Democracy and the 'marketisation' of local radio in Australia

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Abstract

This paper examines the changing contribution of local radio to the democratic process in Australia. It takes the whole local area approach suggested by the Broadcasting Services Act 1992, to examine all the services available in three regional areas to assess their potential in facilitating public sphere discussion, disputation and deliberation, and (since the common assumption is that deregulation severely curtailed these processes) it does this in a historical frame, comparing the changes in services from 1976 to 2001. Because of its strengths in the analysis of relationships between the state (public) and private sectors, Habermas's public sphere theory is used to frame this discussion. Recent theoretical extensions have also seen the welcome elaboration of issues of power (Fraser, 1992, 2000) and the inclusion of a new and subtle range of cultural issues (Peters, 1993; McGuigan, 1997, 2004; Keane, 1998) inside its developing literature.

Democracy has always been a central issue for community radio services, both as internal process (members' right to participate in management and decision-making) and as broadcast content (does station programming enhance public discussion about issues of concern to its communities?). This does not exhaust their concern, of course.

It is also relevant to the regulatory process. Community radio must consider key provisions of the *Broadcasting Services Act, 1992* (BSA) which require licensees to provide 'adequate and comprehensive' services in relation to all other services in a local area: suggesting that, subject to its particular community brief, an effective community station might well address local issues not covered by other services. Community stations must also continue to provide the services for which they were licensed – a provision designed to ensure a diverse range of services in particular areas. The notion of 'adequate and comprehensive' service historically invokes the obligation to provide information, education and entertainment programs of a diverse range and high quality.

The general condition of commercialisation (or 'marketisation') is of crucial importance here, as commercialisation of radio – where market interests dominate programming decisions – is antagonistic to 'independent' journalism (in the case of commercial radio); in the case of community radio, it is seen as subverting community interests. General community objections to any commercialisation of the ABC are, of course, well known.

Why is the issue salient now? Regional Australians' access to quality radio peaked as a political issue after 1997, when the full impact of its de-regulation began to be felt. The wide-scale networking and automation of regional stations, and the loss of local production (especially news, talk, current affairs, local 'what's-on' info and community-related programs) produced very angry and vocal protest, culminating in a parliamentary inquiry which demonstrated the strength of local concerns, and its potential as an electoral danger. The Commonwealth responded by expanding local ABC services and establishing a regional program fund. But the large scale of local loss identified by the inquiry (House of Representatives, 2001) suggests there would still be a gap even if the ABC's local budget doubled and its long promised second regional network were funded.

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services available in three regional areas to assess their potential in facilitating public sphere discussion, disputation and deliberation, and (since the common assumption is that deregulation severely curtailed these processes) it does this in a historical frame, comparing the changes in services from 1976 to 2001. Because of its strengths in the analysis of relationships between the state (public) and private sectors, Habermas's "public sphere" theory is used to frame this discussion. Recent theoretical extensions have also seen the welcome elaboration of issues of power (Fraser, 1992, 2000) and the inclusion of a new and subtle range of cultural issues (Peters, 1993; McGuigan, 1997, 2004; Keane, 1998) inside its developing literature.

Global Commercialisation: the context

While there was no single force determining the new Australian radio system which emerged after deregulation in 1992, the paradigm shift in the western democracies from Keynesian to neo-Liberal economics, which began in the 1970s, was centrally important. This shift is from the social contract of Keynesianism (where social, political and cultural goals such as public ownership of key information resources and communications infrastructure were balanced against economic imperatives) to the free market principles of neo-Liberalism (where social, political and cultural goals are put to the service of capitalist enterprise – the production of private profits). Deregulation of business – the declaration of the "negative" freedoms familiar from the US system (market freedom is essentially freedom of business to make profits unhindered by government regulation) – is also a key element in the economic transformation of the western economies into the globally connected, free trade oriented, free markets of the new millennium.[1]

The gradual transformation of neo-Liberalism from the 1980s on, from economic dogma promoted by capitalist think tanks to institutionally embedded credo of the World Trade Organisation and the World Bank, is directly relevant to regional radio in Australia. Not only was pressure exerted on Australia to open its markets to global trade, but according to Given (1998, 2003a, 2003b), precise and detailed US-initiated reforms in radio, film and television were vigorously pursued through international negotiations such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services. Commercial radio licences were deregulated so that licences were sold to the highest bidder (rather than to the applicant who offered the best services); the total number of licences an owner could buy became unlimited; controls on overseas ownership were removed; the end of content regulation encouraged networking, and effectively ended production by local stations. The introduction of free market principles thus underpinned the abolition of licensees' social and cultural obligations, and established their freedom to buy, sell and operate stations with profit as the major consideration. Neo-Liberal economic credo thus became instantiated as a cultural form of globalisation.

Castells (1996, 1997) warned of the dangers of social dislocation during the difficult international adjustment phase of globalisation, pointing to negative social effects which have particular resonance for regional Australia:

- Structural exclusion
  The new global networks encourage innovation and creativity, and provide many opportunities for new players. However, they exclude those unable to gain access through lack of knowledge, infrastructure and networks. This has a strong locational dimension: since the networks connect only major global centres of production – 'global

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[1] Jones (2001) analyses the connections between negative and positive rights and the change from a regulatory discourse on 'media policy' to one on 'communications policy' in Australia, pointing out some of the ways in which the public sphere has been diminished by this change.

cities' – nations and local areas which are not connected to the networks are excluded from the global information economy, and become 'structurally irrelevant'.

- An under-developing 'Fourth World'
  The socio-economic conditions of two-thirds of the world's people has remained the same or deteriorated as an effect of globalisation. (Some recent accounts dispute this, but such denials sit uncomfortably with the continuation of structurally produced disadvantage among indigenous peoples in Australia, as potentially devastating here as it is in Africa.)
- The loss of social identity
  Along with the decline of the nation state there has also been the loss of key social and cultural institutions and identities – citizens, trade unions, political parties, inter alia – historically associated with it. New forms of social identity have emerged around ethnicity, religion and sexuality, but there are two salient qualifications I wish to highlight: first, loss of familiar institutions like local radio corrodes established identities, and is likely to produce backlash; second, the support structures of new identities and solidarities are more available in cities than in regional areas, so any ameliorating effect of change is unevenly distributed, at least in the short term.

Unfortunately, globalisation's potential benefits such as new media like web radio, which Castells advocates as a means of short-circuiting the entry hurdles and economic barriers to establishing local/global media remain distant promises in this context, as the lack of regional access to learning appropriate to the development and maintenance of networks – increasingly marketised and centralised – remain serious impediments. However, were there to be significant cultural policy changes which promoted regionally based skills development, then regional radio would be in a good position to benefit from them, and to broker access to these skills to individuals and communities.

The seriousness and scale of the negative effects raise many problems for radio's democratic functions, one of the least palatable being that content and participation appears to have become increasingly restricted to city locations, a trend already established with banks, schools and hospitals. Marketisation and globalisation have very important locational implications economically, socially and culturally and there is a cruel paradox here: after deregulation, while radio licences multiplied exponentially, the public spaces for debate, disputation, cultural representation and deliberation – the public sphere(s) of radio – shrank. At the very point where people's lives have become super-saturated with media, and media have become embedded in almost everyone's daily routines, media production has become increasingly distanced from regional areas and local concerns, hence, increasingly beyond local political control.

The contraction of these fora in commercial radio is demonstrated in an increasing number of local studies both in Australia (Turner, 1996; Collingwood, 1997, 1999; House of Representatives, 2001) and in the USA (Fairchild, 1999 provides a useful summary). This paper examines the history of three local areas' radio services to add local detail to the broader sweep of the studies above.

However, against that contraction in the commercial arena must be weighed some limited expansion in ABC services, relatively massive expansion in community radio licences, and the development of narrowcast services. Simple before and after comparisons are difficult, because there has been a qualitative change in the system: not only have commercial services' obligations and services changed dramatically (as we have seen), but the system itself has

developed quite radically in the sphere of community associations – the domain of civil society.

The transformation of the Keynesian welfare state
Australia never had welfare state arrangements of the kind which defined postwar society in the UK and the Scandinavian countries, with their monopoly state broadcasters and cradle-to-grave health, welfare and housing programs. But our institutions of the period were partial copies of those programs, and universal access to health, education and income support schemes have been important politically. In radio, the state broadcasting system operated by the ABC was important as an independent critical voice, and as a nation-building program. In the commercial sector, we can see the regulatory system, in which private operators were held accountable at licence renewal for the provision of high quality local news, current affairs and support of local creative resources as a social contract model – a community obligation which is a key part of Keynesian systems.

The global trend to replace Keynesian welfare state programs with user-pays and market economy initiatives on the (opposed) neo-Liberal model had enormous implications for commercial and public sector broadcasters. Commercial radio became increasingly profit-centred and pressed governments to remove social obligations from their programming charters – typically, they characterised these as impediments to market freedom. Public sector broadcasters could no longer rely on nation-building rationales for their funding, and were forced to raise increasingly greater proportions of their budgets through program sales overseas and pre-sale of co-productions, often in partnership with commercial interests. Globally, a key trend was the conversion of state monopoly broadcasting systems to mixed or commercial systems. Tiffen and Gittins (2004:184), comparing Australia with 17 other affluent liberal democracies, show that among them, 12 were public sector monopolies in 1970, but this fell to 4 in 1999. Australia already had a mixed system by 1970, so here, a move to market-focused public policy manifested as budget cuts to government-funded agencies. Comparing Australian public and commercial broadcasters' revenue in the 1990s, Barr (2000:65) demonstrates the stagnation of the ABC's budget compared with booming increases among commercial broadcasters. Tiffen and Gittins rate public broadcasting funding in Australia as the second lowest among the liberal democracies, with revenue per capita in 1999 at US$29, a very low figure compared with the UK at US$83 and Denmark at US$117 (2004:186).

The state's relationship with commercial broadcasters also changed. Until the 1980s, the Keynesian social contract model had structured relations between the state and commercial broadcasters. Under this model, the state licensed commercial broadcasters and protected them to some extent from competition, a contract balanced by licensees' obligation to provide high quality services 'in the public interest' – the 'adequate and comprehensive service', whose quality was scrutinised at licence renewal. After the 1992 deregulation in Australia, most regulation became industry-based, and is spoken of as 'light-touch' regulation and self-regulation.

The marketisation of radio
Marketisation in the 1980s and 90s affected most of world's liberal democracies deeply, though because of particular national structures and cultures it manifested differently. In Europe, China and Japan, which had long-established public service (state monopoly) broadcasters, the entry of commercial competitors steadily eroded their audience share and consolidated global media conglomerates as important new operators. In the United States, 'marketisation' was experienced as the liberalisation of networking and investment, resulting

in massive expansion of chains like Clear Channel, and loss of local and information-based services in favour of saturation-level entertainment. The mixed systems in Canada and Australia saw a reduction in state funding for public service radio and their increasing reliance on market-generated income, while the deregulation of the commercial sector again saw massive expansion and consolidation of commercial networks, loss of local services, and substantial investment by major international media companies. The international scale of these changes, the broad similarities of the effects of both marketisation and deregulation in many nations, and the importance of international investment in their production underlines the salience of globalisation theory in the interpretation of the changes.

In Australia, marketisation of radio took a number of concrete forms:
1. Increased diversity of ownership between media sectors by encouragement of new investment in radio from local and overseas sources
2. *The transnationalisation of radio ownership in Australia by removing restrictions on foreign ownership – enacted by the* Broadcasting Services Act, 1992
3. The transfer of regulatory power in the commercial domain from state to market-based structures – for example, auction-based allocation of high-demand radio licences and removal of regulatory scrutiny of licensees' provision of programming
4. Investor profits guaranteed by legitimising the consolidation of national commercial radio networks
5. Encouragement of local duopolies – ownership of two stations in a market - producing a broad differentiation of services in regional areas (generally, one youth-oriented rock station and one older talk station) and the clearer targeting of formatted city services (talk, soft rock, hard rock, adult contemporary/gold)
6. Embedding of bottom-line consciousness in the commercial radio system. With the development of ownership chains based on investment returns through stock exchange listed companies, it is no longer possible to maintain costly services through cross-subsidisation of the kind required by earlier regulation.[2] This effectively ended 'fourth estate' obligations and transformed regional commercial radio into 'just another business', to play on Julianne Schultz's (1994) defence of journalism. Before the 1980s, it was common for radio stations trading as small family companies not only to cross-subsidize expensive programming like local news, but often, to trade without primary consideration for making a return on capital. Marketisation, however, locks in bottom-line consciousness through the imperative of balancing programming and capital costs against investor returns – especially those of institutional investors.

The deregulation of radio in Australia
Deregulation brought advances as well as retreats for the public interest.
The particular form of multi-sector radio in Australia - comprised of public service (with separate national and multicultural broadcasters), commercial, community and an emergent indigenous sector - sets it apart from other national systems, though there is growing international consensus on the desirability of each component. There is a common misapprehension that the Australian system is a hybrid of the American and British systems, which description simplifies and fossilizes it.

From its 1930s origins as a mixed system of public sector radio (over time, claiming a total audience share around 20% of all listeners) and commercial stations (currently around 70%),

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[2] For example, early criteria for assessing suitability of potential licensees for television and radio included 'the genuine intention to maintain high standards even at financial loss' (ABCB, 1955:19). 'High standards' always and especially included high quality news, current affairs and information programming.

Australian radio added community and multicultural radio sectors through the 1970s and 80s, to produce a multi-sector system. These extensions to the system can be seen as early instantiations of de-regulation: loosened control by the old duopoly - public service and commercial radio – and the inclusion of new constituencies previously voiceless.

Major structural arrangements also changed: under the old system, a few networks and a relatively large number of stations attempted to provide comprehensive (something for everyone) services; under the new, many stations and many networks provided more specific, niche services. The new sectors' mission does more than increase the culturally diversity of available programming: community, ethnic and indigenous radio increase the possibility of democratic participation by encouraging community involvement in station management and in actual broadcasting.

The new *Broadcasting Services Act, 1992*, changed the state's role from content regulation to structural regulation, and licensees' obligations from provision of adequate and comprehensive service before, to one which 'contributes to the diversity of services available in an area' after. The benefits of each are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of pre and post-1992 regulation benefits to Australian radio

Content regulation (before 1992):	Structural regulation (after 1992):
Capacity to regulate through licence renewal hearings and impose licence conditions on: • the quality of local news services • the provision of local information • the inclusion of local voices • provision of current affairs programs	Benefits (depending on public and private resources available) include: • equitable access in every area to a range of public sector, commercial and community radio services • end of artificial spectrum scarcity by identifying space for new services
Capacity to regulate Program Standards on: • Australian Music content • hate speech and discrimination • right of reply and fair comment processes	Encouragement of innovative programming, by allowing licensees freedom to identify and respond to audience preferences Differentiation of radio services achieved through structural licensing (eg special ethnic and religious stations) and competition

After the reforms, the regulator's point of intervention in programming – formerly the individual station – became a complex calculus of the gestalt of all services in each licence area. The regulator has few clear powers or programs (other than the original planning and licensing of services) to do anything about any deficit in local services that it might discover. This change has had particularly important effects on news and talk structures, sources and access and the political arena has been crucial in producing that change.

One of the important opportunities gained in the de-regulation process was a new approach to the planning of services. The approach fostered by the *Broadcasting Services Act, 1992* was based on a strategy of increasing the number of services in every local area where spare spectrum was available, and where there was demand from potential broadcasters to provide services. This resulted in the doubling of services overall, a massive increase in a very short period.

Commercial radio saw a 50% increase, and the doubling of small regional stations. Five national ABC networks were substantially funded and implemented. The ABC's youth network, JJJ, has been widely criticised, but was enormously influential as the training ground of most staff in other music networks and was the ultimate spur for commercial networks'

music programming development. The Radio National network provided a high quality current affairs network, complementing the ABC's later (partially available) news-only Parliamentary and News Network radio (PNN). ABC Fine Music network extended its coverage to major cities and towns, and the Regional Network was expanded, establishing several new local centres. ABC New Media was also established, providing access to background information, streamed local programs, transcripts of public affairs programs and discussion forums.

There was also major and rapid expansion of community radio (see Table 2). Overall, the sector more than doubled, with dramatic changes at all geographic levels. In addition, an indigenous sector emerged, with indigenous services licensed under the community broadcasting program, and through remote communities programs, such as the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS).

The addition of narrowcasting services (narrowly-targeted services such as all-racing services, religious services and tourist information services) is particularly interesting, because the numbers are likely to be much higher than those shown here. Little is known about their programming, and there have been few studies, but it is clear that they will have some impact on local and national advertising, and thus on the potential revenues of other local services. They are not considered here, because narrowcaster licences preclude them from providing broadcast services such as general interest news and information, and because their development has been largely after 2001.

Table 2: Commercial, community and narrowcast radio by region size, Australia, 1992–2001

Region type	Commercial		Community		Open narrowcast	
	1992	2001	1992	2001	1992	2001
Capital cities	34	40	41	61	0	NA
Large regionals	48	64	23	38	0	18
Medium regionals	45	76	19	35	0	18
Small regionals	36	69	27	142	0	104
All services	163	249	110	276	0	NA

Source: Adapted from Australian Broadcasting Authority's submission to House of Representatives (2001:8-10)

Since 1992, there were a lot of new commercial services licensed in small and medium regional areas, and many more new services in the Community sector.

A third major change enacted under the deregulation brief was the re-networking of commercial radio, in which around 200 stations converted from independent local services to network nodes. After 1992, this followed the US pattern of consolidation into massive ownership chains using extensively networked programming. At the national scale, four metropolitan commercial networks emerged: ARN/Clear Channel, Austereo, Southern Cross and DMG/Nova.[3] At the regional scale eight networks acquired most of the stations, and two large networks emerged: Caralis/SuperNetwork and RG Capital.

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[3] Catalano (2004) notes that since 2000, DMG 'has pumped $533 million into expanding its capital city presence…an eight-station portfolio in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth.'

De-regulation also meant a massive release of new licences, reconstructing 200 former local commercial stations as four national and eight regional commercial networks, multiplying the scale and number of ABC and SBS networks, and more than doubling community and indigenous stations. Quantitatively and qualitatively, these were important changes.

Radio as public sphere
Radio is a public arena where ordinary people can discuss public issues. It is potentially a public sphere because talk and opinion exchange is such an important feature of its cultural architecture. The limits on its effectiveness in this role are the constraints of programming policies, formats, interests of advertisers, the controls exerted by hosts, the political agendas of owners - the kinds of things that originally led Habermas (1962, trans. 1989) to dismiss the possibility of a public sphere in the electronic media. In 1974, soon after the origination of the public sphere concept[4], Habermas extended his notion to include public conversations, newspapers, magazines, radio and television:

> By 'the public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like the members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest. In a large public body, this kind of communication requires specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Today newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. We speak of the political public sphere in contrast, for instance, to the literary one, when public discussion deals with objects connected to the activity of the state (Habermas (1974) quoted in Eley (1992:289).

Habermas's essay *Further Reflections on the Public Sphere* (1992) revises this position again, suggesting the possibility of a plebeian public sphere in which popular culture is a unique and important discursive formation. Among other significant changes, this essay also radically rethinks the role of women in the bourgeois public sphere.

The term has, of course, developed a semantic life of its own in contemporary sociology and cultural studies. Against many appropriations which use the concept as though it were an institution, Habermas's revised formulation of the public sphere in *Between Facts and Norms* (1998:360) emphasizes its ideal (rather than concrete) character:

> The public sphere is a social phenomenon just as elementary as action, actor, association or collectivity, but it eludes the conventional sociological concepts of 'social order'. The public sphere cannot be conceived as an institution and certainly not as an organization. It is not even a framework of norms with differentiated competences and roles, membership regulations, and so on. Just as little does it represent a system; although it permits one to draw internal boundaries, outwardly it is characterized by open, permeable and shifting horizons. The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e. opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and

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[4] Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was originally published in German in 1962.

synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions.

Here, it is clear that Habermas has taken on board Foucault's revelation of the infinite capacity of the most apparently enlightened institutions to transform themselves through the operations of capillary power into instruments of oppression. Thus a library, or a museum, or a community radio station can never **be** a public sphere, although any of them might under the right circumstances create the conditions for its existence. The public sphere only exists as a particular kind of speech – communicative action – performed in a space between the public and private domains of state and home.

Citing Peters' sluice model of democratic decision-making, Habermas argued in *Between Facts and Norms* that deliberative democracy is only viable where there are two-way channels from outside the administrative structures of government to the centre (1998:356). Habermas (1992) has come to agree with his critics that developments in areas such as the Internet require the revision of his pessimistic early public sphere theory, which cast modern media as structures of dominance rather than democracy. The phenomenal capacity of the Internet to promote dialogue and share information, along with increasing inter-penetration of new and old media has created countless new fora for political and cultural exchange, and many of these appear to fulfil his requirement of deliberative democracy that political ideas should originate outside the central structures as well as in. All sectors of radio in Australia have recently developed new forms of internet-based participation, some of them with impressive possibilities for encouraging decentralised opinion formation. The important connection is that radio is an established medium of debate and discussion, an institution embedded in the everyday life of citizens. The new connections to the internet construct an upward sluicing mechanism of great political potential, one not enabled by local radio: just as early radio brought the global to the local, the web connection enables the reverse, transporting local Australian Rules football games live to expats in London and New York, and local political discussion to Canberra. However, that potential is largely still to be realised, and it is noteworthy that by 2001, there was little or no evidence of it in my case studies.

Jim McGuigan (2004:55) argues that Habermas's sluice model also opens up the possibility of including popular culture events and fora as genuine public spheres, citing John Keane's (1998) inclusion of, for example, television talk and audience participation shows. This inclusion of culture collapses the separation of the literary and political public spheres proposed as historical entities by Habermas (1989) in his original formulation. This is appropriate given the cultural turn of modern life, theory and post-Fordist industry. McGuigan (56-7) supports this synthesis, arguing that the activities of French situationists, culture-jammers and Zapatistas all underline the importance in late modern life of what Umberto Eco called 'semiological guerrilla warfare' – or symbolic politics, cultural politics – whose successes in political interventions using cultural means demonstrates the impossibility of maintaining the separation.

This cultural broadening and pluralisation of the public sphere(s) had earlier been argued by Nancy Fraser (1992) in her dialogue with Habermas, where she proposes the existence of a set of independent subaltern or counter-public spheres which characterise, for example, the communicative processes of feminist networks.

Eric O. Clarke (2000:73) warns against the 'subjunctivity' of a unitary public sphere – its pretence of acting 'as if' all actors have equal weight, in spite of inequalities of education, wealth, social position, sexuality, race and so on. We need to be alert to the 'counter-factual'

processes of deliberative democracy, where 'conformist value-determinations can operate under the alibi of "reasonableness".' I believe Clarke has in mind the intolerable burden of persuasion that confronts anyone arguing from what Fraser (1997:16) has described as despised or exploited positions in a unitary public sphere. Fraser's position on the inclusion of counter-public spheres implies the collapsing of the political into the cultural: its radical pluralisation.

In plural form, can we specify the key functions of local media in local democracy? I have based my analysis on work by Graham Murdock (1992:23) which adapts Habermas' public sphere theory by adding a notion of *representation* derived from Stuart Hall. I identify forms of radio practice which provide the capacity to host public sphere discussion, disputation and deliberation. Importantly, Murdock's model recognises the importance of bottom-up communal and affective expression, definitive for much of the community radio sector, and identifies political functions which citizens expect of the media under contemporary social conditions, where politics is electronically mediated:

> First, in order for people to exercise their full rights as citizens, they must have access to the information, advice and analysis that will enable them to know what their personal rights are and allow them to pursue them effectively. Second, they must have access to the broadest possible range of information, interpretation and debate on areas that involve public political choices, and they must be able to recognise themselves and their aspirations on offer within the central communications sectors and be able to contribute to developing and extending these representations (23).

Murdock's democratic norms prompt the following analytical questions: do local media
- provide relevant information and advice about political choices and processes?
- provide analysis, interpretation and debate on public political choices?
- assist communities to present themselves and their aspirations in the media?
- provide resources so that communities can develop and extend these representations?

In the fluid contemporary world, this requires extension in the cultural domain. Simon Cottle has recently suggested that the deepening of democracy might occur in cultural sites as well as obviously political sites like parliament. Reviewing the structural arrangements of TV journalism, Cottle (2003:155) argued that democratic processes should be considered as working inwardly and laterally in the media, as well as externally and vertically. This issue, of cultural citizenship, is of obvious relevance to both migrant communities and to groups who do not identify with traditional political parties – especially young people. It implies that symbolic forms of participation are the deep structures of democracy, so that to understand the Realpolitik of the contemporary era, a wide and complex recognition of cultural forms and knowledges akin to what Fredric Jameson has called "cultural mapping" is essential. Cottle's extension suggests a further question: do local media encourage a wide range of cultural expression, especially among non-traditional and emerging groups?

In the following historical analyses of three local radio regions, I have compiled a general overview of the changing radio services and structures, and used these questions as a typology to describe and evaluate the changes. This work is thus limited to identifying the capacity and potential for a radio public sphere. Performative questions are not addressed in any detail because of limitations on access to relevant data.

Services in three regional areas
Tamworth, New South Wales
Established in 1935 by John Higginbotham and a business partner, 2TM's first networking arrangements followed soon after, when the neighbouring station 2MO[5], crippled by debts, was acquired. With the explicit assent of the regulator, it was re-launched as a subsidiary station in 1938, with much shared programming, including a regional news service produced in Tamworth.

During the 1950s, the Higginbotham family expanded their radio interests[6] consolidating these with local press, and later with NEN television, providing economies of scale through a shared newsroom. By 1986, immediately before the introduction of cross-media ownership restrictions, 2TM and its adjacent stations (2AD Armidale, 2RE Taree, 2MO Gunnedah and 4WK Warwick) were owned by NEN Television (Wilson 1986:118). Even after the introduction of the cross-media rules in 1987, all these stations continued to rely heavily on regionally networked program material, with 2TM the originator and supplier of substantial quantities of networked programs to its regional affiliates: 86 hours per week in 1990 (ABT, 1991:166), Australia's second-ranking regionally-based syndicator at that time.

After the 1987 and 1992 cross-media ownership reforms, New England TV was forced to divest its radio interests to a friendly company, which continued its regional news services and centralised program relays with few changes. NEN maintained its minority share interest (14.9%, just under the 15% 'control' threshold defined by the regulator).

By 1996, however, all of NEN's commercial radio services had been taken over by the Caralis SuperNetwork, which grew to 31 stations in Northern NSW and Southern Queensland by 2001. The Caralis network was rapidly automated, and since 1999, news and music programs were increasingly networked from 2SM Sydney, with local programming windows in daytime. An important change was the introduction of morning talkback by Perth shockjock, Howard Sattler. During the 'Cash-for-comment' Inquiry in 2000, Caralis discontinued the old program source 2UE/Skyradio, its news service, its overnight music and the syndicated talk shows of Alan Jones and John Laws and substituted the 2SM services (including Howard Sattler). Among the services cut were local talkback and, probably most important, a country music program called *Hoedown*, credited with inventing the Tamworth Country Music Festival, and generator of networked music programs supplied for many years to stations in Northern NSW and Southern Queensland. *Hoedown* was also a formidable link to local business and tourism through the Tamworth Festival, and an important link in the local Council's economic development strategy. When the old regional base of networking was relocated and centralised in Sydney, the change was seen by many as an attack on hard-won local successes in building local businesses and community identity.

A general geographic community radio service, 2YOU, was licensed in 1982 and 2HIM, a Christian service, in 1999. When Caralis discontinued the 2UE services in 1999, they were picked up by 2YOU, which took on Hoedown, John Laws, and 2UE/Skyradio news package. Following its decision to re-broadcast the Laws show, 2YOU was the subject of an official Inquiry by the ABA for broadcasting advertising material (embedded in the Laws show). The Authority's decision found against 2YOU, but no penalty was imposed for this move into commercialism, the Authority preferring to deliver only a reprimand.

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[5] 2MO was licensed in 1930, among the first country stations.
[6] By 1977, ABCB records show that NEN already controlled ECN Television (Taree/Manning) 2AD Armidale, 2TM Tamworth, 2MO Gunnedah, 2RE Taree and 4WK Warwick. Interlocking company ownerships also gave them control of local press in several of these areas.

In summary, commercial radio in Tamworth has for a very long time been structured around networked regional, rather than local, news and information services. Since deregulation a broad range of new radio services have developed, including additional ABC channels, a specialist religious-based community service, and a second commercial service for the existing licensee, broadcast on FM and targeting a young audience with a soft rock format sourced by the network's Sydney centre. The networking and centralisation of Tamworth's commercial services in Sydney has been a model of the systemic change in Australian radio. The older model, of a few national networks and a lot of local independent commercial services, has been replaced by a greater number of national and commercial networks firmly connected into global program supply networks, plus a growing number of ABC networks funded publicly, and community-based local services organised on a not-for-profit basis. After the networking of 2TM, community station 2YOU moved to include elements of 2TM's local programming and its old networked program sources, while ABC local radio increased their provision of local news and information programs.

In terms of deliberative resources, there has apparently been a doubling of news and information functions normally associated with commercial radio because of the move of 2TM's programming to community station 2YOU. One serious concern is whether the community representation and participation functions associated with community radio may have deteriorated or even disappeared.

A second issue that this raises, however, is the possibility of an increasingly commercial and professionalised style of operation by community radio stations in regional areas, complete with general news services and syndicated music and talkback programming which serves to fill airtime and increase advertising revenue.

Bendigo, Victoria
Bendigo is a large regional centre with 186,123 residents in its commercial radio licence area at 2001. Its licence area overlaps services in Shepparton, Swan Hill, Deniliquin, Maryborough, Ballarat and Horsham, so many services are available, though reception varies because the topography is hilly.[7] There are several large population centres close by – overlapping commercial radio services south at Ballarat and Maryborough, north-west at Swan Hill, and north-east at Shepparton. Fortuitous reception is variable but common. Some residents in the northern area can receive the Deniliquin services, while in the south, Melbourne's services can be received in some parts.

In 1976, 3BA Ballarat was owned by local press interests; the Maryborough service, 3CV, was independently owned; 3BO Bendigo was owned and run by AWA. By 2001, the commercial services in Bendigo had been acquired by the Daily Mail Group (DMG), and those in Ballarat by Grant Broadcasters. Beginning in 1996, DMG put together the largest network in Australia – 63 licences by 2002.[8] Much of the programming on its Bendigo stations originated from DMG's Albury 'hub', though it maintained some staff in Bendigo. In 1997, DMG implemented a regional hub strategy, shifting production of expensive programs like news, advertising and overnight music out of local stations to new regional hubs. These are in Albury (servicing Victorian, South Australian and NSW stations), Townsville (servicing Queensland stations) and Bunbury (servicing WA stations). This

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[7] Reception is difficult in Bendigo even for the 3CV signal, whose footprint substantially overlaps the Bendigo licence area. FM signals from Ballarat (only 100kms away) are difficult to pick up.
[8] In 2004, Macquarie Bank acquired most of RG Capital's and DMG's regional stations for $193.5m (to DMG, September) and $173m (to RG Capital, June) giving it a total of 93 stations. (Catalano, 2004:Business 1)

strategy resulted in substantial reductions of staff in Bendigo, where local employment decreased from 27 in 1996 to 15 in 2000, a similar pattern to that in 20 of the 21 stations[9] serviced by its regional hub at Albury, which gained 37 staff. (House of Representatives, 2000:296). On DMG's figures, when shifts to the Albury hub are taken into account, there was a loss of around 18% in local employment.

Because of overlaps, there is, however, a diverse range of news, current affairs and music programming available on Bendigo commercial radio, as services in Ballarat, Maryborough and Deniliquin are owned by different owners who use different program sources.

Since 1993, Bendigo also been the site of a local ABC station (Paxinos, 2003:3), and the full complement of ABC networks apart from News Radio were available. A new local ABC service also opened in June 2003 at nearby Ballarat (3).

In 2001 Bendigo had three community stations targeting the general geographic community, the print handicapped and senior citizens. Ballarat, nearby, has a general community service and a Christian service.

Over the period 1975-2001, the changing access to radio services in all sectors has been dramatic: from three in 1975 to nine in 2001, ignoring a substantial number of fortuitous services and a narrowcast racing service.

Applying the typology to these services, Bendigo had a comparatively full range of deliberative program services available by 2001. Even given that local commercial news and information services may have been curtailed by its owner's regional centralisation strategy, the addition of a youth-oriented commercial FM service, several community services, a local ABC station and the planned extension of the ABC's news-only network certainly balance any loss. Overall, deliberative, representative and participative functions have all improved substantially since 1975.

Kalgoorlie, Western Australia
Kalgoorlie had a relatively small population of 33799 in 2001, and it is isolated, its commercial radio services (6KG and 6KAR) bordering but not overlapping those of Esperance (6SE and 6SEA), a small seaport over 350 kms to the South (17428 population in 2001), and Merredin (6MD and 6MER) to the East (population 15419). All of these services were owned by DMG in 2001, with almost all programming networked from Bunbury. Apart from some brief local programming windows, all the programming was the same on these stations.

However, the change in this has been one of degree. Kalgoorlie has long been serviced by networked radio sources: from 1986 through to well past the cross-media rules of 1987 made it illegal, 6KG was owned by the Packer family's Consolidated Press, sold to Bond Corporation by 1990, then sold on to John B. Fairfax's Rural Press after Bond's collapse in the early 1990s. From before 1976, a regional landlined network facilitated extensive networking of news and music programming. This was extended under Bond, and further extended and consolidated through a new regional hub at 6VA Albany, after Rural Press sold most of its radio interests to DMG after 1996. Since hubbing, local callers are automatically

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[9] Star FM Dubbo was the exception, gaining 10 staff over the period. It was not included in this calculation, as it was a new licence.

diverted to Albany, and local production was replaced by remotely programmed automated windows.

DMG's claims to the contrary, local complaints about the inappropriateness of hubbed programming for local audiences are often convincing: an anonymous submitter (No. 205) to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Regional Radio (2000:1447-49) noted without irony the inappropriateness of relaying 6PR's Sunday morning 3-hour Gardening Program into the Goldfields on 6KG, observing that 'Kalgoorlie…has different climatic and soil type conditions compared to Perth…' (1448). The submission also noted heavy losses of local staff, the end of local news and local programming.

Before DMG bought these stations, they were owned by Rural Press, taking automated overnight programming from Bunbury. ABT records show that during Bond Corporation's ownership, when the station also had access to the news and local information resources of Bond's *The Kalgoorlie Miner,* 6KG was taking over 30 hours a week in syndicated programming (1990:38). A year later, facilitated by Bond's new satellite networking, 6KG doubled its network hours to 62 hours per week (ABT, 1991:177).

6KG Kalgoorlie provides an important strategic study in the development of commercial radio networking in Australia. Bond Corporation's plans for global networks of radio and television services[10] connected by satellite delivery systems were based on the networking model of Kalgoorlie radio and TV: before satellite connection, these were isolated local services which because of the vast distances involved could not be connected cost-effectively through the telephone networks. After, they became almost fully networked.

The ABC increased the range of their services, with local services in Kalgoorlie and Esperance. Radio National and JJJ both have small transmitters in the two main towns. There was one major loss to outlying areas however, with the ABC cutting their shortwave transmissions after 1995. ABC News Radio was not available in 2001.

There are no community radio services in Kalgoorlie. There is one Christian station in Esperance (6ESP). Two aspirant community radio broadcasters had begun providing low-power test broadcasts to remote indigenous communities on temporary licences in 2001. Overall, services certainly multiplied over the period 1975-2001, with the addition of a new youth-targeted FM commercial service, the commencement of the ABC's JJJ, Radio National and Fine Music networks, and the addition of two program staff devoted to Kalgoorlie on the ABC's regional network. Although there have been many complaints about the deterioration of local news and information available on commercial radio since its acquisition by DMG, the historical evidence appears to cast serious doubt on claims that a strong local service had ever been provided. This is, of course, a relativity issue. The absence of community radio means the communities there have not been able to use those representational and participative resources, but the commencement of two indigenous remote services was a promising development.

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[10] In addition to Bond's acquisition of Kerry Packer's satellite interests, the funding and rapid development of the former Packer Skyradio radio network based on Sydney's 2UE, the purchase from IT&T of Chile's telephone network (and associated plans for development of a satellite based on the Chilean telephone system), there was the purchase of a stake in UK satellite TV, later taken over by its rival, Rupert Murdoch's BskyB. Bond certainly aspired to be a global media player.

Conclusions

The typology below (Table 3) is a preliminary schematisation of radio's political functions. Formed by using theoretical concepts to interrogate the historical record, it is an analytical grid which generates exceptions useful in pinpointing change and difference.

Table 3: Political functions of radio by sector

Sector	Commercial	National		Community
Function		ABC	SBS	
Information, advice, analysis (news, information programs)	Shrinking news, info programs; talkback	News, interviews, talkback, info programs	News, talk, talkback, community info	Constituency news and info; general news increasing
Political debate (current affairs, talkback, opinion)	Entertaining comment and talkback	Current affairs, documentary, talk, talkback	Current affairs, documentary, talk	Talk, panel discussions, current affairs
Diverse communal representations	Rare	Indigenous and special features; JJJ talk, specials	Indigenous, community programs	Indigenous, community programs
Citizens actively represent their own causes, ideas, interests	Mediated through news, talkback	Some indigenous and special features	Voxpops, indigenous, community programs	Community production key function of the sector
Wide range of cultural expression	Mainstream, mostly commercial, cultures	Social/cultural alternatives: Radio National and JJJ	Diverse social and cultural programming	Defining function of the sector

The historical record in the three areas examined shows unambiguously that over the period 1976 to 2001, services increased dramatically in number and range.

The loss of local news and information services on regional commercial radio after 1992 ranks as one of the more drastic "social dislocation" effects of deregulation. However, the historical record shows that in two of the three areas scrutinised, past performance was often criticised severely, both by the regulator and listeners, so there is no justification for a romantic view of the past. The record is not all good.

There were some improvements after 1992: new commercial FM services for younger audiences extended the array of formats in each area and were well-received by listeners and advertisers. This can also be seen as a basic but important cultural recognition of younger listeners in the commercial mainstream, who were previously ignored.

Improvements to services provided by the ABC were impressive in all three areas, increasing the range of alternative programming through the youth, fine music, local radio and public affairs networks. In addition, the ABC invested substantially in establishing dialogical links through ABC New Media and its website – the most significant development in this area. This professional development, whether provided directly by the ABC, or through grants to community or indigenous services, is likely to be crucial to encourage equitable development in small communities.

By 2001 community radio was established in two of the three regions, though not in the third and smallest. Here, however, nearby indigenous communities had begun tests.

Who should provide local news? Some assumptions formerly common in community radio are now shibboleths: the view that community radio's news and information should be limited to the provision of community news for its constituent groups, by its constituent groups appears to be fading. Constituency representation and participation remain imperatives for community radio, establishing diversity in the gestalt of local services in any local area, and contributing to the authenticity of deliberative democracy. However, in regional areas, they are increasingly providing general news and information services as well. There is no contradiction: communities have both general and specific information needs, basic services (local weather, traffic reports, disaster warnings etc) being equally useful to alternative groups and minority interests as to mainstream groups. Cultural recognition strategies may still define community radio for the regulator, but in practice, many provided mainstream, rather than 'alternative' programming, and general information and news have emerged as an opportunity and priority for them. With the closing of local services on commercial radio, access to general news and information of a high quality has become an important redistributive strategy in regional areas, and as Fraser (2000) argued, redistribution and recognition processes are complementary fundamentals of social and cultural justice. The increasingly wide distribution of CBAA's ComRadSat news and current affairs – which works both ways - supports this conclusion.

For the internet public sphere, there was little evidence of a new local production zone facilitated by local radio. While the centralised systems operated by SBS and ABC provide important information resources and encourage feedback, the often-discussed revolution in bottom-up participation is unrealised. More important, there was little evidence that local radio played a significant role in training local people in web radio production.

What of the public sphere of radio? Perhaps the marketisation of radio in Australia, sealed by its deregulation in 1992, ended any possibility, because the cuts to local news and current affairs – the forms commonly associated with information, discussion and debate – were severe. But the BSA reforms also doubled community stations and multiplied public service networks. Thus, a loss in local content on commercial radio was balanced by gains in community and public structures. The old unitary public sphere (patchy at its best) was truncated, but active and capable communities replaced it with overlapping and interconnected counter-public spheres, which may in time provide a better system. My research suggests that there are certainly structures in the areas examined which can support public sphere functions, and that these have increased over time, though this capacity diminishes in the smaller areas. Further work is required to evaluate performative quality, however.

Finally, we should not uncritically assume that marketisation killed off a public sphere in commercial radio. Detailed research on the "cultural public sphere" of commercial radio may well provide unexpected results here. The use of remote call-ins to automated services, and the actual uses of local 'windows', have yet to be seriously investigated. Perhaps the most important potential site for a public sphere, however, is the most obvious (and disputed): talkback radio, which, though apparently controlled by its host and producers, is often subverted by callers' guile and the critical capacities of its listeners. With evidence from industry sources on increasing resistance and sophistication of young consumers, old work in these areas now requires new questions.

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