

Agitate Educate Organise.

The roles of information-based programming on 4ZzZ

Heather Anderson

Abstract

Community radio in Australia, and community media in general, has received increased attention from academics in recent years. Forde et al (2002) highlight the need for further study into news and current affairs programming in the community broadcasting sector, saying that they are keen to discover more about its format and content, especially in terms of the attitudes and practices of information-based program producers. This paper attempts to clarify some of these issues by outlining the results of a case study of information-based programming at Brisbane community radio 4ZzZ and adopting a modified citizen's media framework.

Introduction

Community radio in Australia, and community media in general, has received increased attention from academics in recent years (for example Forde, Meadows and Foxwell 2002; van Vuuren 2002; Jeffrey 2002; Tacchi and Price-Davies 2001; Rodriguez 2001; Downing 2001). Forde et al (2002: 86) highlight the need for further study into news and current affairs programming in the community broadcasting sector, saying that they are keen to discover more about its format and content, especially in terms of the attitudes and practices of information-based program producers.

This paper attempts to clarify some of these issues at a specific radio station as a first step to furthering research into community broadcasting news and current affairs. It outlines the results of a case study of information-based programming at Brisbane community radio 4ZzZ. 4ZzZ has been broadcasting since 1975 and adopted its current slogan *AGITATE EDUCATE ORGANISE* in the mid-1980's (Williams 2000: 35). The station has always focused on news and information, especially covering marginalised issues not focused heavily upon by its mainstream counterparts.

The initial question for my research was fairly simple, 'What are the roles of information-based programs on 4ZzZ?' I particularly wanted to investigate how information-based programming at 4ZzZ could be analysed in terms of a framework of citizens' media (Rodriguez 2001). Citizens' media is a term used to describe what is otherwise known as grass-roots media, alternative media, local media or community media (Rodriguez 2001: 26) where the term 'citizen' is intended to reflect an actively constructed citizenship rather than one stemming from a given legal status. Rodriguez draws on radical democratic theory to develop an alternative framework for the analysis of grassroots media activities that focuses on processes rather than product, and on the power that is generated through these processes.

Rodriguez (2001: 10) and Downing (2001: v) both call for more analysis of community media that moves beyond comparing community media to *what they are not*. These scholars also warn against analysing community media in terms of its relation to other, usually mainstream, media. However acting as an alternative or supplement to other media is

considered vital by the 4ZzZ workers producing information-based programming, an opinion that cannot be ignored or marginalised despite its oppositional nature.

I found that there was a need to incorporate other media theory to fully study the roles of 4ZzZ information-based programs. Downing's theory of radical media (2001) embraces the oppositional nature of certain alternative media that struggle against power structures and their behaviours (Downing 2001: xi) and Atton's alternative media framework (2002) encourages a focus on the production of news and information. Applying these two theoretical frameworks to a citizens' media model produces a holistic approach to analyzing community broadcasting.

Finally, this paper presents a snapshot of 4ZzZ and its information-based programming in 2003. This is significant as what little study there has been on 4ZzZ (as one of the longest running community radio stations in Australia) focuses on history (Holman 1989; Knight 2000) rather than the roles or outcomes of the station's activities, or the way that democratic communication is produced. This is a contemporary study that explores what is happening at 4ZzZ in the here and now rather than a retrospective analysis of what the station has been or could be in the future.

The Case Study – Brisbane community radio 4ZzZ

4ZzZ has a well-established reputation for promoting local, Australian and independent music and for its commitment to independent and alternative news production. Its mission statement is under review and currently states:

To provide a voice for community interests and concerns of marginalised groups in Brisbane, not represented in the mainstream media (4ZzZ 2002: 1).

This mission statement is reinforced in the company memorandum of association's list of objectives (Creative Broadcasters 1995: 1) and by the station's *AGITATE EDUCATE ORGANISE* slogan.

The station broadcasts from a three story building in inner city suburb Fortitude Valley and caters primarily but not exclusively to the 17 to 35 years old demographic (Heath 1998: 1). Whilst there are currently two paid positions (Station Coordinator and Promotions) and one trainee (Administration), 4ZzZ is operated predominantly by volunteers with an estimated 100 to 120 people at any given time (Haslan 2005). This is in line with other findings that show community radio is strongly supported by volunteer labour (for example Forde et al 2002; van Vuuren 2002). The main areas of operation are announcing, administration, music (acquisitions and programming), news and documentaries, production, promotions, sponsorship and training.

4ZzZ is funded by subscriptions, sponsorship, fund raising events, donations and grants. Station manager Dominique Haslan estimates that there are approximately 1 400 subscribers and an undetermined but significant number of listeners. The Community Radio National Listener Survey (McNair Ingenuity Research 2004: 41) found that community radio in Brisbane commands 28% of the audience market but does not give specific details for each station.

The early days of 4ZzZ focused heavily on providing an alternative or supplement to the news and current affairs disseminated by the mainstream media. The idea for the station began at a public meeting called in 1971 by local activists to discuss establishing an alternative media outlet (Knight 2000: 3). The proposed station had explicitly political aims, two goals being to provide an alternative source of information to mainstream news and current affairs and to demystify the media by providing access to the community (Knight 2000: 5).¹

As commented by Priest in *The Courier Mail*, 'no other Australian radio station has had a more turbulent or troubled history than Triple Zed' (Priest 1996: 10). The news room's reputation for reporting stories relating to police and government corruption has, at times, led to workers being targeted by the police. Examples of this include arrests of journalists at protests, (for example 1985 at the SEQEB protests, 1994 at Freedom of Speech demonstrations and in 1996 at a hemp rally) and over-policing at 4ZzZ events (for example Caxton Street 1980, Cybernana Market Day 1996). It is no wonder that the station is still committed to the broadcast of independent and alternative news and information. While many other community radio stations do not see news as a high priority 4ZzZ is still noted for providing listeners with various news and current affairs programs (Forde et al. 2002: 83).

Information-based programming on 4ZzZ today

I draw on Forde et al's (2002: 87) definition of information-based programming which requires that original news is produced by volunteers at the station. The term 'information-based programming' refers to programs that place a significant emphasis on imparting information of social, political or local importance by means of original news production (usually interviews) and are recognised as information-based programs by 4ZzZ. At the time of my case study there were twelve information-based programs broadcasting on 4ZzZ. For my research I conducted a focus group with program presenters representing six of these programs. I also conducted content analysis on three of these programs – *Queer Radio*, Saturday's *Brisbane Line* and *Eco Radio*.

4ZzZ has presented continuous programming in support of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities in Brisbane since 1978. *Queer Radio* is one of the two programs currently broadcasting and, although male focused (all volunteers at the time of research were male), regards itself as fully inclusive and aims to present studio guests, interviews, news, views and relevant music. The program is two hours long and also hosts a comprehensive website (Queer Radio). There were three main volunteers involved with *Queer Radio* at the time of the research, one of whom (the primary announcer) has worked on the program since 1994; the other two presenters have volunteered for two to three years. The primary announcer conducted most of the information gathering and programming and organised other guests to appear on the show.

Brisbane Line is another long-running program established in 1976 (although it is not certain if the show has broadcast for that whole time) and is a news and current affairs program that provides alternative local, national and international news broadcasting two one-hour

¹ A detailed history 4ZzZ is available on the station's website (www.4zzzfm.org.au).

weekday episodes and another two hour edition on Saturdays. The program 'explores a wide range of current affairs and speaks to groups often ignored by the mainstream' (Brisbane Line). Each *Brisbane Line* has a regular presenter (two females and one male at the time of the research) and stories are taken from the general news department which has a fluctuating staff of volunteers made up of students on placement or gaining work experience and other 4ZzZ volunteers. It is estimated that there are between five to ten people producing news for *Brisbane Line* on any given week. These volunteers also compile and present *Zedlines*, news headlines at the beginning of each program.

Finally *Eco Radio* broadcasts for one hour on Friday mornings and is described on the 4ZzZ web site as radio about 'life, the community, and everything' (Radio Eco). It is a spin-off from the *Peace and Environment Show* that broadcast for at least ten years. The program focuses on environmental, health, globalisation and other social justice issues and represents the activist movement in Brisbane, Australia and internationally. At the time of the research there was one (female) primary presenter for *Eco Radio* and four other volunteers (two male and two female) contributing on a regular basis. Activists from local and national activism/environmental movements also contributed stories or assisted with the presentation of the show.

These three programs reflect the general philosophy of 4ZzZ to *AGITATE*, *EDUCATE*, *ORGANISE* and are in line with its mission statement, aiming to provide a voice for community interests and the concerns of marginalised groups in Brisbane. They provide a snap-shot of the information-based programs on 4zzz on which to base my case study.

Research method

For this case study I employed mostly qualitative means (focus groups, theoretical and archival research and content analysis). By employing a multi-faceted approach my results are triangulated to produce a more holistic and accurate analysis (Fortner & Christians 1981: 368). There are inherent difficulties in quantifying the benefits of community radio (Forde et al 2002 ; Foxwell 2001; van Vuuren 2002) especially when the sector is examined within the economic discourse of commercial/mainstream media. The citizens' media framework encourages researchers to move away from the dichotomy of 'them vs us' and to analyse community radio in its own right and specifically in terms of participatory power rather than audience numbers or annual income. Qualitative methods are most appropriate to investigate the roles of cultural citizenship, participatory power and other community development concepts that are influencing current thought on community media.

The first phase of my research was an in-depth focus group with current 4ZzZ information-based program producers to discover what they saw as the main roles of their programs. The intention was to gather people working in this field and draw on their experiences and understandings to identify the roles of their programs. The second phase of my research was to conduct content analysis of selected information-based programs produced at 4ZzZ. The main purpose of this was to test the results from what program producers *said* or *thought* they were achieving, or trying to achieve, against the actual content of their programs (what they *did*). This triangulation of results builds a more fully rounded analysis of the research problem (Fortner & Christians 1981: 368).

To maximise results (as suggested by Christians & Carey 1981: 354) I selected three different shows -- *Brisbane Line*, *Eco Radio* and *Queer Radio* -- and recorded two editions of each program a week apart from one another (ten hours of programming). This compensated for the possibility of an atypical program being analysed. Program producers did not know which broadcasts were being monitored to best observe the phenomena naturally (Christians & Carey 1981: 351).

The results of focus group research and content analysis

I have structured my findings in terms of four major themes common to community radio, as identified by previous research (for example Forde, Meadows and Foxwell 2002; van Vuuren 2002; Jeffrey 2002). Ordered to reflect the emphasis of my findings, these are:

- To provide alternative information to the mainstream media,
- to provide local information,
- to represent the community and
- to facilitate community participation.

An alternative to the mainstream media

To provide a different perspective...so you do not have to listen to the same old hegemonic capitalist interpretations (4ZzZ focus group participant).

When asked about how participants chose their stories the importance of providing ‘an alternative’ was raised repeatedly. The reasons for this were commonly to either provide information not covered by other media or to provide different perspectives. Respondents were quite critical of the mainstream media, saying that it ignored certain issues and covered others unfairly. Alternative media was seen as a means to get through the corporate filter which may not represent things as they truly are, to paraphrase one participant. Other considerations were to avoid promoting the government and being restricted by limited time and resources. The tendency for Triple Zed to focus on non-mainstream issues was applauded:

We get the opportunity to be a little more outspoken and a little bit, yeah, we don’t hedge much, we just say it the way we see it and I think that’s a really good advantage of 4ZzZ.

Content decisions seemed to be based more often than not on individual decisions and interests rather than based on policy. For example, while one participant from the news department was aware of ‘a very small amount of documentation’ outlining editorial focus the general consensus was that individual workers decided what stories they would cover for the news programs, drawing on shared community understanding to make these decisions. This does not mean that ‘anything goes’ in terms of what was broadcast – similarity in content was noted during the discussion. One participant explained this:

It’s the vibe of Triple Zed – for someone to choose to start producing news at Triple Zed, if they’re comfortable in the atmosphere ... then they are going to generally know and be interested in underground news, stuff we do cover.

There appears to be a form of self-censorship that exists at 4ZzzZ that informs workers about what is or is not usually covered. Atton (2002: 10) agrees that alternative media producers construct their own news based on alternative frameworks and values and it is generally agreed upon that news-room culture develops an understanding of what is or is not news and creates knowledge that is internalised by workers (see for example Meadows and Ewart 2001; de Bruin 2000). Content broadcast on 4ZzzZ supports the following focus group claim:

There's a lot of similarity with the way different individuals select what they're going to cover regardless of that being what's suggested by news department and editorial policy.

It is significant that the role of 'alternative to the mainstream' was the most commonly identified role. Rodriguez considers this oppositional thinking as inhibitive, that it can blind our 'understanding of all other instances of change and transformation brought about by (alternative) ... media' (Rodriguez 2001: 20). However, Rodriguez also says that the richness of community media would be overlooked if we analyse their roles as 'one dimensional static platforms aimed at unified goals' (Rodriguez 2001: 158).

It is difficult to classify a story or issue as alternative as this project did not facilitate a complementary study of the content on a mainstream radio station to be able to demonstrate 'alternative to what?' Therefore there is need for some subjective analysis about what classifies a news story as alternative. Downing's term 'radical' to some extent solves the problem he describes as the oxymoronic nature of the term 'alternative media'. The extra designation 'radical' assists to firm up the definition of alternative media (Downing 2001: xi) with some further qualifications. Generally radical media serve two overriding goals -- to express opposition from subordinate groups/organisations directly against the power structure and to build support, networking and solidarity (Downing 2001: xi).

A look at the stories covered on the monitored programs shows that all three programs in the study qualify as radical media. *Queer Radio* broadcast a wide variety of local, national and international information, focusing on gay rights, performing arts, Pride Day, music and community information. In the two episodes monitored, *Queer Radio* broadcast the following stories and information:

- discussions about age of consent and sodomy laws,
- a variety of montages of the 2003 Pride Rally and Fair, including speakers, vox pops and interviews with performers,
- an interview with French bisexual pop star D'Gey and
- international news from an American satellite service, *This Way Out*, that covered a variety of issues (especially human right/gay rights) including gay marriage rights in Canada, same sex parenting and a right wing attack on banners at the Jerusalem Pride Rally.

Eco Radio focused heavily on activist and environmentalist news and information (international, national and local) and did not feature any arts/entertainment information except the 'Reclaim the Streets' event which can be classed as street

entertainment as well as protest. The program explicitly advocated protest. The issues covered included:

- WTO protests and anti-globalisation issues,
- Great Barrier Reef protection,
- Critical Mass (where bike riders, skate boarders etc. travel en mass to take over road lanes in protest of car pollution) and
- uranium mining and waste management issues.

Brisbane Line similarly covered alternative news and information including community announcements, news headlines (*Zed Lines*) and some arts/entertainment information. The reported stories included:

- protest against the deportation of Iranian refugees and other refugee rights information,
- the detention of David Hicks,
- food irradiation and
- the Ideas Festival at the Powerhouse Museum.

Zed Lines included headlines covering a variety of issues including the Tent Embassy in Canberra, policies to phase out plastic bags and the release of 1960's American radical Kathy Barden from prison.

Local Content

The capacity to articulate the local constitutes a crucial component of the political potential of citizens' media (Rodriguez 2001: 155).

Localised information is 'an essential characteristic of community radio' (Barlow 1997: 122) that plays an important part in strengthening local identity and self-respect (Barlow 1997: 132). Community radio stations, especially in regional areas, are finding themselves more and more to be the only local voice in their area and the vast majority (79%) of community broadcasting is locally produced (CBAA 2001: 1). The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) -- the peak body for the sector -- has developed a Code of Practice that requires a focus on locally produced content. In its guiding principles, the CBAA says stations should support and develop local and Australian arts, music and culture to reflect a sense of Australian identity (CBAA 2002: 2). In the Preamble the CBAA also warns that stations should not rely too heavily on syndicated programming (such as that provided by the national community radio satellite -- COMRADSAT) at the risk of failing to meet their license requirements to represent and involve their community.

An important aspect of maintaining community culture is the provision of local information that is immediately relevant to the everyday lives of listeners (Forde et al 2002: 37). This information can be local geographically or culturally (Forde et al 2002: 94), for example, relating to the interests of the town to which the station broadcasts, or culturally to a certain group within that community such as prisoners, youth or queer audiences -- known as 'communities of interest' (Forde et al 2002: 12).

In Australia three quarters of news and current affairs is specifically relevant to the station's

communities (Forde et al 2002: 94). Just over half (53.7 per cent) of station managers interviewed for the *Culture Commitment Community* study said that the provision of local news and information was their station's most important role. It is interesting that local content was not an overt focus of any of the focus group participants although was implied in terms of discussion relating to 'community'. From the focus group it appears that providing specifically local content is not considered as important as providing alternative information and also reflects the different communities represented by 4ZzZ that are not classed geographically, i.e. programs such as *Queer Radio* and *The Anarchist Show*.

However, local stories featured prominently in the sample broadcasts suggesting localism may be a news role (or value) internalised by 4ZzZ. Fifty per cent of *Eco Radio* programs were locally based, with *Queer Radio* having a similar percentage (though this may have been influenced by the increased local activity from Pride Day celebrations). *Brisbane Line* also placed a significant emphasis on stories with local and national relevance. Examples of local content include:

- The Narangba Food Irradiation Plant,
- Pride Fair Day,
- protests against US nuclear submarines in Brisbane Port,
- Reclaim The Streets and
- Critical Mass protests.

Also, almost all of the information provided was produced locally, with only three outsourced pieces used in the broadcasts -- *This Way Out* (an American syndicated news service used on *Queer Radio*) and two interviews from Indy Media in Mexico (used in *Eco Radio*). Producers from both of these programs contribute to these international services, which demonstrates a contribution to the international community broadcasting sphere.

Community announcements also fulfill an important local purpose. One participant described this:

I do not see any problem in advertising community groups and getting them out there ... I think that it's a really important part of a news program 'cos communities create issues ... so it all goes round in circles.

A number of community notices were included in all three sample programs, both pre-recorded and read live. These included:

- the QLD Aids Council -- HIV awareness campaign and volunteer recruitment,
- the Gay and Lesbian Welfare Association -- general announcement,
- a Michael Moore film night at the Democratic Socialist Headquarters,
- a benefit gig in Brisbane for the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra,
- 4ZzZ Collective meetings,
- a Remember the Tampa forum,
- a performance art piece by the Refugee Action Group and
- the Queensland Arts Marketing Network information sessions.

This reflects the types of organizations or issues that are covered by 4zzZ information-based programs and is indicative of a fairly significant participation or interaction from the wider

community (given that community notices are actively forwarded to the station by organizations and individuals wanting airtime for their cause or event).

Representation 'of' or representation 'by'?

Communities have a right to 'engage in symbolic reinterpretation through the media' (Rodriguez 2001: 1). By encouraging participation in the sector, community radio stations facilitate the enactment of this right through allowing access to the media so that citizens can represent their own issues and perspectives to a wider audience and contribute to community public sphere activity. This is what Jeffrey (2002: 48) refers to as self-representation in an ongoing way. Atton (2002: 115) describes community members who participate in alternative media and engage in their own representation as 'native reporters' who gain political strength and self-respect through self-representation.

The citizens' media model focuses on this involvement of communities through their own representation. Issues surrounding who provides this representation are complex. Outside the realm of theory we find that community radio stations cannot and do not provide total access to all members of every aspect of society (or even to disadvantaged sectors of society). It is important not to homogenise marginalised groups and expect self-representation to involve a unified identity. Jeffrey (2002: 48) cites examples of program-makers not always directly experiencing the issues they discuss or present on-air. Hochheimer (1993: 477) found that although producers may come from backgrounds that are more disaffected they are also most likely to be the people already most active in their communities and also be middle class.

Representation is, however, required of community broadcasting. *The Broadcasting Services Act 1992* is a piece of national legislation that covers all three tiers of the Australian broadcast mediascape. In Australia, Schedule 2 (paragraph 9 [2b]) states that the license holder must represent 'the community interest that it represented at the time when the license was allocated' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994: 105), thus implying that community representation is intended as a role by legislative means.

In the case of CBAA requirements, Code 2 of the Code of Practice (CBAA), in part, covers news and current affairs programming:

- 2.6 News and current affairs programs (including news flashes) should:
 - (a) provide access to views under-represented by the mainstream media ...

This implies providing representation to those groups not usually represented in the mainstream media as well as providing the audience with access to marginalised information.

In the case of news and current affairs (and other information-based programming), the producers often represent the issues of 'other' groups. Representation of issues falls in the hands of a small number of people who have often not directly live these experiences but believe them to be important to public sphere debate. Therefore, we have two different forms of representation -- self-representation (which is still contentious in terms of 'who represents?') and representation 'of' -- both of which can be considered roles or outcomes of

information-based programs.

Most participants in the focus group were aware of the importance of representing the communities they broadcast for and to, and felt this was achieved in part by providing alternate content to that in the mainstream media. Some felt that the community they broadcast to was difficult to define and therefore a challenge to fully represent:

The mysterious thing of course about the gay community is that it's not defined, because individual people will have different ideas about what gay is.

The *Anarchist Show* representative, on the other hand, felt he provided interpretation, rather than representation:

I think that most anarchists would be quite offended to think me as an individual was representing their views through the media ... to be more accurate I think of it as I personally interpret the anarchist community.

Jeffrey (2002: 48) points out that whether or not they want such a role, program makers become representatives for their community. This representative aspect can create problems (such as those outlined in the previous quote) 'because public representatives attract both praise and criticisms and the legitimacy of their voice can be challenged' (Jeffrey 2002: 48).

Focus group participants demonstrated an awareness of this problem. Concerns were expressed that there was not enough true community representation happening at 4ZzZ, especially due to resource or time limitations. As a result, certain sectors are more often included than others:

What ends up happening is that the sections of the community that are more ... media savvy ... get a much better look in.

Content analysis of the sample programs shows however a variety of groups of people or organisations representing themselves -- that is being interviewed for, or on, the programs, or participating in other ways. These included:

- people identifying as lesbian or gay,
- youth and children,
- musicians and arts workers,
- the Pride Collective who wrote a letter to the program to communicate with the audience,
- Indigenous Australians,
- Mexican people speaking on the World Trade Organisation meetings in Mexico,
- Democrats spokesperson for nuclear issues and
- food irradiation protestors.

This was in ten hours of programming. While there are only a small number of presenters and producers for each show, the people given an actual voice on the program represent a much broader cross-section of Australian society. However, most 'appearances' were not live

in the studio but pre-recorded at events or on the telephone. Although there are many factors effecting whether or not a guest can appear live (time of broadcast, location, nerves etc) community participation may be greater enhanced by encouraging people to come to the studio rather than only appear as 'talent' for interviews, as they would become more familiar with the actual radio station.

Community Access and Participation

Forde, Meadows and Foxwell (2002: 39) found that more than 90 per cent of station managers interviewed described the provision of access to community groups as being the most important contribution made by their station to the local community. The vitality of public participation underpins the community radio sector not only philosophically, but also in terms of policy. Schedule 2 (Paragraph 9 [2c]) of *The Broadcasting Services Act* outlines the standard conditions of community broadcasting licenses and requires that community broadcasters 'encourage members of the community that it serves to participate in the operations and the selection and provision of programs' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994: 105). The CBAA Code of Practice also requires community participation. Section 1.1 of the code outlines that community stations will 'have policies and procedures in place, relating to the licensee's community of interest, which ensure access and equity and encourage participation by those not adequately served by other media' (CBAA 2002: 2).

Wong (2001:4--5) describes two ways by which we can define access to community radio -- availability and participation. Availability refers to the actual structural elements necessary for communication such as funding, technical infrastructure, training and language. Participation involves the opportunity to actively engage in the communicative process. People can participate with in the goings-on at 4ZzZ on a number of levels and in different ways. Subscribers are eligible to attend collective meetings which oversee the operations of the station along with the official committee or board of members. Subscribers may also volunteer in any number of the departments mentioned earlier. Most announcers are expected to have worked in other areas of the station before becoming announcers, to assist with fund raising ventures and attend announcer's meetings. Listeners may also participate by commenting on programming, subscribing to the station or using the station as a medium by which to put their own issues forward. Community organizations, special interest groups and individuals can use the station as a means to disseminate their own information.

Encouraging or supporting community participation in the media was raised during the focus group as a role of information-based programming. Programs were perceived as an opportunity for listeners and the community to participate in the production of radio by either getting involved in organising the show (citizens' media in action), appearing on the program as a guest or providing information for content. Announcers said they often encouraged other people to get involved, either by direct request over the air waves or by canvassing the local community as explained by one respondent:

Through being out there and knowing people in the community. And even if I don't know them directly other people know them so they (suggest) to people that they could come in.

The 4ZzZ web site has pages for all three of the sample programs and each has a section encouraging or inviting listeners to get involved. During the sample programs *Queer Radio*

gave a direct request for new people who might be interested in joining 4ZzZ's *Youth Show*. There were also a number of people in the studio for some of their discussions. *Eco Radio* involved a number of different announcers from the activist community in Brisbane (according to personal communications with the primary presenter) and also encouraged people during the program to attend the 4ZzZ Collective meeting and participate in the running of the station.

As demonstrated in the discussions on localism and representation, a variety of people from the local area or specific communities of interest participated in the production of the sample information-based programs. This participation was however mainly in the role of information-provider rather than information-producer. For the purpose of this study I am considering such involvement to be a legitimate, if not somewhat weaker, form of participation. Further study is needed to examine the actual potential for new people to become involved in producing information-based programming.

Anecdotes from the focus group suggested that program producers fostered an environment that allowed listeners and the community to join them during their broadcasts although it is interesting to note that analysis of *Queer Radio's* content demonstrates that one presenter was dominating the production, doing most of the interviews and guiding discussion. This dominance is demonstrated especially by the introduction to the 18th June episode that the presenter pre-recorded because he would not have been able to make the beginning of the show -- he and one of the other presenters were to be attending a performance that they would later come back to the studio and review. Rather than the panel operator beginning the show he played the pre-produced piece.

During the focus group (though not in direct response to this issue) the primary presenter explained how attached one could become to their program:

After nearly ten years of radio its starting to get to the point, I need a rest but you treat your show like a child too in that you don't want it going into someone else's hands for fear ... it may not be raised in quite the way that you might have liked the child to be raised.

This issue is complex. Radio programs and stations all experience different dynamics and relationships between their various volunteers and it is inevitable that different levels of work commitment will exist, given the volunteer nature of community broadcasting. At other times, more established program producers may find it difficult to relinquish the work they have invested in a program to new people (often strangers).

Conclusions

Community broadcasting is a vital local community resource. Community media has increasing relevance to Australian society as the global communications revolution continues to see a decline in local media content and infrastructure (CBAA 2001: 1).

This study demonstrates the roles of 4ZzZ information-based programming within a citizens' media framework. These programs broadcast alternative information that is often local in nature. Though not directly participating in program production, a range of people

are represented through the on-air content. 4ZzZ information-based program producers articulate an awareness of the value of self-representation and participation by the community although one instance is revealed of a program presenter's dominance over 'their' program.

In general I believe this research supports the *Culture Commitment Community* (Forde et al 2002: v) report's findings that most community radio stations are closely integrated with their local communities of interest and that 4ZzZ is one radio station contributing to the overall value of the community broadcasting sector. No doubt, other stations may be achieving similar goals through their information-based programs. While this is only a small study of one radio station it helps to understand a specific circumstance, identify what situations are unique to the situation and what may be common to the larger picture.

Information-based programs on 4ZzZ contribute to the public mediaspheres by supplementing the mainstream media; providing alternative information, opinions and sources that reflect these ideals; facilitating community participation by encouraging new volunteers on-air and in promotional material and by allowing community organisations or individuals access to programs by appearing as guests or providing community announcements; providing local information and supporting local organizations; and facilitating and providing representation of the communities of interest, by providing access to the airwaves and covering their issues.

The roles of information-based programs on 4ZzZ defined by this study assist to verify the station's community radio license by meeting a number of the CBAA's Code of Practice guiding principles and adhering to requirements of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*. Information-based programs are also assisting the station meet its mission statement and reflect the concerns of marginalised groups.

This study also demonstrates that the citizens' media framework provides a useful stepping stone for analysing community radio as it focuses on the processes and highlights the benefits of the participatory and empowering nature of the community broadcasting sector. There is room though to look at content in terms of its radical or alternative nature to better appreciate the contributions made by community radio to the wider Australian mediasphere, particularly the community public-spheres.

Forde et al (2002: 15) assert that the transformative roles played by community broadcasters within their communities should become a focus for policy making bodies and governments. Qualitative research focusing on process rather than product may assist the sector to lobby for future funds to sustain the growth of the community broadcasting sector. Similar studies at other community radio stations would establish if these are common outcomes of information-based programs and compare the directions of metropolitan, regional and rural stations.² The more that is understood about the roles, contributions and significance of information-based programs on Australian community radio stations, the better the sector and its participants can lobby for support to these services, in terms of financial support, band width and air-time, so that the growth of news and information-based programs continues alongside the growth of community broadcasting in general.

² For example van Vuuren (2004).

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