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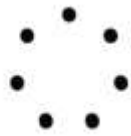
**Eötvös Loránd University  
Faculty of Education and Psychology**

# **Promising, remarkable, marginal – 30 years of community broadcasting in Hungary**

**Dr. Gabriella Velics, PhD**

Athens Institute for Education and Research  
18th Annual International Conference on Communication and Mass Media  
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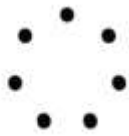
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# 30 years – 4 periods of community broadcasting

- before 1996
  - 1996-2002
  - 2002-2010
  - since 2011
- 
- Each period is characterized by particular features embedded in media law.
  - The presentation will show how legislation and regulation have an effect on operating and changing the Hungarian media system, mainly focusing on the conditions for the community radio broadcasting.





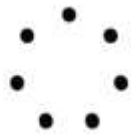
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## Data and research methodology, personal motivation

- before 1996:
  - first hand information: volunteer of the first community radio of Szombathely, news and daily editor,
  - Journalism MA
- 1996-2002:
  - start working at higher education and continuing voluntary work at radio
  - responsible for Communication and Media Studies – Journalism specialization,
  - start PhD studies
- 2002-2010:
  - first hand information: founder member of Berzsenyi Radio (university radio), later editor in chief, involving in education and representation for the community broadcasting in Hungary
  - PhD research: interviews, field-research, documents, database of media authorities
- since 2011:
  - first hand information: continuing lobbying for the community broadcasting in Europe (CMFE),
  - academic work, publications and presentations,
  - documents, database of National Media and Infocommunications Authority





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## Before 1996:

- In the former socialist countries broadcasting was a state monopoly both for radio and TV.
- There were only a few pirate radio stations broadcasting during the events of 1956 in Hungary and 1968 in Czechoslovakia and later in Poland too.
- After changing the regime, alternative sounds could be heard for the first time in Hungary in 1991. It was the starting point of one of the most prestigious community radio: Tilos Radio (Forbidden Radio), they worked as a pirate radio at first.
- This first period was for making an attempt for open media environment with commercial media and also alternative voices, but media legislation delayed.
- A back-door solution: in 1993 a regulation was found in the previous „press law” of 1986 which allowed the granting of permit for radio and TV studios to make and broadcast non-commercial programmes covering local events only. The government edict (110/1993) was meant to put the matter in order and legalize the operation.
- At that time three community radio stations were granted permission: SzóKöz Rádió in Szombathely, Szubjektív Rádió in Pécs and Szóla Rádió in Debrecen.





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## Coming close to the first Media Law

- The first community broadcasters had strong links to the alternative scene and/or civil movements in Budapest and bigger cities with university.
- They made an attempt for building an open media environment with alternative voices, some even started operation without a proper license.
- This kind of courage had some unchallenged effects and made an undisputable status for community media.
- Act I of 1996 on the radio and television broadcast.





## 1996-2002

- In the second period *Act I of 1996 on the radio and television broadcast* and the newly formed Hungarian Media Authority created a new situation, community radios were specified on financial base and labelled them as ‘non-profit purpose programme provider’.
- The new act required that everybody apply for permits again, and the strict conditions embroiled the community broadcasting into a serious crisis and community radio broadcasting lost its importance by the turn of millennium.
- This period was more prosperous for the commercial broadcasters both on regional and local level.





# Local level: „public-programme provider” and „non-profit purpose programme provider”

- Many similarities and few differences:
- ‘The public programme provider is obliged to inform on national and foreign events of public interest, or affecting the lives of people living in the coverage area, including debated issues, various opinions and interpretations in an unbiased, authentic, and correct way. A radio can be qualified as public-programme provider, if it broadcasts at least fourteen hours of self-made programme every week.’ Act I of 1996 allowed maximum six minutes advertisement in one programme hour.
- Community radio = non-profit purpose programme provider: The law permitted only three minute advertisement blocks in every programme-hour, and the Authority offered financial help to the operation of community radios, making them eligible for receiving financial support and exempt from paying broadcasting fees.





## 2002-2010

- The third period can be described as the golden era of „small community radio”.
- By the end of 2010 there were 68 small community radio stations across the country; it was a unique fact in Central and Eastern Europe.
- It must be emphasized that community broadcasting, similar to that in Hungary, has not survived in any of the other former socialist countries. This achievement was made possible by the frequently criticized Hungarian media law (Act I of 1996.), making it possible to create not-for-profit local broadcasting as a unique phenomenon in Eastern Europe.







# What is a small community station, a small scale community radio?

- The technical requirements are very limited for small community stations, e.g. the output of the transmitter must not be over 10Watts and the height of the antenna measured from the ground level may be a maximum of 30 meters.
- In comparison, the community stations started in the first half of the 1990s have the right to broadcast with a radius of 10 kilometres, whereas the small community stations licensed since 2002 have a much more limited coverage, with a typical maximum radius transmitter output of only 1 kilometre stereo and approximately 2 kilometres mono pickup counted from the transmitter site.
- This kind of community broadcasting offered a possibility for real social participation in rural areas, small cities, youth hostels, schools, etc.





# These regulations may be viewed in two ways

- Firstly, a unique opportunity, even for Europe, has been provided since 2002 to found and launch small community radio stations. Limited coverage area with relatively simple legal and technical conditions resulted audience only in walking distance but human closeness in the respect of topics and emotions.
- On the other hand, the strictly limited parameters do not ensure effective operation, but causes operational and economic problems for the station staff who are therefore dependent on the authorities, both local and media, providing regular financial support via different open tenders.





# The financial dependence was the crucial point as independent sources were infrequent

- The financial support coming from the Broadcasting Fund was one of the most efficient.
- To obtain money from the Fund every year, four types of application were designed for community radio stations:
  - application for yearly running costs,
  - for technical development,
  - for starting or developing the broadcast diffusion,
  - and for creating news programs.
- The amount of self-financing required for different applications were range from 15-50%.
- The system has worked, not without mistakes, but it has provided a calculable frame for operation.





# The new Media Law: pro and contra

- The fourth period started with *Act CLXXXV of 2010 on media services and mass media*, which came into force on 1 January 2011.
- On the one hand the sector was satisfied with the fact that the community media service as such was finally codified and recognized in the new media law, on the other hand they realized that the definition, the criteria and the basic principles of community media were formulated inappropriately and too loosely in the regulations.
- This regulation changed every single aspect of the community radios' life, and contains - contrary to the previous regulation and EU declaration - an unconventional vision of community media.





# The major changes

- The new law doesn't contain the previous 'small community radio' nor the „non-profit purpose programme provider” category. These were squeezed into the **linear community media service provider** category. (Act CLXXXV of 2010. §66.)
- This new category makes it possible for local and regional broadcasters to apply for registration as a linear community broadcaster and this way maximalize their financial background:
  - no longer having to pay the broadcasting licence fee
  - access to financial sources previously only intended for the community radio stations
- This widely criticized regulation demanded almost impossible requirements for the volunteer-based radio stations (regular information service, operating at least four-hour in every day, 66% public service content, 50% of the music played must be Hungarian, etc. with detailed paperwork and regular supplying of data).
- The way of advertising didn't change, community media providers can broadcast six minutes advertisement in one programme hour.





# All permissions that would have been valid for years had replaced with new authority contracts by 30 June 2011.

- From the first time there was a fear of losing the real principles of community radio movement and the altered practice (both licensing and financing) might easily lead to the disappearance of genuine community radio activity in Hungary.
- The Media Authority registered 157 applications before the deadline, but who are familiar with the situation know that only about 70 came from real community broadcasters.
- By the end of December 2011 the majority of those stations which had applied and received new linear community media service provider status were professional, local or regional commercial-style or religious radio stations; they have paid employees and editors and lack volunteers or a genuine community of radio listeners participating in radio work.





## Since 2011

- One was not seen clearly after the first shock: the community media landscape was dramatically overwhelmed by religious broadcasters.
- Mária Rádió, the Catholic Church and the Reformed Church established community radio stations all over the country with their specific feature: with one radio license using several frequencies on different areas.
- 46 local frequencies (from total 147) were given to church radio broadcasters who operate with community radio status and benefits.
- According to the database of the National Media and Infocommunications Authority at the end of 2019 only 16 small community broadcasters remained in Hungary. Two radio closed down on January 2020. so only 14 are operating.

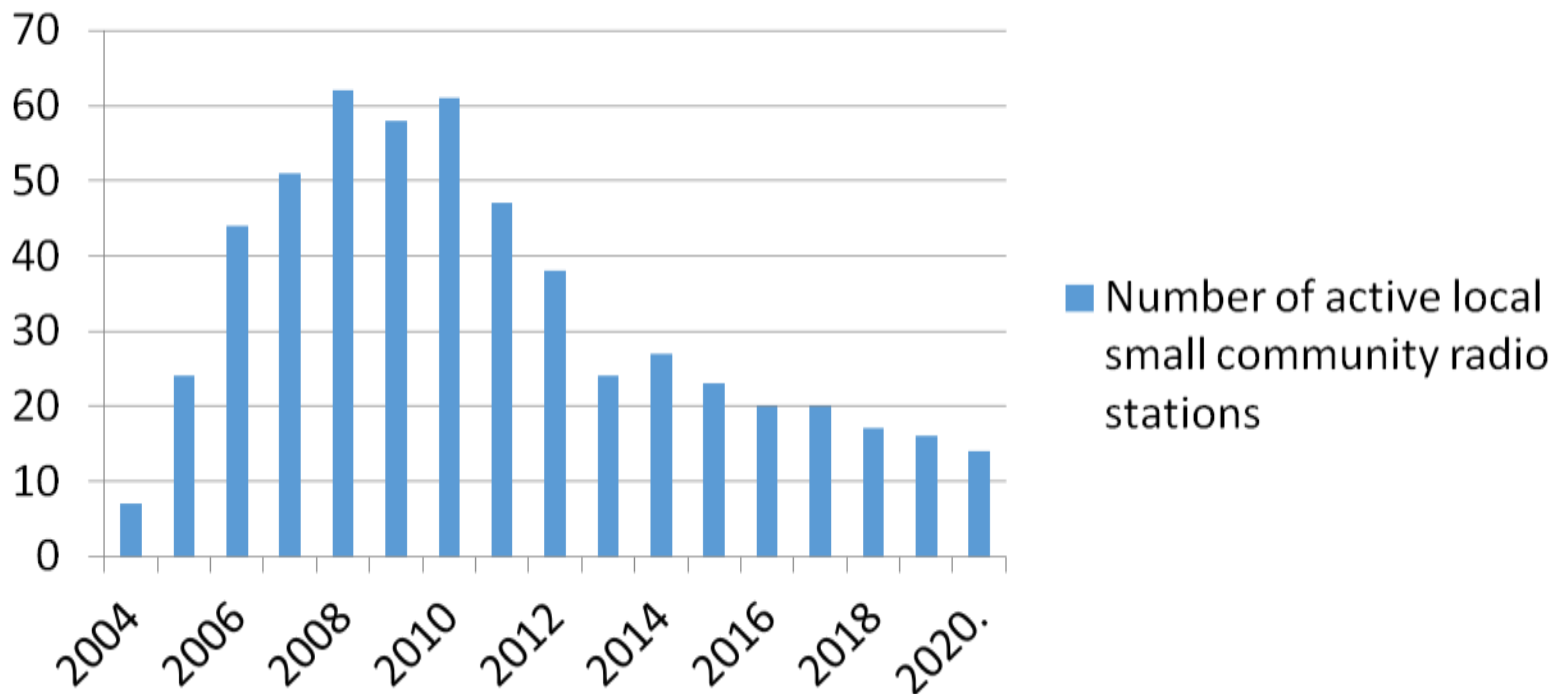




Origin of data: Database of National Media and Infocommunications Authority

<http://ehmmsa.nmhh.hu/musorszoras/4-46/001,a/#4-46>

## Number of active local small community radio stations







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# The 14 local radio for small communities

7: local news + music, commercial style

2: youth radio

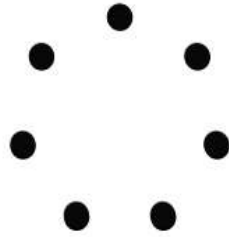
2: local cultural NGO

1: religious radio

1: university radio

1: special target group: pet owners and animal lovers





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[velics.gabriella@ppk.elte.hu](mailto:velics.gabriella@ppk.elte.hu)

