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‘The establishment of a community radio station is not the starting point for organising people: it is merely an extension of the efforts to draw upon local people’s felt and articulated needs to communicate among themselves and with others to establish their own sense of personal and community power’ (Hochheimer, 1999:451).

‘...I volunteered at the community radio station in Geelong...bikies pitched in with the dykes, the farmers with the greenies, the unions with the union bashers and a range of broadcasters with a variety of cultural interests including the original inhabitants of the land’ (David Melzer-CBAA President and Radio Activist).

Across the nation, from Broome to Katherine, Cairns to Brisbane, Canberra to Bathurst, Mildura to Mt Gambier, Whyalla and Launceston, between 20,000-25,000 Australians volunteer and contribute to their local community radio station each week (Forde et al, 2001). On average, each community station in Australia enjoys the active involvement and participation of 65-70 volunteers (see Forde et al, 2001) demonstrating a firm commitment by these communities to their local radio station. Recent research results from Australia’s Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy found that in the majority of cases, even the demanding role of Station Manager is performed by volunteers.

Previously known as ‘public radio’, community radio stations often cater to smaller communities in Australia including regional/rural communities, ethnic communities, indigenous communities, marginalised or disadvantaged groups such as gay and lesbian communities, religious communities, etc. Community radio stations cater for programming needs not present in the mainstream such as jazz and blues music, local or Australian music, local news and current affairs and coverage of local cultural events and festivals. Community radio is a vibrant and dynamic sector and examples of their contribution to local cultural life and to the Australian public sphere generally, are seemingly endless. Port Augusta’s 5UMA, for example, broadcast to their significant indigenous community using languages which the ten tribes who reside in the area are able to understand. 5UV Radio Adelaide maintains strong links with the local arts community through their support and live broadcast of the Adelaide Fringe Festival, and Writers Week, while 2AAA in Wagga Wagga provide a ‘Truckies Program’ (from midnight to dawn) to cater for drivers negotiating a notoriously dangerous section of the highway.

The Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (The Act) provides discrete legislation for community broadcasting. Amongst other principles, the Act requires that community stations be not-for-profit, represent the community they have been licensed to represent and significantly, that stations will encourage their communities to participate in station

operations and program content (Thompson, 1999:23). Unlike other media, community radio sees its listeners as potential volunteers. While (in the vast majority of cases) not commanding comparable audiences to commercial media, community radio performs a vital task in the Australian community enabling representation in the public sphere to those who would otherwise be denied access. In the primordial stages, community radio was precisely about ideas of ‘democracy’ and the need to provide an opportunity for Australia’s diverse communities to be heard (and to hear themselves) over the airwaves.

In recent times however, community radio, in a climate of rapidly increasing stations and decreasing government funding, is being called to evaluate its role in fiscal terms and economic jargon. This paper provides a brief overview of community radio in Australia and considers one of the most recent statements on community broadcasting, the Australian Productivity Commission’s *Final Report into Broadcasting (2000)*. This report is an example of the financial and economic formulae which community radio is being required to fulfill. I argue that the quantification of community radio’s social and cultural role is at best, inappropriate and will reassert community radio’s qualitative role as a social and cultural resource. Introducing the emerging concept of ‘cultural citizenship’, this paper aims to reinvigorate and strengthen arguments for community radio based upon ‘democracy’ and ‘citizenship’ in Australia’s diverse and multicultural society.

- **Community Broadcasting in Australia – An Introduction**

In 1932, the Australian Government established a dual radio broadcasting system in Australia. This dual system consisted of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as publicly owned and funded and commercial services which were privately owned and operated only in specific areas. This broadcasting arrangement remained relatively unchanged until 1972 when grassroots movements and other political forces conspired to produce a third tier to Australia’s radio broadcasting environment (see Bear, 1983). Dissatisfaction with existing broadcasters prompted music enthusiasts, educators, ethnic groups, religious groups, trade unionists, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and many other interested parties to lobby for community access to the airwaves. In 1968 and 1972 respectively, the Whitlam Australian Labor Partyⁱ (see Barlow, 1999) government granted the University of NSW and the University of Adelaide low powered broadcast of educational/course material (Moran, 1995:151). Fine music stations followed with 2MBS-FM Sydney in 1974ⁱⁱ followed by 3MBS-FM in 1977. In 1978, the Fraser Liberal-National Country Party Coalition government fully enshrined the third tier of Australian broadcasting in legislation. In its short history, the community radio sector has experienced phenomenal growth. In 2000, the Australian Broadcasting Authority listed 198 community broadcasters and 137 active aspirant stations working toward a full license. In comparison, there are currently 255 commercial licenses. Of the 198 fully licensed broadcasters, 145 broadcast to non-metropolitan areas while in 37 places in Australia, community radio is the only broadcast service (Melzer, 2001).ⁱⁱⁱ

The Australian community radio sector emerged from local grassroots action. As is the case today, supporters and participants of community radio represent a diversity of interests. Bear (1979:5-7) isolates four different groups which were primary antagonists

for the development of community radio: music buffs; ethnic communities; educational institutions; and political groups. These four groups maintain a strong presence in the community broadcasting landscape and have evolved over the 25 plus years of community radio in Australia. Their achievements and contribution to the Australian community are worth noting individually. Beginning with music enthusiasts, the first FM station in Australia, 2MBS demanded 'fine music' on community radio and significantly, better reception via the FM spectrum. In 1991, the Australian Fine Music Network was established for marketing and other purposes. Fine music stations (with a broader definition than 'classical music' – now includes jazz, blues, folk, light opera and others) can be found in every state in Australia and cater to music tastes often absent in mainstream radio. A second pressure group, ethnic communities sought access to the airwaves to ensure programming in languages other than English and also to undertake their own culturally relevant programming. In 1975, 2EA and 3EA went to air though these were operated by the Federal Dept of the Media and were later to be absorbed by the establishment in 1977 of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). In 1979 4EB went to air as a community based ethnic radio followed the next year by 5EBI (see Moran, 1995:150-151). In 2000, the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters Council reported more than 1600 hours per week of broadcasting in languages other than English on 87 community stations around Australia (48 regional and 39 metropolitan stations). These programs are broadcast in 92 languages (Francis, 2000:17) and thus cater to the broadcast needs of Australia's multicultural community.

The third impetus to the development of community radio stations came from educational institutions. As mentioned, the University of Newcastle and the University of Adelaide were the first educational institutions to become involved in community radio. In 1975, the Whitlam government issued twelve experimental tertiary licenses to groups generally associated with universities. Today the list of stations associated with universities includes Bathurst 2MCE, Lismore 2NCR, Perth 6UVS and Sydney 2SER. Stations with an educational background cover a broad range of interests providing access to many communities including ethnic, educational, women, Indigenous Australians, youth, gay and lesbian and music groups (see Moran, 1995:151) – all of which exist outside the mainstream and are not adequately served by commercial broadcasters. Finally, there were politically progressive elements in the push for community radio (Bear, 1979:7). Stations in this group include 4ZZZ, 2SER, 3RRR, 3PBS, 5MMM and Canberra's 2XX. These stations enable groups such as Indigenous Australians, gay and lesbian, environmental, youth, anti-drug law, etc to broadcast their political viewpoints and contribute to the diversity of opinions in the public sphere. All stations also show a commitment to local non-commercial music. Contemporary community radio retains the legacy of fine music, ethnic, educational and politically progressive stations and now boasts additional categories including sport stations, Reading for the Print Handicapped (RPH), indigenous stations, youth and religious/Christian stations.

At first glance, it may appear that the diversity of programming formats characteristic of community radio have very little in common. The *sine qua non* of community radio, is its philosophy of community access and participation (definitions of 'access and participation' may vary, see Barlow (1999)). As shown above, a 'community' may be

defined in terms of interest, geography, culture, etc. However defined, the commitment to local access to the airwaves is a consistent and central theme of community radio. This was a view shared by governments involved in the initial investigations into the feasibility of community broadcasting. In 1975, the Whitlam's government's Working Party on Public Broadcasting (the Working Party) reporting on policy recommendations for the introduction of public broadcasting indicated that it was the responsibility of the new sector to provide all neglected and minority interests with an avenue for participation in broadcasting. Further, the Working Party asserted that access by trade unions, industry groups, professional groups, religious and all political, social, ethnic and cultural minorities would be effective in countering the discrimination these bodies experience within the existing dual broadcasting structure. At the time the capacity of community radio to foster democracy via access to broadcasting and its associated potential to 'extend the freedom of the individual, foster local independence and cultural enrichment' were familiar in both government and community literature and consultations (see Barlow, 1999:86-87). The fundamental philosophy involving both the rights of groups to broadcasting opportunities and the obligations of democratic governments to provide a conducive environment to public participation still underpins the community radio sector.

The commitment to 'democratising' the airwaves is particularly evident in the sector's Code of Practice (required under section 123 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*). Amongst other principles, the code clearly states the sector's responsibility to 'seek to widen the community's involvement in broadcasting and to encourage participation by those denied effective access to, and those not adequately served by other media'. Of course, this is a key feature of community radio which differentiates it from commercial media. The capacity of community radio to provide access to groups not adequately served by mainstream media is a consequence of both their 'local community' and 'not-for-profit' status: operating on a not-for-profit basis frees (to a certain extent) community broadcasters to pay less attention to audience measurement and more attention to their community's profile. These stations serve their community rather than advertisers and are not solely reliant upon favorable ratings for their continued existence. As such, community stations can air a program in a language other than English, cover news stories from different countries, or present an ethnic perspective on an current Australian issue without fear of alienating or marginalising audiences or losing ratings. Indeed, it is often (though certainly not always) those alienated or marginalised audiences which support and justify the continued existence of community radio. In illustration in late 2000, the City Mayor of Shepparton, Vic approached 3ONE, the resident community station, asking if they could secure an Arabic speaker as quite a number of Iraqi asylum seekers had moved into the area and there was a need for communication (CBX November 2000). This is a fine example of the niche services community radio stations give to their communities. As David Melzer (2000) asserts, '[Community Broadcasters] may never command mass audiences...but community stations serve the public interest in ways that could never be met by commercial or national broadcasters'. The community radio sector is rampant with examples similar to the above particularly in regard to Australia's ethnic and indigenous communities. Again, duty to diversity is articulated in the sector's Codes of Practice – the sector has a manifest mission to

‘present programs, which contribute to expanding the variety of viewpoints in Australia and enhance the diversity of programming choices available to audiences’. This resolution is particularly important in Australia where geography and the ‘tyranny of distance’ deem regional coverage and perspectives vital to, and appropriate for, many communities. Certainly, as concern grows surrounding the withdrawal of commercial stations from rural and regional Australia alongside the growth in networking in mainstream services, the local public space community broadcasters sustain will finally receive the credit (and presumably support) it deserves. More broadly, the globalisation of communications and associated threats to local identity and infrastructure coupled with forecasts of inequitable outcomes for sections of the community will add ballast to community radio’s unique role. Of course, a local broadcaster is in an excellent position to thwart some of the negative implications of globalisation (Barlow, 1997:129) via its representations (and affirmation) of local diversity, support and acknowledgement of local cultures, issues and events, and local perspectives on global issues and events. As Venner (1988:43) points out with regard to indigenous broadcasting, community broadcasting (which is the largest component of indigenous media in Australia) has provided opportunities to ‘maintain and develop [indigenous] language and cultural identity instead of being...passive recipients of alien communicators’. The value of hearing our own local voices and stories is difficult, if not impossible to quantify and is the distinguishing feature of community radio.

• Quantifying Community Radio

The need to quantify the social and cultural benefits of community radio is an area fraught with difficulties for the sector’s representative bodies. Given the above expose of community radio’s specialist audiences, audience measurements are unlikely to impress governments. And of course, social and cultural benefits are notoriously difficult to quantify in monetary or economic terms. And yet, in a climate of economic rationalism where the nomenclature is profitability, efficiency, competition and numbers generally, ‘soft’ notions of social and cultural benefit will fail to produce the hard figures so revered in contemporary society. Simply, economic discourses occupy a powerful and central presence in society while claims of social and cultural benefits characteristic of community broadcasting arguments exist on the margins. Increasingly, social and cultural benefits are seen to flow from effective economic management. This situation is particularly pronounced in the Australian Productivity Commission’s *Final Report - Inquiry into Broadcasting* (2000) (The Commission) where acknowledgement of community broadcasting’s social and cultural benefits is secondary to the primary need to justify community radio in economic terms. The Commission (2000:275) notes that,

‘...[T]he major cost to the general community of community broadcasting is the opportunity cost of the spectrum they use. Community broadcasters receive ‘free’ access to scarce radio frequency spectrum and thus exclude other potential broadcasters’.

‘Opportunity cost’ is an economic concept referring to the value foregone to use a resource in a particular way. The opportunity cost of the free allocation of spectrum is the

amount commercial broadcasters would pay for the privilege. It appears blatantly obvious to even community broadcasters that in financial terms *alone* the reservation of spectrum for non-commercial broadcasting does not produce any outstanding financial rewards for government (see Melzer, 2001). Best financial practice and management is not, and has never been the cornerstone justification for community radio. Indeed, the Commission's 'opportunity cost' criteria for assessing community radio and the sector's own criteria are incongruous and incommensurate. The point is that attempts to gauge the performance of community radio using similar criteria to commercial enterprises is at the very least, inane – it is akin to using 'sweetness' as a criteria for judging oranges and lemons. The Commission (2000) does concede that:

'Society...may wish to give up some of the economic benefits to pursue social goals that are valued more than the associated loss of economic efficiency. That is, there is a collective judgement that the social value of the outcome is worth more than the opportunity cost of not applying those resources to the most valuable alternative use. Such a judgement requires more than an appraisal of considered opinions. A sound and reliable judgement cannot be made without rigorous cost-benefit analysis of alternative uses of the channels' (Papandrea cited in Productivity Commission, 2000:276).

Again, in the very breath that 'social value' is acknowledged, 'a cost-benefit analysis' is seen as a fundamental and defining requirement. A more fruitful analysis of community radio would perhaps incorporate the plethora of *considered examples* of community radio's social and importantly, cultural value. Given the sector's role in broadcasting the ideas and opinions of marginalised or disadvantaged groups; their role in regional communities; or indeed, their social and cultural role in ethnic and indigenous communities (the vast majority of which represent smaller groups within the Australian community) a rigorous cost-benefit analysis may seem inappropriate.

No-one would debate that if conceded to the marketplace, community radio's spectrum allocation would reap financial rewards in terms of licensing fees, business creation/advertising, jobs etc. However, few have argued that community radio be penalised for its inattention to commercial incentives when the law deems it as not-for-profit. The Commission demands evidence of community radio's commercial viability, even if it is by comparison to 'alternative uses'. And the answers the Commission will find does not require the expert analysis of the Australian Broadcasting Authority – spectrum allocation to community radio does cost the Australian community in terms of revenue foregone. However the social and cultural benefits of community radio are priceless. Further community radio represents 6.3 per cent of broadcasting licenses so is a relatively tiny piece of spectrum pie. A cost-benefit analysis based on the quantification of alternative spectrum use does not provide a qualitative analysis of the free spectrum allocation as it exists and is used by community radio stations. For example, how does one quantify the value of Australia's network of Reading for the Print Handicapped Stations where volunteers read (*inter alia*) newspapers and other current affairs publications to aid those in the community who do not possess literacy skills? Or how would one quantify the key role played by 8KTR Katherine in the 1998 Australia Day Floods and the accurate broadcast of evacuation centres up until the moment water

lapped at the on-air announcers feet (CBX Feb. 2000) who were in all likelihood providing their services for free?

The cost-benefit analysis is the easy option for the Commission and does not require any analysis or thought outside the paradigm of economic feasibility as a qualitative social and cultural analysis demands. Another recommendation by the Commission (2000:276) was to instruct the Australian Broadcasting Authority to 'conduct regular research on the demand for community radio and television programming'. Only a few paragraphs above this recommendation, the Commission (2000:276) cites 1999 Roy Morgan Research on the audience for community broadcasting licenses which found that for the period March 1998- April 1999, only 5.6 per cent of the population were estimated to listen to some community radio in comparison to 63.8 per cent of the population which listened to commercial radio. Therefore, the answer to the Commission's question on quantification of audience demand is in its own analysis. This audience measurement undermines the social and cultural role of community radio and the comparison to commercial services is inappropriate. The role of commercial stations in Australia's broadcasting environment is qualitatively and quantitatively different to the role of community radio. Commercial stations relying on advertisers for their continued profitability seek to maximise their audiences. As such, it is not in their best commercial interests to program for specialist or niche audiences. For example, a major commercial station is not about to broadcast 30 hours of programming per week in Vietnamese. And nor should they incur government/report wrath for failing to do so. Commercial stations cater for larger mainstream audiences and advertisers while community radio caters for smaller specialist audiences and communities. Further, a quick glance at the advertising and promotion budgets of community radio stations in comparison to commercial stations (and of course differentials in signal power) indicates that it is hardly surprising that commercial stations have larger audiences. Frequently, commercial stations offer listeners a financial incentive to listen such as \$2000 to guess the 'secret sound'. The inducements for audiences to listen to commercial radio are significant, and primarily financial. This is the critical and defining point in the Commission's scrutiny of community radio audiences which it is either unable to process within its cognitive frameworks or unwilling to concede.

Admittedly, the Commission (2000:277) accepted that community broadcasting could not be understood in economic terms only but required more research because 'the opportunity cost of awarding community broadcasting licenses is the reduced opportunity for more competition and perhaps diversity in the commercial radio sector'. The emphasis here is on competition and diversity in the commercial radio sector rather than the content of community services to local and specialist (often smaller) audiences. Further, allocating community broadcasting licenses to commercial interests is highly unlikely to produce increased competition and diversity in the commercial radio sector – community radio licenses are the proverbial 'crumbs'. Moreover, how ironic that a statement like this should occur in a document which also considers the convergence of broadcasting industries and graphs the trans/national media ownership of groups like News Corp and PBL? Concern over the increasing concentration of media ownership in Australia (and subsequent reduction in competition and diversity of ownership and

content) has incurred the wrath of public and academic criticism for well over a decade (see Bagdikian (1987); Wheelwright & Buckley (1987); Craik et al, (1995)). Somehow, the Commission did not make the connection between the growth of large media enterprises and the consequential reduction in competition and diversity of ownership and content. The statement represents an ignorance of radio in Australia where '[M]ergers between commercial radio organisations [such as Austero radio network] have resulted in fewer owners and larger networks and the decline of solus stations in regional Australia is expected to continue as they are swallowed by multi-station groups' (Peters, 1996:8). Networked and syndicated services are a corollary to these larger radio enterprises simply because it is cheaper to produce content in a 'one size fits all' fashion. Community radio has a mandate to tailor its programming to the communities it serves and is by definition, committed to diversity.

Community radio is useful media for representing the diverse Australian community and ensuring that those situated outside mainstream communities have the opportunity to broadcast (and hear) their own culture, opinions, dreams, stories, music, etc. A Commission with a vision would have to acknowledge the role locally based stations are poised to play in a globalised society where local media perform an increasingly important role. Australia's community radio sector is in a strategic position to offer genuinely local information services and to offer an avenue to preserve local identity and infrastructure. However, community radio stations are not perfect entities and their operation, as a public good, does require scrutiny and assessment. However in the case of community radio, insistence of the quantification of the qualitative services necessarily breeds 'loaded' questions – for example, if the question relates to audience measurement or demand the answer will likely be smaller figures than the commercial sector and will only affirm community radio's *relative* failure. The question is 'loaded' insofar as the criteria employed to judge community radio in no way reflects the sector's community orientation or indeed, the legislative requirements of community radio. The Commission or Australia's media authorities need not waste time asking quantifying questions as the answers are apparent without the injection of research funds. Certainly, the money would be better spent by raising the profile of community stations on a national and local level to encourage communities and governments to *listen and participate* in the rapidly diminishing phenomenon of local enterprise. To maintain community radio as a vibrant and strong local entity, governments need to resist the facile application of quantitative methods to the social and cultural value of community radio. The community radio sector and its representatives will do well to continue to argue their case on the basis of their social and cultural value – and in their own interests, overtly refuse to become involved in economic arguments which they will not win. Recent work on the emerging concept of 'cultural citizenship' will also add ballast to the sector's claims to social and cultural value, prove valuable in interactions with government and help restore community radio's primary philosophy of broadcasting democracy.

- **Cultural Citizenship and the Community Radio Sector**

The notion of broadcasting democracy can best be considered in light of emerging concepts of the public sphere, and particularly cultural citizenship. Indeed, it can be

argued that community radio is making a significant and unique contribution to the development of a genuine form of cultural citizenship in Australia. Culture can be defined as a 'way of seeing' the world which highlights the 'dialogic production of meaning and aesthetics through a variety of practices' (Stevenson, 2001:1). The communities (geographic, cultural and interest communities) who participate in community radio represent and reproduce specific meaning systems and semiotic practices of their culture/s. In this sense, community radio is implicitly about conveying, representing and re/producing culture. Of course this assertion is applicable to commercial radio. The difference is that community radio's commitment to local regions/towns and to groups such as ethnic minorities, gay and lesbian groups, bluegrass music buffs, etc means that they are able to represent a diversity of cultures not present in commercial radio. As such, community radio is more representative of the diversity and multiculturalism of the Australian community. And again, commercial radio is primarily concerned with audience measurement and mass appeal – their primary role is to attract the largest audience possible which can then be sold to advertisers. Commercial programming cannot afford to offend its audience via the broadcast of radical political viewpoints, ethnic language programming, or music formats with specialist appeal, etc. Community radio can serve these audiences and encourage them to actively broadcast their ideas because it has long been its primary responsibility to do so.

Citizenship invokes ideas of membership, belonging, rights and obligations and in institutional terms, summons legal definitions about who is included or excluded from the political community (Stevenson, 2001:1). Traditionally, the idea of citizenship has been associated with the nation-state – until the last few decades, a relatively homogenous entity. Historically, the nation-state secured its membership via language and religion and often by default, defined cultural membership also (see Turner, 2001:13). Traditional/dominant characteristics of cultural membership in Australia would include English as the spoken language, Anglo-Saxon ancestry and a commitment to Catholicism/Protestant religious ideals – the adage 'football, meatpies, kangaroos and Holden cars' was an attempt to define Australian culture. Notably, traditional notions of Australianess exclude women, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, other religious traditions, etc, just to name a few. The global movement of people and cultures has deemed a homogenous Australian culture anachronistic and exclusive. Assumptions of homogeneity and 'cultural consensus' attached to the nation state can no longer be maintained. In contemporary Australian society and across the world, globalisation has eroded many of the assumptions and ideas associated with the nation-state. Indeed, globalisation has raised many questions for national governments and in turn, the rights and obligations of their citizens.

The development of new communications technology and global transport systems has deemed national borders increasingly irrelevant to not only industry and government but also to the maintenance of culture/s. In addition, the global movement of peoples (and consequential, multiculturalism) and the capacity of electronic networks to facilitate communication between geographically dispersed communities of interest has also undermined the 'cultural consensus' associated with the nation-state (see Stevenson, 2001:3). Multiculturalism in Australia is a prime example of the consequences of

globalisation. Due to changes in society brought about by globalisation, some social theorists have elevated the responsibility of the state to accommodate 'cultural rights' in addition to civil, political and social rights (see Turner, (1993), Roche (1992), Stevenson (2001)). According to Jan Paklusi (1997:80) cultural rights are a 'new breed of claims for unhindered representation, recognition without marginalisation, acceptance and integration without 'normalising' distortion'. In other words, in social theory there are increasing claims that the state has a responsibility to ensure that those cultural groups within its borders are afforded opportunities to represent their cultural beliefs and values without intimidation or fear of condemnation. It is only a short step then, to frame the community radio movement as a call for 'cultural rights' and to see the community radio sector as enabling the diverse citizens of Australia with an incomparable opportunity to represent their cultures. Of course, enabling access and participation in the broadcast media empowers diverse cultural groups with the potential to reach a significant audience with relative ease. Certainly, increasing calls for cultural rights will focus on the media and education being the prime sites where culture is represented and contested (Stevenson, 2001:3). According to Stevenson (1997:42)

'[C]ultural citizenship can be said to have been fulfilled to the extent to which a society makes commonly available the semiotic and material cultures necessary in order to make social life meaningful, critique practices of domination, and allow for the recognition of difference under conditions of tolerance and mutual respect'

Inadvertently, community radio has been asserting the cultural rights of citizens since its inception in the discourses of democracy and citizenship. Promoting active citizen participation in radio has provided a forum for the broadcast of Australia's cultural diversity. Effectively, community radio has placed the ownership and control of an (admittedly small though not inconsequential) portion of Australia's cultural production in the hands of local diverse communities. In an era characterised by the accelerating presence of global media corporations, local participation in the ownership, production, distribution and consumption of cultural goods (Turner, 2001:20) is (will become) a key criteria by which governments are judged in the forum of citizenship rights. True the sector is not without fault or problems. However, Australian community radio has at the very least, the infrastructure in place to respond to the threats (and sometimes benefits) of globalisation. It is a well rehearsed argument that in the 'global information era', the power to control the production and distribution of knowledge/s threatens to produce 'information-haves' and 'have-nots'. Community radio provides a safe haven for the representation of information and knowledge/s which often contest dominant mainstream assumptions about Australian culture. In Australia, listening to commercial radio could lead the untrained listener to believe that Australians are white, anglo-saxon and are only interested in events which take place on the east coast. Community radio counters this perception via its commitment to the representation of diversity. As one of a multitude of examples, Radio 3ZZZ in Melbourne arranged an Albanian language program to be delivered each day to cater for recently arrived Albanian refugees. This service informed the refugees of happenings in their home country as well as information about their status in Australia. Community radio contests the notion of cultural homogeneity and represents regional/rural cultures, ethnic and indigenous cultures and various other

interest groups thereby affirming their place (and importance) in the Australian cultural landscape – as is a primary requirement of cultural citizenship rights.

- **Conclusions**

In the global flurry of excitement surrounding new media and technologies, community radio is at best, a whisper from the backroom. While successive Australian Governments and/or commercial enterprises debate policy options in the rapidly changing new communications environment, community radio struggles to be heard over the din of cash registers and major corporate manoeuvres. Certainly, free spectrum allocation and a total of 6.3 per cent of broadcasting licenses does not procure a powerful bargaining position for community radio stations in Australia's political environment (unlike commercial media interests). It is a truism that a primary defining feature of the (Western) globe is its obsession and preoccupation with economics and associated concepts of markets, profitability and efficiency. In this climate, then it is no surprise that the sector's principle argument for continued and increased support based on its social and cultural contribution (Thompson, 2000:30) is subjected to economic formulae and quantification. Community radio does not operate for profit and due to its 'local' catering for specific communities will not (except in rare cases) command comparable audiences to commercial enterprises. It is difficult then for community radio stations and the sectors' peak bodies to lobby governments for some prolonged and productive attention. Ideas associated with 'democracy', 'citizenship' and 'cultural representation' don't hold the same weight when delivered to an audience whose 'bottom line' is economic feasibility. Indeed, the only aspect of community radio worthy of quantification is the potential cost of wages, on-costs, etc of the sector's 25000 volunteers.

Elevation of the notion of 'cultural citizenship' in government and sector circles is a potentially useful concept for Australia's community radio sector. Australian governments and others have frequently applauded our nation as a place where a diversity of cultural groups manage to live in relative harmony and enjoy tolerance and acceptance of diverse beliefs, values and practices. Community radio provides grassroots access to media which re/produces, maintains, nurtures and cultivates the acceptance and representation of Australia's diverse and multicultural society. As Stuart Cunningham (1996:25) asserts:

'[c]ommunity broadcasting is constitutionally about an acceptance and a determination to make the most of a pluralistic polity, of 'being stuck with each other'. As such, it is potentially on one of the front lines...that might make real Australia's claim to being a culturally diverse and effective pluralistic society'

This is a role that other media are unable to fulfill due to commercial pressures or in the case of Australia's public broadcasters (ABC & SBS), major declines in government funding. Attempts to quantify Australia's community radio sector must begin with an explicit acknowledgement and support of the qualitative value of their contribution to the Australian community. While costing of spectrum allocation will prove interesting financial analysis for some, research which seeks to aid the sector in its unique,

qualitative role will prove far more fruitful for the long term prospects of the Australian community than a short term cost-benefit analysis could hope to achieve.

ⁱ For a history of party political support for community broadcasting see Thornley (1995). Suffice to say here that both parties at varying times supported community radio initiatives.

ⁱⁱ There is some disagreement about which station was the **first** public broadcaster - 'education' stations associated with the University of NSW and the University of Adelaide pre-date 2MBS-FM.

ⁱⁱⁱ This history of Australian community radio ignores many frustrating delays, party political manouvers, specific issues relating to 'radio activists' etc. during the development of community radio. The path of development did not run smoothly. For further discussion see Thornley (1995); Bear (1979); Bear (1983); Barlow (1999)

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