Europe local – Community Media in the Union
Thursday and Friday, September 12 and 13, 2013
Permanent representation of Hesse in Berlin

Bruxelles pulled out of this conference at very short notice, and yet the consensus among the 50 or so people who did attend was that they learned a great deal, made a number of new contacts and enjoyed lots of interesting conversations.

The conference agenda attracted delegates from European community media and associated regional media regulators, as well as members of the Media Council of the Regulatory Authority for Commercial Broadcasting and New Media in Hesse (LPR Hessen). A number of ‘old friends’ of the Open Channels were also present.

The conference was organised by the Federation of Open Channels in Germany (Bundesverband Offene Kanäle) in partnership with the Regulatory Authority for Commercial Broadcasting and New Media in Hesse and the Open Channels for Europe! coalition. The title of this latest European conference builds on the European Union’s decision to designate 2013 the ‘European Year of Citizens – European Citizenship at Local and Regional Level’. The conference aimed to provide an overview of local community media initiatives reflecting the spirit of the European Year and to allow delegates to develop ideas and concepts about developing a joint strategy that could best serve to promote the European project.

The conference was expertly chaired by Karin Kraml, who also facilitated last year’s symposium entitled ‘Social Gaps – Social Bridges: European community media as mediators’. She made light of Commissioner Reding’s withdrawal from the event, using the time set aside for the Commissioner’s speech to chair a round table where speakers from France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia and Spain were asked about how the public in their respective countries currently feel about Europe. The responses were extremely varied, with attitudes ranging from outright opposition to a ‘United States of Europe’ promoted by Viviane Reding, the Vice-President of the European Commission, to a desire to see genuinely closer ties between the countries of Europe.
Brigitte Russ-Scherer, spokeswoman for the Cities for Europe initiative and former mayor of Tübingen, then presented an overview of the work of the international volunteer organisation ‘A Soul for Europe’. She strongly believes that ‘two things are of central importance to Europe’s future development: culture, in the widest sense of the word, and Europe’s cities and regions’. She gave several practical examples of what Europe means to people in their everyday lives and discussed the opportunities for Europe offered by the continent’s cities and civil societies. Her view was that ‘We must not leave Europe exclusively in the hands of national and European policymakers and their institutions. Europe needs to draw on the experiences of its cities and citizens, their day-to-day experiences of living together.’ She referred to the emergence of twinning agreements as a basis for establishing closer ties between the countries of Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War. And she described the work of her own initiative in the following terms: ‘We believe in this ability of cities to act as a unifying force and in the capacity of culture to forge identity. We wish to harness these forces for Europe’s future development. That is why we do not look to the institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg to wait and see what they do. We would rather adopt the opposite approach and see what cities and citizens are able to do by themselves to “build Europe”, to see what contribution they can make to strengthening and developing Europe.’

Ms Russ-Scherer told the conference that 50 voluntary partners are currently launching and implementing local projects all over Europe in conjunction with ‘A Soul for Europe’. Her hope was that one of the practical outcomes of the conference would be to bring the people responsible for Europe’s community media together with the people and organisations who are working to give Europe a soul in their own cities or regions.

A second round table then addressed the situation of community media in the individual countries. Once again, an extremely diverse picture emerged. While in Germany the Open Channels, local non-commercial radio stations and other educational broadcasting services are all able to draw on funding from the regional broadcasting authorities, local government and other funding sources, in many countries very little funding is available. Delegates from France, Slovakia and Spain said that they are forced almost exclusively to work on a project-by-project basis and that their institutions provide very little moral support for their endeavours.

The participants unanimously agreed that, in spite of these obstacles, the fact that such an astonishing diversity of community media and associated initiatives in Europe still exists can only be down to the selfless commitment of a small number of full-time employees and the huge number of extra hours that they often put in for the cause.
In the discussion that followed this round table it was agreed that Brussels, in addition to funding large, high-profile projects, should also be called on to provide support for ‘small’ local initiatives.

The evening of Day One was set aside to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Federation of Open Channels in Germany, which was founded in Bonn on 9 September 1988. After welcoming delegates to the event on behalf of Prof. Wolfgang Thaenert, the Director of LPR Hessen, Jochen Fasco, Director of the Thuringian broadcasting regulator and Commissioner for Media Literacy and Community Media of the Conference of Directors of the Media Authorities (DLM), began his welcome address with the following words: ‘Thanks to the Federation of Open Channels, I now know what a 25th anniversary feels like—and believe me, it feels good.’ He went on to tell the participants that ‘the triple mission of community media—open access, local information and media education—has been a constant feature of the Federation’s work for as far back as at least 1994, a time when this was not yet standard practice by any means in many parts of Germany. Let us take a moment to think about the 19 years since 1994 and reflect on the huge changes that have taken place in the media landscape over that period. Anyone who has just visited this year’s IFA trade fair on consumer electronics here in Berlin will be in no doubt about how much things have changed. And the continuing relevance of the community media’s triple mission demonstrates that it runs a lot deeper than the latest media trend and should therefore be treated as something quite separate… I firmly believe that this triple mission will equip you well to meet the challenges of the digital worlds of today and of tomorrow.’

The evening’s keynote speaker was Christian Schurig. In 1979, whilst working as a broadcasting officer at the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg, he became one of the founding members of the Open Channel expert group. He served as Director of the Regulatory Authority for Communication in Baden-Württemberg between 1986 and 1992 and subsequently in Saxony-Anhalt until 2007. He is a practically inexhaustible fount of wisdom of all matters relating to community media, not least because he was the DLM Commissioner for Community Media from 1997 to 2005.

His speech drew on a wealth of information from his own archive, and let delegates hear the inside story. He described the arguments made for and against Open Channels from the end of the 1970s right up to the present day using an impressive array of quotations, including an example from a six-page article on Open Channels which appeared in DER SPIEGEL issue 18/1982, entitled ‘Let’s Make Our Own Media’. The article began as follows: ‘West German politicians and planning officers are currently blocking plans for community TV. The latest television technology means that it will soon be possible to
set up TV channels in West Germany allowing anyone to broadcast their own programmes, just like in several US cities where tens of thousands of viewers already tune in every evening to watch programmes made by members of the general public about anything and everything from council meetings to charity bazaars and local scandals. But West German planners want to restrict these new channels to commercial and party political broadcasts. Flying in the face of international experience, they are adamant that the idea of citizens’ TV is “stillborn”.

Mr Schuring’s speech went on to discuss why things had in fact turned out very differently. He also had some advice as to how the Federation of Open Channels could ensure that community media remain a permanent fixture in Germany going forward: ‘In the future, competition and the battle for a share of the available money and airtime and for engaged and interested users can only get tougher. I believe that the Federation will need to engage professional full-time – or at the very least part-time – staff to lobby successfully on its behalf. Partnership with the other two community media associations might also encourage the regional regulatory authorities to support this new structure.’

The evening concluded with a buffet featuring traditional fare from Hesse. The relaxed and festive atmosphere provided a backdrop to some very intensive conversations between delegates as a prelude to Day Two, when the conference resumed its work on the European dimension.

Katrin Abele, press officer at the European Commission Representation Office in Germany, kicked off the second day with a presentation entitled ‘Europe reports’. She provided a very clear overview of the range of resources available to citizen journalists researching or looking for material for broadcasts on European affairs. She called on the participants to take full advantage of these resources and offered to provide them with assistance in making contacts, finding information and indeed with any other Europe-related matter.

The Federation is planning to post Katrin Abele’s presentation on its web site to give interested parties direct access to specific topics a much faster approach than if they attempted to battle their way through the maze of websites offered by the European institutions.

Next on the agenda was a presentation on the Network European Movement Germany (EBD), a member of European Movement International. Karoline Münz, the organisation’s Deputy Secretary-General, explained in her presentation that, since 2012, the EBD’s work has been divided into the three fields of Governance and Participation, Actors and Networking and Education and Information. This has meant that projects can more easily be assigned to the relevant workstream and that members and partners, when they get in touch with the organisation, are able to speak to someone with the appropriate expertise. Ms Münz also described their activities which range from long-term programmes to temporary partnerships and short-term campaigns. She had brought along handouts on various different aspects of the European Movement’s
programme and encouraged her audience to read the organisation’s newsletter for more information. Furthermore, she expressed her willingness to work with community media, urging people to get in touch with her directly through the EBD.

‘Europe in my country’ was a session where participants had the opportunity to present practical projects, concepts and ideas. Delegates from across Europe gave examples of broadcasts and presentations to illustrate local initiatives in their countries designed to get the European idea across to the people who live there.

Ireland’s Ciarán Murray is President of the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE) which was founded towards the end of 2004 with the aims of strengthening the Third Media Sector, representing it vis-à-vis the European institutions, lobbying on its behalf and unlocking funding sources. In his capacity as coordinator, Mr Murray also presented an overview of the Near (North East Access Radio) Media Coop in Dublin, which started life in 1993 as a community radio station. The cooperative’s remit has now expanded to include community TV productions and media education. More information is available at www.cmfe.eu/ and nearfm.ie/

His brief presentation on the structure, work and aims of Near was accompanied by a selection of clips from DC TV (Dublin Community TV) programmes that provided an excellent illustration of the wide range of issues addressed, such as local information, art, culture, living together and social engagement.

Carme Mayugo is part of a team of four who run Barcelona’s ‘Teleduca’, an organisation that provides media education for a variety of target groups including teachers, parents and youth work educators within a 50 km radius of Barcelona. One of the main priorities of the Teleduca collective is to teach audiovisual media literacy to disadvantaged young people in deprived communities. Founded in 1996, Teleduca’s goals are to promote ‘educació i comunicació’, (education and communication). Information about their courses, projects and partners is available in Catalan at www.teleduca.org.

Ms Mayugo also showed the audiovisual output of a joint project with the Fédération Nationale des Vidéos des Pays et des Quartiers in Aix-en-Provence, France. The project involved young people from the two countries sharing their opinions about Europe live on the Internet.

Daria Jaranowska is a young Polish woman who is currently taking a year out to do voluntary community work at the Bennohaus community media centre in Münster. She became involved due to the fact that the EU-funded ‘Youth4Media’ network has its German headquarters at the Bennohaus and its Polish headquarters at the Nowy Staw Foundation in Lublin. Youth4Media is a partnership of 40 organisations from 26 European countries and its members regularly organise exchanges, including members of staff.
Ms Jaranowska showed a number of clips from a magazine programme called “diverCity” in which she also appears as a presenter. This monthly programme, which is made by young people from several different countries, has been reporting on political and European affairs since its inception in 2008. Alongside current affairs, its diverse format also incorporates city guides, web sites, music videos, surveys, short films and various other items. The programme features content in both English and German. Information on the European youth network is available at [www.youth4media.eu](http://www.youth4media.eu), while diverCity can be viewed at [www.owtv.de/divercity](http://www.owtv.de/divercity).

Eva Děkanovská from Slovakia is one of the organisers of the International Festival of Local Television which is now in its 19th year. Every June, filmmakers from around the globe travel to Košice in the hope of coming away with the ‘Golden Beggar’ prize for the year’s best film. The festival has cultivated close contacts with community media and their ‘managers’ for many years, even though community media as such do not really exist in Slovakia. However, Ms Děkanovská bemoaned the fact that no network yet exists to promote the exchange of programmes and project concepts and outcomes. She promised delegates that community media would be invited to participate in the next festival in June 2014. As chief executive of the City TV Foundation and head of Košice’s local TV station, TV Naša, she would welcome closer cooperation with the community media. For information about the Foundation and this year’s Festival of Local Television, visit [www.festival.sk/2013/en/ifolt](http://www.festival.sk/2013/en/ifolt), where you can also view all the prize-winning films.

Vincent Aguano from Amiens was one of the prize-winners at this year’s festival in Košice. He works for Association CARMEN (Création Action Recherche en Matière d’Expressions Nouvelles) which won one of the coveted awards for its documentary ‘Bloc 5 Story’. CARMEN provides media education services to the general public, focusing in particular on work with disadvantaged groups. Its productions are broadcast on the Canal Nord cable TV channel. You can find out all about this channel and about CARMEN at [canalnord.org](http://canalnord.org/).

Mr Aguano showed a clip from a documentary entitled “Des Histoires en Nord” that was created as part of a project with a so-called “marginal social group”. The programme features former Algerian soldiers talking about how they came to France and what their lives there are like.

Luxembourg has a rather unusual Open Channel in the town of Kehlen called ‘.dok, den oppene kanal’. Like some Swedish Open Channels, it is open to anyone and everyone. Airtime is sold to whosoever wishes to buy it, and also provides support to purchasers. Maurice Molitor is a professional journalist, chief executive of a production company and also runs the Open Channel. He told the conference about how he had hit upon the idea of setting up a TV channel for members of the public after his experience
working for the German TV channel, RTL. He and two colleagues run the channel on a voluntary basis. It obtained its broadcasting licence in 2003 and now reaches over 100,000 households with cable TV. This particular Open Channel features a weekly programme by 84-year-old Astrid Lulling who has spent two stints as a Member of the European Parliament, from 1965 to 1974 and from 1989 to the present day. Mr Molitor showed a clip from one of the reports on European current affairs that Ms Lulling has been broadcasting since 2006.

As soon as he returned from Berlin, Mr Molitor re-established his collaboration with the Open Channel of Trier. The two channels had previously exchanged programmes and information, but the partnership had lapsed some time ago. For more information about the oppene kanal, visit [www.dok.lu](http://www.dok.lu)

Rounding up the session, Karin Kraml concluded that it is more important than ever to work together much more closely at a European level and to cooperate in unlocking funding. There are clearly huge differences between well- and poorly funded community media and something needs to be done about this. She once again called on the European institutions to uphold their commitment to ensuring that the Member States implement the demands adopted in two particular papers (the ‘European Parliament Resolution of 25 September 2008 on Community Media in Europe’ and the ‘Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and intercultural dialogue’, of 11 February 2009).

At the close of the conference, delegates agreed to write a letter to Brussels in support of the ‘Berlin Declaration 2013’ jointly adopted by them. In addition to describing the wide range of Europe-related activities carried out by community media over the past 20 years, the Declaration also contains a commitment on behalf of the signatories to step up their activities and cooperate more closely at European level. Furthermore, it calls on the European institutions to help community media gain legal recognition and to provide them with moral and financial support.

Bettina Wiengarn thanked all those present for their constructive participation and wished them all the best for the future. On behalf of the Federation of Open Channels in Germany, she also thanked the co-organisers of the conference and the DLM’s Commissioner for Media Competence and Community Media for providing financial backing for the event. The event concluded with an opportunity for people to strike a few final agreements over a light snack of pretzels and fruit, before everyone made their way home to begin the business of fulfilling the commitments they had made.