The Emergence of Wellbeing Radio
Rob Watson, robwatson@decentered.co.uk
Wednesday, 09 September 2020

Community media is a widely recognised approach to social communication that is best understood as 'independent, civil society-based media that operate[s] for social benefit and not for profit' (Buckley, 2001, p. 7). Across the world, alternative, civic, DIY and community media movements seek to address subjects and issues that are relevant to local and self-defined communities (Howley, 2005; Rennie, 2006). The volunteers who dedicate their energies to creating community media want to see their concerns expressed and discussed near to where they live, in a style or language that is relevant to their cultural traditions, and in a way that meets the needs and wishes of a diverse association of members of each community.

Advocates of community media believe that it is possible to foster meaningful media spaces and platforms that are free from the controlling influence of commercial, national or governmental media, including the exploitative data capture practices of social media technology companies. In championing access to self-managed and accountable media platforms, community media advocates therefore promote creative media skills, they nurture diverse social interactions, and they support the development of social capital assets that facilitate more opportunities for people to engage in discussion and deliberation. Through community media, a growing number of people are able to articulate their voices, practice creative expression, share trusted information, engage in debate, and influence public decision making (Lennie & Tacchi, 2013).

In the United Kingdom community media organisations are usually recognised as not-for-private-profit civil society organisations which are typically registered as legal bodies, such as charities or community interest companies, though there are many that are un-constituted, informal and ad-hoc. A defining principle of community media is that they offer and encourage participation by their members and supporters in the organisational management, governance, and development of the project. In the past community media has been referred to as the *third media sector*, sitting alongside commercial and public service broadcasters. Community media, however, has a clear and distinct character, based on its commitment to social gain, social change, and participation, which separates it from other forms of media. Community media promotes forms of active citizenship and social contribution, particularly from groups that are underrepresented or are marginalised within corporate media cultures. For example women, migrants, disabled people, elderly people, and other

non-typical social actors who do not get ready access to the institutions, companies and networks occupied by many media professionals (Ofcom, 2019).

The guiding principle underpinning much of the work of community media activists and volunteers is social gain and social value. Social value is best understood as an integral feature of a wide-ranging movement towards social justice, which recognises the need for social partnerships by public authorities, civic sector organisations and businesses. The Public Interest Research Centre, for example, suggest that 'to build a more sustainable, equitable and democratic world, we need an empowered, connected and durable movement of citizens.' However, as is noted by the PIRC, we cannot hope to 'build this kind of movement through appeals to people's fear, greed or ego.' (PIRC, 2011, p. 1). Instead, the focus has to be on the cultural values and the mechanisms for supporting the best practices of equitable social gain that emerge both from public debate and discussion (Cottam, 2019; Unwin, 2018a).

When combined with a coherent evidence-base, on which government and business policy can be built, the social value approach, it is argued, has the potential to foreground the best interests of civic society. Tom Crompton suggests that 'there is a crucial and exciting role for civil society organisations in ensuring that this becomes the case' (Crompton, 2010, p. 5). The UK Government has itself recognised the need for change in the structure of state, civil and commercial partnerships, as outlined in the Civil Society Strategy in 2018. The Civil Society Strategy notes that

> The government wants to build a partnership with charities and social enterprises, with volunteers, community groups and faith groups, with public service mutuals, socially responsible businesses and investors, and with the institutions which bring sports, arts, heritage, and culture to our communities (Office, 2018, p. 18).

Encompassing this wide range of cultures, traditions, motivations, and ways of working, clearly cannot be achievable under a single policy strategy, so adapting and encompassing a set of social value principles to the different circumstances at hand remains a task under review. To what extent this includes the development of community media as a social value resource remains unclear at present, principally because of its emergent function.

Social Value UK has campaigned for strong action from UK government for the implementation of robust civil society strategies. In their manifesto prior to the 2015 general election, Social Value UK put forward argues that

One of the root causes and potential solutions to inequality lies in the extent to which organisations – businesses, charities and public sector, can be held to account for how their actions create or destroy value for different groups of people. This is why we are campaigning for a world where both financial and social value matter (S. V. UK, 2015, p. 2).

Similarly, Social Enterprise UK have campaigned vigorously in recent years for a more *social-centric* model of social value procurement, in which supply chains are diversified and the risk of negative impacts from dysfunctional market practice is minimised. The shift to the social economy has the potential, according to Charlie Wigglesworth *et al*, to 'substantially contribute to the positive impact businesses have,' because diversity and inclusion in the supply chain is a "win-win for business and society" (Wigglesworth, Exon, Chandgothia, & Daly, 2019, p. 13). As the Civil Society Strategy itself acknowledges,

A healthy, independent and influential civil society is a hallmark of a thriving democracy. Charities and social enterprises – the social sector – are the core of civil society. A strong social sector is a sign of a strong democracy, which offers many ways in which citizens' views and concerns can be communicated to decision-makers (Office, 2018, p. 14).

In England the Public Services (Social Value) Act, gained Royal Assent in March 2012 and started being implemented from January 2013 (S. E. UK, 2012b, p. 3). Under the Social Value Act (SVA) public bodies are required to consider how the services they commission and procure 'might improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing' of the people that they serve (S. E. UK, 2012b, p. 5). The aim of the Social Value Act has been to shape the procurement approach and design of public services by opening them up to a more diverse range of potential contractors and providers in the social sector. As Mansfield *et al* describe, 'the Social Value Act was originally intended to broaden the provider market and make it easier for social enterprises and voluntary and community organisations to bid for and win public sector contracts' (Mansfield, Towers, & Phillips, 2019, p. 37). The Social Value Act therefore encourages local and public authority commissioners to go beyond the established value for money approach when they are planning and commissioning contracts for service delivery. The Social Value Act allows contracts to be agreed, not solely on the basis of the lowest cost, but with regard to the accompanying social value benefit that might be generated in providing the contract. This may be in addition to the fundamental operational and contract costs. This means that the Social Value Act, for the first time, adds a legal requirement for public bodies in England and Wales to 'consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing' of the people in the area they serve (S. E. UK, 2012a, p. 2).

Community radio is the only regulated form of broadcast media in the UK that has similar principles embedded in its core function, i.e., the principle of social gain (Ofcom, 2016). This has been the case for analogue radio for some time, and is now so for digital radio (DCMS, 2019). The terminology that is employed in the Social Value Act legislation and guidance, however, has not been updated or cross-referenced in relation to the principles and experience of public media regulation. The Social Value Act demonstrates that legislation can be enacted that promotes a pluralistic and open process of commercial and public services development, especially in relation to the allocation of scarce and limited public resources. So, if the principle of social value can be enacted for public procurement policy, then it must be possible to apply an appropriately adapted set of values and principles to media regulation, frequency allocation and public interest subsidy support? One qualification, however, is that commercial media services and community media services should be considered in the same regard, and against the same set of published values and principles. Principles which are linked to full social accountability principles (SROI) associated with the social value economy. Especially if they receive any form of direct or indirect public subsidy (Bolton & Savell, 2011; Ferguson, 2017; Unwin, 2018b).

Faced with a growing crisis in social wellbeing, in which record numbers of people are reporting that they feel socially isolated, lonely and depressed, community radio has demonstrated that it can be a powerful tool able to take a significant role in social reform aimed at the alleviation of these entrenched social problems. There are many things that community radio activists and volunteers do that can have a direct and lasting impact on people's lives. One area of increasing success in community radio are partnerships between community radio stations and public healthcare and wellbeing services. These partnerships between stations and public bodies are at an early stage of tentative development, with room for a more strategic approach to the social value role of community media clearly needed. Especially as it might be informed by clear and urgent social wellbeing objectives. If the principles of social value that have become rooted in the public sector procurement process since the enactment of the Social Value Act in 2012, surely, they can be rooted in media regulation and practice as well?

One example, Winchester Radio, has grown from being a dedicated hospital radio station to become an Ofcom licenced community radio station that serves the wider city of Winchester. Nigel Dallard, a trustee of the charity that supports Winchester Radio, describes how changing needs associated with health care have transformed the focus of the station and the volunteers who support it. There has been a realignment of the work that volunteers at the hospital radio station have been doing,

according to Nigel, because there was a need to address changes in people's expectations, both about radio and media services in general, and about how people will access hospital and medical services in the future. Patients are no longer staying in hospital for long periods, Nigel points out, but are increasingly encouraged to manage their treatment by making fewer and more flexible visits to hospitals. This means that the role of the traditional hospital radio service, based principally at the Royal Hampshire County Hospital, was increasingly difficult to sustain. Relationships with patients, for example, became harder to establish and maintain. As Nigel describes,

> Because more and more patients were going in and out of the hospitals so quick, you barely had time to meet them. And more and more people not coming into the hospital at all. There were there were also some issues with the bedside entertainment system as well. So, we, we came up with a whole raft of possible ways forward. One of which was community radio.

The solution, according to Nigel, was to apply for a community radio licence. This expanded the coverage area of the station and widened its social remit. Going from providing a primarily companionship service to patients in wards, the station now covers more general issues of health and wellbeing in the city. Which builds on its legacy by advocating and developing services as part of the wellbeing agenda. As Nigel explains, this has been a huge shift.

> We had a maximum audience, if everybody could tune in, of about 450 people. Now our transmitter, potentially, gets us to somewhere in excess of 50,000 people. And suddenly you've got a much more, but much larger potential audience. But we are a charity. We've got charitable objects that are all about health and wellbeing. So we entertain the patients in hospital, as we always have done, but we also provide health and wellbeing promotion. Active Ageing. Positive Ageing. Whatever phraseology you want to use, to the local population in and around Winchester. Effectively trying to help, them help them, help themselves stay out of hospital for as long as possible, rather than having the unfortunate task of entertaining them when they're in hospital.

A similar experience is noted by Cathie Burges, who helps run Life Care Radio in Totnes. The station was for a long time based on the traditional model of a hospital radio service. Using the wired transmission systems that were part of the communications network in the hospital. However, with changes and upgrades to the hospital infrastructure, these legacy systems had become obsolete. Rather than dismantling the service, Cathie and her husband Mark, and a core group of volunteers at Life Care Radio, set about persuading the hospital managers that they could redevelop the radio service, and in the process widen its scope. Life Care Radio now streams online, both on the internet, and directly into care homes in the Totnes area, where they provide dedicated programming to residents and their care community. As Cathie explains,

> The NHS at the moment are having a really big drive on more focus on community care. So they're taking people into hospital as a very last resort, which means that we are in a really good position to work with the NHS to foster those relationships with local nursing and residential homes, and also with people that are receiving care through agencies.

Life Care Radio, then, is a response to this change in approach, and doesn't simply *talk at* the residents from afar, but aims to *talk with* and foster a greater sense of community through the programming that the volunteers produce. As Cathie notes,

> It's the people in the Nursing and residential homes who need those relationships, who enjoy getting their request played and having those relationships with the request collectors who go out. They talk to them. They find out what they want to hear. They find out the stories behind what they've chosen. And then we use that in our broadcasting.

The shift in patterns of delivery of healthcare services has come at a time when the health promotion, or the wellness agenda, has moved to the forefront of healthcare planning. Dr Terri Eynon, a retired GP who volunteers at Hermitage FM in Coalville, has also helped champion the development of Carillon Wellbeing Radio in North West Leicestershire. Terri explains that the idea is that health is not just about illness. She notes that

> The NHS is by and large a sickness service, not a health service. And there's been a recognition for a long, long time that what makes people well, are ways to well-being, such as getting active, connecting with other people, being part of your community. But nobody's entirely sure in the NHS what a community is. Well why would they be? They are doctors and their working doctor surgeries and in hospitals.

Working with Jon Sketchley, who provides the core infrastructure and station management support for both Hermitage FM and Carillon Wellbeing Radio, and along with the volunteers at the station, Jon and Terri have endeavoured to pilot a new kind of community radio station. One that can work in close collaboration with the local health and wellbeing services, the local authorities and councils, as well as offering a radio service that reflects the interests and tastes of its audience. The aim of the project is to promote informed and educated decision making about people's care and health needs. As Terri describes,

> We know that people are happier and healthier if they take exercise, and if they give things to other people, and volunteering in charitable organisations. We know all of that, but how to get them to do it, we're not quite so sure? There has been some movement towards that, and certainly here in Leicestershire we have public health local area coordinators who do some of this work in the community. Which has become part of that model and thinking that was behind the Carillon Wellbeing Radio project.

In Rochdale, Zahida Warriach runs a healthcare programme on Crescent Community Radio which is a station aimed at people with a South Asian background who live in the city and surrounding areas. Zahida's programme was initially developed in association with a local branch of the mental health charities Mind, but more recently it has been supported by Greater Manchester Police and the local Commissioning and Care Group (the health care providers in the area), along with the local authority. According to Zahida,

> They obviously are seeing some sort of benefit, that they keep coming back to us, with kind of sharing that information, education. What I say to a lot of my guests that come on is that people don't actively go out looking for information regarding their health, wellbeing or mental health. However, through the radio medium they're listening in their cars, in their kitchen, in their living room, in the supermarket. So we broadcast and a lot of our local shops and cash-and-carries, so stores broadcast it in their shops well. So people are shopping and they're listening as well. So to get that information through the radio medium, and they absolutely love it. Yet they don't actively go looking for it. So I think they really benefit from getting all kinds of health information.

Zahida's believes that community radio, if it is properly supported, can play a crucial role in helping people in the community to understand health issues, while also helping those healthcare professionals and service providers to develop a deeper understanding of the people that they are serving. As Zahida notes,

> I get a lot feedback from the professionals. It's the GPs, the pharmacists and the commission. People are feeding back to them that they are changing their lifestyles by listening to the program.

In Cardiff, Yvonne Murphey has been developing the Talking Shop as a research and development project in association with the National Theatre of Wales. She wanted to run a project based around political and cultural engagement, but rather than working in a closed room with some writers, she wanted to work with the public and find out what they think about political and cultural engagement. She wanted to find out what is important to them, what makes them angry, what makes them sad? She wanted to put writers in the space with the public and create, as she describes, "collisions and collusions." What she found, however, was that many of the people who visited the shop where desperate for meaningful contact and opportunities to share their experiences with other people. To break their social isolation. Yvonne suggests that we need to take a different approach to our wellbeing, and rather than simply proscribing medication, we should instead support and champion participative arts and media, especially if they lead to creative opportunities for people to engage with one another. As Yvonne explains,

We see art and culture as the third pillar of a civilised society. So we have access to state health, which looks after our bodies. We have access to state education which looks after our minds. What we need is absolute access to art and culture which looks after our spirit, or our soul, or whatever you want to call it. Media is included in this. It is a proven statistic that young people who are involved in arts activities in school, and by involved, I mean participating, not simply watching, are twenty percent more likely to vote as young adults. Kids who learn through the curriculum in a creative way get higher attainment in all subjects. So the whole thing of creative learning and the curiosity that it brings is one way that we will prepare for the future.

While the Talking Shop wasn't a radio project, it suggests that by working closely with a wide range of creative practitioners and advocates of community development, such as people in the participatory arts movement, it will be possible to be innovative and find solutions to the wellbeing crisis that aren't top down or centrally run.

The experience of managing these relationships, however, is not straightforward. Sabrina Malik is part of the communities' team at Leicestershire County Council. She has worked with Jon and Terri at Carillon Wellbeing Radio, and has helped them to connect with other public service providers. She recognises that the respect that needs to be shown to community groups for their knowledge and experience is instrumental to the success of these projects. As Sabrina notes,

They have been doing this for years. They are really the experts in this. They know their audience. They know the technical things. They know what will work and what won't work. The credit for the hard work is down to them.

This is a shift in thinking for many local authorities. Lorna Dellow, who is a media and communications officer at Leicestershire County Council, notes that most authorities must focus on getting their messages out to the broadest audience, while at the same time using an ever-expanding set of techniques and platforms. The challenge of working with community media projects and community radio stations, however, is significantly different, because it uses a different set of processes and values. It's not just about pushing out formal messages, as Lorna explains,

There are joint messages that the council wants to get across. Carillon Wellbeing Radio was a new challenge that presented a slightly different opportunity to pitch interviews, to push out formal messages, and to look at how they could work with volunteers. Sometimes people feel more comfortable talking with people that they know. Some of the volunteers at the station help because it comes out more naturally when they are telling their story, than if they were to put it to the formal media. They might not feel as comfortable.

Community radio, then, has a strong emphasis on relationships, on local identity, and on local opportunities to participate and volunteer. As Jon Sketchley of Hermitage FM explains,

The transmissions are what promote the community activities, and the community activities that the station supports, including those in the coffee shops, in turn supports the community activities. There is a level of direct accessibility as people can walk in the door and engage with people directly.

The challenge, according to Jon, is to keep funding these activities and to ensure that they are sustainable. Hermitage FM has been innovative in developing a collaborative social enterprise model, with a coffee shop forming the core space for interaction, income and helping people in Coalville. There is a risk, however, and as Jon points out, that with increased market consolidation and the loss of local media services, that people will lose a vital part of what connects them to one another. Jon believes that local radio should always maintain its connection with local people, and that there is a need to consider in greater depth why people might want to tune into a local radio station that goes beyond music and information, and offers something more. Jon believes that the success of Hermitage FM is because the "station promotes a positive attitude and a direct sense of engagement for the people who live and work in the area." Which is something that is increasingly difficult to find if you only listen to mainstream media. The radio station and the coffee shop work together. As Jon explains, they

Help people who are feeling isolated, across the whole social spectrum, both rich and poor alike. Even professional people can suffer from social isolation given the nature of modern working life.

Attempting to take some of these ideas forward into the policy arena, Juan Pardo is a strategic policy adviser at Leicestershire County Council, who believes that while many of the changes that have taken place in local authorities over the last decade have been challenging, but they are beginning to indicate that a new consensus is building around the importance of the principle of social value, and the usefulness of the 2012 Social Value Act. The Act amended the principles on which public procurement is made in England, making it much easier for councils and public bodies to explore wider social investment issues over and above the financial bottom line. As Juan explains,

In practice this is about the way policies are explained and communicated. Changing the language from a dictation and centralised point of view that implements solutions on the community's behalf, to one that listens, and which enables communities to deliver those solutions themselves in a more collaborative fashion. Within communities is there a sense of competition rather than collaboration? This means that the local authority has to change from being the expert to be the enabler. Helping to provide tools that can help communities to take on new ideas, new technologies, perhaps some funding to support change, rather than just keeping going in the same way. This is not just about saving money. There are many different ways to save money, but collaborations can shift the focus of the delivery of service which allows the communities to

deliver services and to maintain them in different forms, to introduce innovation and to adapt to future needs.

Perhaps what is most striking, then, is that few of these community radio practitioners are aware of each other's work, and that there are few readily available resources at hand than can be used to help others learn about the social value ethos in relation to local and community media.

Lucinda Guy, the creative director of Soundart Radio summarises the problem when she says

> If our media is too slick and we reach the point where we are comfortable at the failure phase, and we are comfortable with the slickness of the product, then we are probably not pushing ourselves enough. If you are finding that it is slick and perfect and you know everything, then you need to try new things that push ourselves a bit harder.

Siobhan Stevenson of Birmingham City University proposes that while

> There are many agendas, such as loneliness, the lack of social interaction, the loss of communication skills, the loss of confidence in talking to other people. It's possible to see that community radio can help people to learn to communicate more effectively even though they may not follow social norms and have different expectations of communication. To be socially excluded means that we don't follow the norms and conventions. With a community station, however, there are many people who will tell you that they had no confidence, that they didn't know how to talk to people… This kind of empowerment and transformation won't happen on a commercial station because it is not their job.

Who we turn to is of equal importance to how we undertake this work? Advocating for community media based on a model of social value media requires a fresh mindset and approach to the development of both regulatory policy and broadcast practice. As more examples of wellbeing focussed radio emerge, we will be able to piece together a more coherent picture than these first snapshots highlight.

All Interviews conducted for the Decentered Media Podcast (Watson, 2020).

Bolton, E., & Savell, L. (2011). *Towards a New Social Economy - Blended Value Creation Through Social Impact Bonds*. Retrieved from London: https://www.bigsocietycapital.com/sites/default/files/attachments/Towards%20A%20New%20Social%20Economy.pdf

Buckley, S. (2001). *Community Media: a Good Practice Handbook*. Retrieved from Paris:

Cottam, H. (2019). *Radical Help: How We Can Remake the Relationships Between Us and Revolutionise the Welfare State*. London: Virago.

Crompton, T. (2010). *Common Cause - The Case for Working with our Cultural Values*. Retrieved from London: https://valuesandframes.org/resources/CCF_report_the_case_for_working_with_our_cultural_values.pdf

DCMS. (2019). *The Small-Scale Radio Multiplex and Community Digital Radio Order 2019*. London: DCMS Retrieved from https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/9780111187784/contents

Ferguson, Z. (2017). *The Place of Kindness: Combating loneliness and building stronger communities*. Retrieved from Dunfermline: https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/place-kindness-combating-loneliness-building-stronger-communities/

Howley, K. (2005). *Community Media - People, Places and Communication Technologies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lennie, J., & Tacchi, J. (2013). *Evaluating Communication for Development*. London: Routledge.

Mansfield, C., Towers, N., & Phillips, R. (2019). *Front and Centre - Putting Social Value at the Heart of Inclusive Growth*. Retrieved from London: https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/front-and-centre-putting-social-value-at-the-heart-of-inclusive-growth

Ofcom. (2016). Regulation of Community Radio Services. Retrieved from http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/radio/community/regulations/crregulation/

Ofcom. (2019). *Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Radio 2019*. Retrieved from London: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/159421/diversity-in-radio-2019-report.pdf

Office, C. (2018). *Civil Society Strategy - Building a Future that Works for Everyone*. Retrieved from Westminster: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732765/Civil_Society_Strategy_-_building_a_future_that_works_for_everyone.pdf

PIRC. (2011). *The Common Cause Handbook*. Retrieved from London: https://valuesandframes.org/resources/CCF_report_common_cause_handbook.pdf

Rennie, E. (2006). *Community Media - A Global Introduction*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.

UK, S. E. (2012a). *Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 – A Brief Guide*. Retrieved from London: https://www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk/files/5413/4996/6918/Public_Services_Social_Value_Act_2012_guide_SEUK_2.12_-_010312.pdf

UK, S. E. (2012b). *The Social Value Guide – Implementing the Public Services (Social Value) Act*. Retrieved from London: https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/the-social-value-guide

UK, S. V. (2015). Manifesto April 2015. In. Liverpool: Social Value UK.

Unwin, J. (2018a). *Civil Society Futures - The Independent Inquiry*. Retrieved from London: https://civilsocietyfutures.shorthandstories.com/the-story-of-our-future/index.html

Unwin, J. (2018b). *Kindness, emotions and human relationships: The blind spot in public policy*. Retrieved from Dunfermline: https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/kindness-emotions-and-human-relationships-the-blind-spot-in-public-policy/

R. Watson (Producer). (2020). *Decentered Media - Conversations About Community Media* [Retrieved from https://decentered.co.uk/category/podcast/

Wigglesworth, C., Exon, J., Chandgothia, N., & Daly, A. (2019). *Buy Social Corporate Challenge - Year 3 Impact Report*. Retrieved from London: https://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/buy-social-corporate-challenge-year-3-impact-report