel your community would benefit from having its own station, make contact with CRAOL today on www.craol.ie and join us on the Bicycle Highway.