

Funding the ‘third way’ of radio broadcasting in Britain

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Abstract

Very few scholars of community radio in Britain have discussed funding in detail since the introduction of full-time community radio licences in the country (Lewis 1977, 2008, 2012; Lewis and Booth 1989). Some have pointed out the possible pitfalls in the British case of reliance on social objectives funding (Gordon 2009). Bearing in mind the historical development of community radio in the United Kingdom, this article, traces the contours of the origins and development of community radio under the New Labour government. It discusses how the change in the political landscape, with the landslide victory of the Labour Party in 1997, affected the social, cultural and media policies that followed. While, in the end, the sector got what it had campaigned for since the first lobbying efforts in 1977 (Lewis and Booth 1989), the current shape of the sector was much influenced by the political context after 1997 and the strategies adopted to get the legislation through in 2004.

Introduction

This article will attempt to provide an intellectual argument – namely, that community radio in Britain today can be understood fully only in the wider context of New Labour’s period in office and the policies pursued by New Labour. Indeed, in a context in which New Labour put the concept of “community” at the centre of social policies in the wider context of regeneration, employment and training processes, the representative body of the sector, the Community Media Association (CMA) was keen to highlight how the sector could play a key role in delivering the recommendations that the policymaker, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), put forward to the Social Exclusion Unit (Community Media Association 1999). In a historical perspective, this signalled a shift from a sector that had started to define itself more as *complementary*, rather than *alternative* to public and commercial broadcasting. In this view, community media, then, became a *partner* of the Government in the delivery of public policies, alongside the more general “third sector”, which includes civil society, community and voluntary organisations. Community media, with this move, positioned themselves in a new context in which they had to compete for funds against other community and voluntary organisations, and demonstrate their ability to perform community development functions better than them. This brought new opportunities for funding, but simultaneously created inherent risks.

With the political support of the New Labour Government, a changed atmosphere at the then regulator (the Radio Authority), and a different position towards both of them, the CMA then engaged in what would turn out to be, in the end, a *consensus building* operation in order to get the deal for community radio done. Mostly stripped of its previous ideological background, and following a successful evaluation of a pilot project, community radio was then introduced as the third sector of radio broadcasting in the United Kingdom on 20 July 2004. While it is undisputable that New Labour permitted, ultimately, the introduction and consequent mushrooming of stations across Britain (233 stations according to the list of licensees provided by the media regulator Ofcom, 28

August 2015) (Ofcom 2015a), I argue that this association with the New Labour policy agenda created a number of shortcomings in the system.

Policy context under New Labour (1997-2004)

The millennium should harness the imagination of all those people who have so much to offer for the benefit of the community (Labour Party 1997).

On 1 May 1997 the Labour Party won the General Election and, in this context, the success of New Labour, as Driver and Martell argue, ‘consolidated a process of reform that had been under way for a decade’ with work, and not welfare, becoming the centre of the party’s social policies (2002, 7 and 36). Once in government, one of the most important interventions of Labour in social policy was the New Deal on welfare. As argued by Finn (2003, 115) ‘the extension of ‘opportunity’ through employment was the core of New Labour’s approach to welfare state reform. Instead of applying the Old Labour principle of ‘more spending, less injustice’, New Labour aimed to increase ‘the employability of our people through education and skills and an active employment service’ (Blair 1997, in Finn 2003, 116). In 1999 Regional Development Agencies were established in eight English regions and the New Deal for Communities (NDC) was introduced as a long-term programme designed to reinvigorate urban areas that had suffered from serious decline. Social exclusion, among other areas, was tackled through cultural policy funding as the *New Audiences Programme* of Arts Council England (ACE), through which it commissioned reviews (Jermyn 2001), research projects and evaluation of arts projects tackling social exclusion, with the aim of filling one of the gaps in evidence for the impact of arts in regeneration (Johnson et al. 2004). One of the outputs, Jermyn’s report for Arts Council England *The Art of Inclusion* (2004), failed to prove the “hard” impact of work in this area, but found that participation in arts projects did increase levels of self-esteem and confidence, enhanced a feeling of self-determination and self-control, gave pleasure and developed creative skills (ibid., 63). Finally, ACE also published a briefing paper on the role of arts in neighbourhood renewal (Shaw 2003), listing a series of case studies where projects helped to improve communication within communities in the areas of personal development, strengthening communities, employment and skills, crime, and health: “The arts do not offer a magic potion, but they can question beliefs and ambitions and help individuals and communities take a new direction. No other field can do this’ (ibid., 1). In this context, John Carey had criticised the British arts establishment for paying ‘almost no attention to how active participation in art alters people’ (2005, 158). The only exceptions, in his opinion, are those who have taken arts into prisons, and he cites the experiences illustrated in *Including the Arts: the Route to Basic and Key Skills in Prisons* (Home Office Standing Committee for Arts in Prisons 2001). The document provides evidence of how artistic production changed people’s lives, giving them the skills to express themselves and renounce violence, the changes of behaviour in inmates involved in theatrical activities, and, more generally, the boost in self-confidence and self-esteem.

As can be seen from the policy trends discussed above, between 1997 and the first half of the new century, a space emerged in the policy discourse of New Labour that allowed the community radio sector to enter, given its credentials of involving communities “from below” in their double role as listeners/producers. Here it is important to note how the community media sector was positioned to enter discourses about using creativity, culture and voluntary organisations that were at the top of New Labour’s

cultural policy agenda, and which were, therefore, given substantial amounts of funding. In short, it could capitalise on this when requesting a change in media policy and in campaigning for the introduction of community radio as the third pillar of British radio broadcasting policy.

There were, then, several elements that brought a climate more favourable to the introduction of community radio in Britain. Governmental policies emphasised the role that community and voluntary organisations could have in helping local and regional agencies to regenerate urban areas and combat social exclusion, as well as through cultural activities originating from below. With space to manoeuvre relatively limited for the BBC, which already was receiving licence fee money and had to take into account different decision making processes, the community media sector could step in and create space for itself through a media policy agenda. In this respect, it was counting on the fact that commercial radio operators were aiming to loosen further ownership restrictions and any remaining public service obligations. Social, cultural and media policy were, then, converging on the creation of a much more friendly environment in which community radio could talk with Government, Members of Parliament (MPs) and the regulatory authority at that time, the Radio Authority (RA). The way to the introduction of the community radio in Britain, though, also presented some potential risks, namely the decision to emphasise the participation in projects with specific social policies and the risk of attaching community radio activity to the reach of regional, national, and international social policy objectives. However, the sector's approach ended up being a pragmatic one and aimed at getting the best of the funding opportunities at that time and to work to open up further the space for community radio.

The “third way” of broadcasting: opportunities and challenges

The Australian media scholar Ellie Rennie has discussed how, in the “third way” models, community has been given a central place in a context where there is less central government support, and when ‘a simultaneous emphasis on skills creation and responsibility means a stronger role for civil society organisations in partnership with local governments’ (Rennie 2006, 39). She goes on to say that the Community Media Association (CMA) ‘has been making the most of the Blair government’s community rhetoric’ (ibid., 151) and includes a quotation of the Director of the CMA (up to 2004) Steve Buckley that deserves to be cited here:

The government has majored on social inclusion, reform of life-long learning, community access to communication information technologies, local democracy, e-government, etc. All these things tie in with new agendas within the community media sector. And we’ve been able to argue fairly successfully that community media reaches lots of themes and topics that the government wants to reach. (Ibid., 151)

Indeed, the Information and Communications Technology Learning Centres initiative had been launched by the government in 1999 through a Capital Modernisation Fund and the New Opportunities Fund, and the CMA had successfully argued for an integrated approach to ICT learning, incorporating wider cultural practice as well as business skills (Buckley 2007). By 2003, the scenario included a growing number of community media centres that were equipped with multimedia workstations, broadband internet, digital editing software and digital radio studios for audio/video production and live broadcasting. CMA staffing, mostly based at their headquarters in Sheffield, also

reached a peak at this time: 'we employed 25 members of staff, there was substantial growth of the sector, of membership, and growing political recognition,' Buckley (2007) observed.

Through the New Deal for Communities and the UK Communities on-line Fund, the latter containing initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide, an £80m investment for neighbourhood ICT capital investment, funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) 'many community groups were successful in getting funding and this also helped to create further awareness of the presence of the sector' (Buckley 2007). Moreover, the CMA also argued that 'these multimedia centres had to involve disadvantaged communities to stimulate creativity as well as productivity' (*ibid.*). A substantial amount of funding was channelled into CM projects (e.g. £600,000 for a project in Sheffield alone) and for those who were successful in jumping on the bandwagon, and making use of relevant Lottery funds, this was the opportunity to move from limited technical resources to state-of-the-art digital production environments (Community Media Association 2000). The problem with the context described above is that the community media sector is caught between the possibility of helping to improve social fabric, communications and local public spheres on one side, and the risk of becoming too attached to national, regional and local governmental objectives on the other. This is a challenge not only for community media organisations, though. As Harris et al. state in their review of social policies affecting the work of community and voluntary organisations, the higher level of professionalism required by partnerships with local governmental bodies

diminishes the attention given to the messy and muddled yet vibrant sorts of voluntarism that often spring up as collective expressions of opposition to the state and private sector policies and practices. Examples include direct action to protect jobs or to prevent degradation of the environment: the sorts of activities captured by the term 'social movements'. 2001, 13)

Harris warns that governmental agencies are demanding about the level of accountability and the setting of targets to be achieved in return for their funding. Even though it is important for community and voluntary organisations to also be active in consultation, planning and policy development, this risks stretching their human resources to a breaking point (2001, 214) and 'requires not only time but also knowledge about the way governmental institutions work as well as sophisticated lobbying and negotiating skills' (*ibid.*, 220). Moreover, 'government funding is often uncertain and confined to specific projects, leaving voluntary agencies with problems about maintaining core funding, developing long-term plans and retaining their central mission' (*ibid.*, 216). The balance between receiving governmental funding and preserving some autonomy is a difficult one as it could inhibit such agents 'from expressing different viewpoints from those of their funders' and there is the risk that 'short-term organisation growth may be achieved at the expense of long-term survival as an independent third sector organisation' (*ibid.*, 218-9).

A question that emerges here, then, is how community media outlets, while fundraising for their survival and concentrating on national and local government targets and needs, can manage to retain a focus on the needs of the communities they serve? How can they put this into practice in a context of scarce financial resources and unreliable streams of income? As was briefly discussed in the outline of social and cultural policy

developments under New Labour, there was space for the community media sector to apply for funding programmes aimed at giving skills to communities, helping them to participate in the knowledge economy and to regenerate areas that suffered extensively from the changes in Britain's economy between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. It is perhaps useless to speculate further about what could have happened, in terms of funding, if the community radio sector had been part of the government's policy straight away in 1997. Given the tensions and contradictions that surrounded New Labour's approach to the concept of community, the management of schemes that were supposed, in theory, to encourage bottom-up approaches to achieve social and cultural policy objectives, the emerging issue here were the risks attached to the development of community radio policy and practice, given the clear social policy objectives of the New Labour Government. This required a change in approach for a sector that had historically developed the concept of community radio in ways that were more clearly detached from government policies of the time. It became apparent that the kind of space being opened up was likely to be complicated for a sector that claimed, historically, to be set apart from the mainstream. This meant that the historically "alternative" British normative definition of community radio had to change to adapt to a new political context that majored, in the context of cultural and social policy, on community, regeneration and widening participation, as well as prioritising the acquisition of ICT and media literacy skills. Indeed, a stronger recognition of the community media sector, and higher amounts of funding, emerged in the context of a wider set of social and cultural policies promoted by the first two New Labour governments headed by Tony Blair (1997-2005). As George McKay argues in a review of cultural policies in Britain for the period 1960s-2000s

The post-1997 'subsidy revolution' – a New Labour government committed to more socially inclusive arts funding, urban regeneration via the engine of culture, and the funds from the then National Lottery to support such a 'seismic shift' (Everitt 1997, 157) – in community arts in Britain saw specific cultural forms benefit significantly. These included community music and community media. (2010, 51)

Indeed, it was the success of the Community Media Association (CMA) in getting funding, more specifically European Social Fund (ESF) matched with Yorkshire regional development funds (the CMA has its headquarters in that area, in Sheffield), to support its lobbying action, and a more favourable political climate, in the end, opened the way for approval of the Community Radio Order (CRO) in 2004. However, the CRO emphasised that the stations should deliver 'social gain' by contributing to social cohesion, helping to regenerate communities, encouraging volunteering, developing social enterprises and facilitating 'the delivery of services provided by local authorities and other services of a social nature and the increasing, and wider dissemination, of knowledge about those services' (United Kingdom Parliament 2004). The shape of this definition included several items that ranked high on the New Labour social and cultural policy agenda and indicates a shift from previous alternative discourses on community radio. A number of British scholars, though, have been concerned about the risks of such a formulated legislation. McKay suggests, for instance, that the contemporary uses of 'community' are 'masking a depoliticization of once radical projects or a dilution of their legacy' (2010, 42). Janey Gordon, meanwhile, argues that

The station needs to define where the money comes from rather than the funding bodies defining the nature of the station. Secondly the community stations need to examine their relationship with their

audience and ensure that they are not giving an over emphasis on the number of volunteers and the training they provide to make an undemanding claim for social gain (...) They cannot rely purely on social worth to show that they have the right to broadcast. The UK stations need to avoid becoming an arm of the social services (2009, 77).

These identify the key concerns that have emerged from actual community radio practice and funding considerations over the last few years, and indicate some of the emerging tensions within the UK community radio sector.

Funding Community Radio: limits of the British model

Despite recommendations and promises of a substantial Community Radio Fund, New Labour failed spectacularly to deliver on this front. While the Radio Authority, through Everitt's evaluation of the Access Radio pilot project (the name of the project that preceded the introduction of community radio) (Everitt 2003a, 2003b), strongly suggested a fund in the order of tens of millions of pounds, the New Labour Government completely ignored this important indication. With only £500,000 available per year for a sector that now counted over 200 stations, and growing, the impact that such a fund would be able to make was very, very limited. As the then CMA's Director Steve Buckley commented, this 'was either a gross exaggeration of government's real intention or there has been a serious failure of implementation' (2010, 9). Especially in the case of community radio stations that relied mostly on project funding to run their activities, as, for example, Manchester's ALL FM (see also Scifo 2011, 194-240); the fact that it depends largely on social policy project funding puts similar stations to a higher risk. Such models, which chase a variety of local, regional, national and, eventually, international funding, require stations to have one or more members of staff spend considerable time in searching for funding in a highly competitive environment, and with decreasing resources, then they have to "tick the boxes" and report back to the funder. Moreover, it does not help to cover the core costs of management and administration of the whole station, but just the part related to the project. So, stations such as ALL FM have indeed been influenced towards dedicating a large part of its programming to fulfilling the aims of a wider regeneration agenda. On the positive side, though, this has permitted hundreds of local members to get training, learn skills and, most importantly, gain voices. At the other end of the spectrum, stations that run with very low operational costs, a good advertising base and spend little or no time on project funding, as, for example, Forest FM (see also Scifo 2011, 244-66); based in Verwood, Dorset, in the south of England, would be less affected by wider changes in the political context in Britain.

Overall, the elephant in the room is the sheer size of the Community Radio Fund, which could have proven to be key in giving these British community radio stations a more solid start and building firmer foundations for years to come. New Labour introduced community radio, but did not commit adequate funding to enhance its sustainability. When dividing £500,000 among all UK residents the 'budget for the Community Radio Fund in the UK amounts to less than 1p per head of population (...) No doubt the absence of significant core funding for the sector also means that a growing number of stations are competing more intensely for a largely static pot of other national public funding sources, such as lottery grants' (Buckley, 2010: 11). Another issue that emerged from the development of the sector in Britain after 1997 was a cultural barrier; there was little awareness on the part of governmental departments, other than the policymaker,

the DCMS, of what community radio actually is. However, given the very low settlement of the Community Radio Fund and the emphasis on other aspects as just “radio”, the CMA had to engage in several separate discussions with government officials of, for example the Home Office, the Department of Education and Skills, or the Department of Work and Pensions. In informal talks with people involved in such negotiations, there was visible frustration with the fact that the people in these departments would say something along the lines of: ‘Radio? Then you need to talk with the DCMS. We have nothing to do with radio.’ This could be explained by the fact that community radio, until then, was simply not on the government’s radar. What happened at the national level was echoed also at the local level, with officials who were used to working with traditional community development organisations, but not familiar with the use of radio as a tool *for* development.

Under New Labour, neither the DCMS nor other governmental departments committed any further funds to support core costs for community radio. On 27 June 2007, Gordon Brown succeeded Tony Blair as Prime Minister and remained in this position until 11 May 2010. Cuts to public funding implemented in the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review made the increase in any central/national funding for community radio unlikely, with regional and local funding on a decreasing trend, too. However, some important changes were introduced in an amendment to the Community Radio Order, approved on 21 January 2010 (United Kingdom Parliament 2010). Firstly, licence holders were given the right to apply for a one-off extension of their licence for a period up to five years, in line with similar practice for commercial radio. Secondly, based on data collected by Ofcom (Ofcom 2009), the amendment to the 2004 Order lifted the rule that prohibited more than 50 per cent funding from one source, even though this limit would remain in place for advertising income. Thirdly, it lifted the rule that prohibited community radio stations from being licensed if they overlapped with a local commercial service whose coverage was fewer than 50,000 adults. In the latter case, these stations still would be prohibited from taking any advertising.

While all the amendments above do not tackle the crucial matter of funding, the 2010 Order helps to guarantee the continuity of operation for a fragile sector, recognises funding opportunities and restrictions across the UK, allowing further flexibility, and, finally, states that the establishment of community radio stations in less populated areas would not pose a risk to incumbent commercial radio broadcasters. Right before the end of the mandate of the 2010-2015 Coalition Government, the UK Parliament approved a further amendment to the Community Radio Order, the ‘Community Radio (Amendment) Order 2015’ (United Kingdom Parliament 2015). On funding matters, the CMA lauded the fact that the Amendment offered an important improvement with ‘the provision to allow certain community radio stations to receive income from the taking of remunerated advertising or sponsorship of their programming output that were previously prevented from doing so’ (Best 2015), which would ‘allow 25 stations that were previously prevented from receiving advertising and sponsorship revenues to receive up to £15,000’ (ibid.). Moreover, in the words of the CMA ‘The 200 other community radio stations will be permitted to earn an additional £15,000 in advertising or programme sponsorship before the “50% rule” (which limits a station’s income to not more than 50% of their annual income from on-air advertising and sponsorship) applies’ (ibid.). On the other side, the community media body expressed its disappointment at the fact that the Amendment ‘did not go further and permit all stations to raise at least 50% of their revenue through advertising and sponsorship’ and highlighted once again that

‘the Community Radio Fund remains inadequate’, also that ‘the community radio sector has declined in income and viability’ (ibid.).

A few months after the 2010 Order, at the General Election 2010, a Conservative/Liberal-Democrat coalition replaced New Labour after 13 years. The Coalition Government didn’t impact the media policy framework, but, for example, with its first Spending Review in 2010, it approved, among other things, cuts for £81bn from public spending and a seven per cent yearly cut for local councils to take place for four years from April 2011 (BBC News 2010). Arguably, the 2010 and subsequent spending reviews have had an effect on all the stations that relied heavily on the project funding model. An assessment of the Coalition Government community radio legacy after its mandate ended in 2015 also deserves further research. Moreover, with a newly elected Conservative Government on 7 May 2015, and the current economic context, the continuation of public spending cuts seems to be irreversible for the near future.

Another widely discussed concept in Government’s circles has also been the Conservative Party’s vision of ‘The Big Society’ (Cameron 2009). Briefly, this concept promotes less public intervention in the delivery of services and an increased role for community-based organisations as partners to deliver such services. Power would be devolved from central to local government and from there to local community groups, which would become public service providers paid ‘by results’ (Cameron 2010). For example, policing could be part of neighbourhood watch schemes and include ‘New powers for local communities to take over the running of parks, libraries and post offices’ (ibid.). Critics such as Gauntlett have argued that ‘community engagement is a good thing, and is rewarding for participants and their neighbourhoods, but it should be built *above* the baseline of necessary services – not as a money saving replacement for them’ (2011, 157-8, emphasis in original). What effect such an approach could have on community radio is out of the scope of this article; however, the co-author of a well-known sector’s publication, the *Community Radio Toolkit*, and *The Guardian* commentator Ally Fogg, has claimed that Cameron’s proposals are nothing new: ‘that’s what we’ve been doing for years!’ (Fogg 2010) He warned that, under current proposals, the benefits of funding scheme for Big Society projects will be far less than the consequences of cuts to public spending elsewhere. This could be a task for future researchers to explore.

What can be done in here, though, is to discuss briefly how two very different stations in terms of funding models, ALL FM and Forest FM, have performed when comparing them with the gradual decrease in cultural and social policy funds, with reference to the last annual report published by the media regulator Ofcom for the community radio (after 2011 this has become a small part of a large ‘Communication Market report, see Ofcom 2015b). Ofcom’s ‘Annual Report on the Sector’ for 2010-2011 (Ofcom 2011) was based on an analysis of the annual reports of 161 stations submitted to the regulator. The total cost of the sector was estimated as £10m, providing volunteering opportunities for 12,500 people (ibid., 5). Ofcom had, by then, licensed 235 stations over three rounds of licensing, with 196 of these broadcasting at the time of the report. The regulator reports also that,

Ten stations decided not to launch and a further ten have handed their licence back after they had commenced broadcasting. Three stations have ceased to exist after the licence-holding companies were dissolved. The reasons given for a community radio service failing have in general related to funding, with groups, for example, encountering unexpected cash flow

problems or difficulties in obtaining sufficient funding to launch or to maintain the service (ibid., 7).

As can be seen, 10 per cent of the stations did not start, or had concluded their broadcast mainly for financial reasons, which should come as no surprise given the outcomes of this research and other subsequent studies. The report also outlines an impressive range of social gains in terms of speech and music diversity, provision of services to previously underserved communities, the facilitation of discussion and expression of opinion, and training opportunities for volunteers (see *ibid.*: 34-45). Despite that, funding is still the *major* difficulty highlighted by the stations:

Not surprisingly the most common difficulty cited by community radio stations has been the lack of available funding. Stations feel stifled by the small budgets they have to work within and the majority of community radio services cannot afford to employ staff to undertake key functions. (...) For many stations, the lack of public funding means that there is an atmosphere of uncertainty (*ibid.*, 49).

More in detail, then, ALL FM reported, among other things, that although it has 'successfully lobbied Manchester City Council to continue funding, this will be 33% less than the previous years' (*ibid.*, 74). There also has been a 'significant drop in advertising revenue' and 'accessing funding has become more difficult' (*ibid.*, 104). Finally, 'due to lack of funding we have reduced staff numbers significantly' (*ibid.*, 111) Since July 2011, this has resulted in ALL FM having four paid part-time staff members, down from three full-time and three part-time members present in September 2006, when the author visited the station. The sustainability concerns expressed earlier seem to have taken their toll in a scarcer funding context. On the other end, a station that is performing well is one that relies the least on project funding schemes, such as Forest FM. Station Manager Steve Saville stated that the national and global context have had very minor consequences on the station operations; funding from the local district council, given that 'the station has proven its worth', is unchanged for the years between 2006 and 2011 (Saville 2011). Moreover, with the closure in 2011 of Heart Radio's (formerly 2CR) studio in Bournemouth, with its closest studio now being in Southampton, listeners seem to increasingly appreciate the local nature of Verwood's station.

Conclusion

Couldry has argued that 'voice as process – giving an account of oneself and what affects one's life – is an irreducible part of what it means to be human' (2010, vi). Neoliberal discourses privilege top-down structures and increasingly commercialised models of broadcasting, and New Labour was no exception to that in the field of commercial radio. In this article I hope to have demonstrated how community radio, despite its limitations, and far from being a perfect model, has begun to offer a tool for self-expression and is making the use of one's voice meaningful.

It has been discussed how the community radio sector was able to capitalise on changes, both in terms of funding and media policy, by choosing pragmatically to be part of the delivery of social gain and to engage in partnerships with governmental bodies to achieve social policy objectives. Where the New Labour government supported the introduction of community radio as the third sector of radio broadcasting in Britain, it is clear that it failed to take the occasion to support a more solid establishment of the sector by ignoring the recommendations for a substantial Community Radio Fund. Being aware of

the possibility of over 200 stations going on air in a relatively short period of time, having established, and left, the size of the fund at £500,000 meant, effectively, depriving new stations of essential seed funding that could have helped them to cover their ‘core costs’ of basic administration and management for the initial phases of operation of a station.

This means that, when looked at through a media policy lens, the financial support to the sector was extremely poor, despite evidence from Radio Authority (Everitt 2003a, 2003b), Ofcom (2009, 2011) and DCMS reports (DCMS 2007) that the sector was starting to make an important contribution to a much more diverse media landscape at the local level in Britain.

Finally, the vast majority of UK’s licensed community radio stations are still broadcasting, and have proven to be resilient and adaptive in challenging funding circumstances where social policy funding has been increasingly reduced by the governments that succeeded New Labour after 2010, namely the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition (2010-2015) and the Conservative government that has been in charge since 2015. There is some evidence that this context has affected heavily those stations based on project funding. However, there is a need for further, in-depth research to assess the scale of the impact of the changed political context, especially after Ofcom’s decision to terminate the release of its annual reports on community radio after 2011 ‘Given that the community radio sector is now relatively mature’ (Ofcom, 2011: 6).

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