

# The Transformation of the Public Radio after 1989

## **Keywords:**

*media history, public radio, minority press, Hungarian language media in Romania, Radio Romania, Radio Cluj, the Romanian Radio Society (SRR).*

The hereby book analyses the transformation of the public radio through the prism of modifications noticed in the Hungarian broadcasting grating's evolution within Radio Romania Cluj – Kolozsvári Rádió, between 1989-2016.

The current public radiophonia of Cluj substantially differs from the one existing at the beginnings, in 1954 and in 1989, when broadcasting restarted. I consider that the reasons of the transformation arise from the diversification of the media market in the analyzed period, as well as from the technological progress, respectively from the modification of media consumption in the context of social change.

But how can radio be examined? From a technical point of view, the details of the signal transmission, the description of the transmitting antennas and the reception options are important. I only touch on this approach insofar as it has an impact on reception, on reaching the audience.

Regarding the content, we can examine the subject of the programs or of the whole program stream at certain times, within shorter time intervals, or we can compare it - in a horizontal section - with the content of other media products. Respectively, we can examine the development of the content of individual programs or program streams longitudinally, thus we can reflect on the experienced content, possibly approach changes, structural transformations. However, such an examination requires an archive which, in the longer term, regularly records the program stream of the radio so that it can be retrieved or possibly re-analyzed at any time. Radio Cluj – Kolozsvári Rádió does not have such a daily updated, expanded archive for the given period:

storage, “inheritance” is only possible, depending on the extent to which the editor organizes the materials or programs he has created into a searchable database, thus assisting the subsequent analysis. The possibility of the investigation is therefore very limited, so only analyzes of excerpts of certain radio programs have been included in the present research.

Radio can also be examined historically: we can research what programs were made and when were they broadcasted, look for documents to substantiate it, we can conduct a survey or interviews among the members of the staff, which can also reveal the stages of development of a given institution. Research can be expanded by examining the legal or social context in which these changes took place.

This book is mostly the latter type of study. I was looking for the answer to how the public service broadcasting in Cluj-Napoca, which was restarted with the overturning of the communist regime in December 1989, changed in the midst of changes in the media legislations and media market environment. At the same time, in view of the specific situation of the examined radio, I also paid attention to the extent to which it can be perceived in the radio program that it is a minority broadcaster, mainly for ethnic Hungarian audience.

## 1989 - 2016

The starting time is a restart after almost 5 years of silence, and the closing moment is a seemingly significant change in broadcast time. As of November 1, 2016, the Hungarian broadcast of Kolozsvári Rádió was forced to move to a new VHF frequency, which on the one hand allowed all-day broadcasting on the new frequency (98.8 MHz) and on the other hand significantly reduced the transmission compared to the previous frequency (95.6 MHz) VHF reception area – so I chose this as the closing moment of the research.

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Few noteworthy researches and scientific dissertations have been done on the history of radio broadcasting for Hungarians in Romania, a list of which can be found in the appendix. So, as a source, the questionnaire survey I conducted among the staff of Kolozsvári Rádió was very important. In addition, I relied on my own observations and notes, and I recorded events and changes based on the stories of my colleagues. This is precisely the sensitive point: due to lack of resources, my research is partly observational and oral history-based. There is no complete program archive available, so the most authentic source is the memory of the current and still living former editors of Kolozsvári Rádió. Remembering and forgetting, on the other hand, can sift through and significantly modify the information provided. Therefore, where possible, I paid attention to the preserved documents, the occasional leaflets, and compared the memories of the editors to describe the history of radio development.

### Commercial and/or public service media

It is undeniable that the emergence of commercial media has forced public service channels to change. However, the change should not mean that the public service now speaks “commercially”, that reading and demanding free speech will be replaced by constant chatting, in fact: chatter. This could be manifested in the fact that the listener is also brought closer by the public service media to maintain a more direct relationship with him, without their relationship being transformed into some kind of excessive trust. The mission of the public service media does not end in being a leader, having a diverse program; it cannot completely give up on language demands, even if it means an elevated, solemn tone. These language expectations are also changed by the social transformation itself: our speech is constantly accelerating, with the advancement of technology, not only foreign words but also abbreviations, even commonly known and accepted acronyms, are more easily found in our everyday speech, including media lan-

guage. This is especially important in our case because this radio under study broadcasts mainly to *etnospora*, scattered areas, so I think it has to fulfill a specific mission as well. In his language, he must undertake the service that would otherwise be fulfilled by the everyday mother tongue environment: in a beautiful, demanding speech, he must transmit the specific culture, traditions and also trends of the modern age, to all those who have only few living connection with Hungarian speaking community.

Based on the above, it has been a question for me throughout my work to what extent the former state radio's regional studio is still able to meet the conditions imposed by public service broadcasting, and to what extent the ideal of public service has fallen victim to the proliferation of commercial radios, especially because their fight is unequal.

At the beginning of the described research, I assumed that in the constantly changing media situation the program structure of public service radio also changed in the period under review, that the change is significant. I assumed that the information is constantly present in the public service radio program, and that the information programs are appropriately careful, use various sources and are linguistically demanding, so the language of the examined radio is normative and standard-transmitting for scattered Hungarians in Romania. I assumed that the educational and service programs remained in the radio program structure, although their share was likely to decrease over the years. To what extent all these assumptions have been substantiated, I will return to at the end of the book.

My sources included both print and online publications. Among the latter, the pages recorded by the Internet Archive Wayback Machine are of documentary value, as without them we would not be able to reconstruct the changes of the website of Kolozsvári Rádió, for example. Leaflets and publications related to the events of the institution also helped a lot as they record a specific moment in time, and the difference observed between them also shows the possible direction of change. And for details, I asked my colleagues for help, often not planned in advance, and I also got data from

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their personal archives. Given the scarcity of resources, I have often relied on my own observations as well as my own notes made during editorial meetings. And finally, I used an online questionnaire on who were working in the editorial office on November 1, 2016 - the endpoint of the surveyed period.

## Conclusions

The presumption that in the conditions of media market changes, the Hungarian grids suffered modifications at Radio Cluj is confirmed: there are 4 different program grids in the period of 1990-2016.

The presumption that the modifications of the program grids are in advantage of the entertainment type content is confirmed: with the start of broadcasting on FM band, the new shows, predominantly musical shows, contributed to the increase of the percent dedicated to entertainment, even in a significant way – infirming in the same time the complementary presumption that the modification wouldn't have been radical. At the second modification of the grid in 2007, one can observe a decrease of such a type of content. Even though the Hungarian commercial station became known at that time, we can thus conclude that the public radio station doesn't get engaged in a „competition for listeners” with the commercial stations (on the other hand I consider this falsely understood competition to be absolutely useless), more than that: there is an increase of the percent of informative and cultural shows. Still, the next program grid changes (2012) would lead to modifications through which the entertainment type of shows covered two thirds of the total of broadcasting time in Hungarian. In the lack of their content analysis one could not precisely conclude that the public radio adopts a commercial type of attitude. The current research cannot confirm such an affirmation.

The presumption that the informative type of shows are constantly present got confirmed: the number of minutes allocated to news and journals remain almost

constant, including the case of broadcasting time extension allocated to Hungarian shows. The comparison of these shows' content is not possible due to the lack of archived registrations. In the same time, one can observe a significant decrease (from 8 to 2) of the number of correspondents and of the number of reporters on field. As a conclusion, the news journals cannot keep their balance from the geographical point of view, more than that, certain events in Cluj remained uncovered. We can notice, however, the presence of the regional and local news, in a greater percent than the national news; the news regarding the minorities have a decreased percent (10%). All of these facts prove the editors' desire regarding an ample and diversified information.

In completion, I presumed that the informative shows use a diversified resource and an elevated language. By my researches I concluded that the hypothesis can be considered as confirmed, also one can identify some expression and diction mistakes. With all of the several Romanian language resources used, we cannot talk neither about the preponderance of some incorrect translations, nor about the unjustified use of some foreign language expressions.

The presumption that the number of educational and service provision type of shows decreased is confirmed. In the studied period, two grid modifications lead to the decrease of their percentage and only in one of the cases we registered their increase, they being permanently kept in the Hungarian program grid.

From the language's point of view I presumed that the public radio offers a standard for the Hungarian population from etnospora. The research results that one can notice some expression mistakes, some of them being probably caused by the alert working rhythm.

Altogether, it is confirmed that the public radio is rather „relocated” towards a more entertainment-like content. But from my point of view, we cannot declare that this would underline the overdue concept of the public radio, on the contrary: it shows that the public radio is capable of changes permanently. More than that, the contents of commercial or communitary type media attract different groups of listeners, each

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one of them responding to different needs. The same listener might listen to different types of radio, even ones received via Internet in different parts of the day or week.

The research had other additional results. I found out that there is an (unexhaustive) archive regulation of the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Society. This does not mean that the Radio Cluj – Kolozsvári Rádió territorial stations' shows for minorities would be completely archived. As a result, their longitudinal study-research is much clogged. Thus, the researchers can rely on the personal archives of the editors or in the case of some pre-established researches, they can require archived registrations according to the regulation of the National Audio-visual Council.