



Grassroots Radio FACTSHEET #04

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Cultivating participation to make Grassroots Radio happen

ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is a **process that aims to understand the needs of people located in a specific area, and to include them in the design of technologies.** In the Grassroots Radio project community engagement aims to ensure members have power in decision-making and in the activities that concern them. To do this effectively, engagement processes involve gaining an understanding of the make-up, needs and expectations of people, and of the mechanisms to ensure that a diversity of people can participate in the design and running of community radio stations.

THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT APPROACH IN GRASSROOTS RADIO

The Grassroots Radio project adopts a **participatory design approach** to setting-up and adapting the radio technology. Particular attention is made to also engage the diversity of people in the community, and to offer tools whereby to address any future issues and to enable participation of diverse groups.

The project is working with people that live in rural and remote locations to introduce and test RootIO, the technology supporting the creation of community ra-



Training on how to stream a music programme using the rootIO platform on Cape Clear island

RADIO AS FORUM

In Ireland, the communities suggest that the radio could be a platform to discuss funding received by development groups and how they use it, and as a **space of deliberation** to discuss issues - e.g. sustainability of fishing reserves surrounding the preservation of the islands' beauty versus the economic need for fish farms. Moreover, maintaining links with interested academics to provide research on these topics in discussion with islanders has been considered a useful way of informed debate. In pilot countries, community radios are being employed to **bring expertise from outside** (e.g. podcasts) as well as to

radio stations. This technology fosters community engagement in two different ways:

- People belonging to the communities can participate in the design and implementation of the technology and to the setting up and running of radio stations;
- The stations, through RootIO, provide spaces for informed reflections and public deliberation.

The work of designing each individual community radio station as well as the content and local events surrounding those stations is **participatory and iterative** in nature. The activities currently underway include:

- Events to launch radio stations in each country
- Training events for radio
- Community interests and participatory design events

Adopting a **participatory approach** to community engagement means, in the first place, to **recognize the expertise of community members** as active voices in a shared process of creative inquiry and innovation. Such an approach serves as a vehicle for **enabling collective awareness and action**, innovating around services and practices, while honoring local identity (e.g. cultural and linguistic expression), and sustaining existing community connections.

broadcast content from and to rural communities in partnership with national radio channels, journalists, NGOs and other entities. Using the radio as a forum to **deliberate on future development**, to discuss what is needed and what people want, and to influence policies constitutes an effective tool to foster community engagement. In Romania, the two radios are also used as a show-case that is meant to pave the way for the development of similar community channels of communication, fostering the **pluralism of sources** of information and increasing **freedom of speech** in rural areas.

RADIO AS ARCHIVE

A community radio is also used as a way to **preserve the oral histories** of all the communities - especially recording the older generations and as a way to **archive older ways of life**. These uses help to create opportunities and a platform for young people to become aware of the history of the land in which they were born. In Romania, for example, the two radio stations generated a large collection of oral histories, through the interviews with the elders in the community. They talk about community issues, their life stories, local stories, local traditions, crafts, fishing. In Ireland, a programme called postcards of the past **documents people's memories** of growing up on Bere island.