

**Building a language community through radio in the age of social media:
the case of Raidió na Life**

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the motivations of volunteers in participating in broadcasting on a community radio station in the age of social media.

The station examined is Raidió na Life. It is based in Dublin and broadcasts to a mixed and dispersed population of Irish language speakers. One of the original aims of the station was to build a sense of community and linguistic empowerment for these people.

The research discovered that volunteers do not see themselves as language or community activists. Their primary motivations for volunteering to participate in the station appear to be personal. However, the performances of their roles as voluntary broadcasters, particularly in their engagement with their audiences on air and on-line, appear to be having the desired effect of building social, cultural and linguistic networks.

The article demonstrates how social, communicative and cultural benefits can accrue through traditional broadcasting and new social media, even where practitioners seem unaware of this dimension to their work. The element of fun or enjoyment keeps people volunteering and makes it personally worth their while. This is found to be more important than any sense of language or community activism as a motivation for participation in the station and is actually one of the reasons why Raidió na Life has managed to stay so successfully on air for three decades.

Key words: Community Radio; Irish language; Motivation; Participation; Community Development; Minority Language.

The Irish language and Irish language radio

Broadcasting for twenty-seven years now, the not-for-profit community radio station, Raidió na Life (lit. 'Radio of the Liffey', referring to Dublin's river), has afforded an entire generation of Irish speakers in the English language milieu of Dublin an opportunity to perform their linguistic identities on air in novel and sometimes transgressive ways (Ó Drisceoil, 2007). This paper is part of a long-term research project and focuses on one aspect of that work. It seeks to assess and understand the volunteers' original motivations for getting involved in the station; their awareness of the original linguistic aims behind the station; their understanding of Raidió na Life's role in community building and it examines their levels of participation in and commitment to the station's project. This paper draws on discourses of community building and participation (Day, 2009), where ownership of the station and control of broadcasting, management and strategic planning by members of the community are seen as the most pure form of participation and are deemed to be fundamental in the development of any meaningful and lasting community (Day 2007; Day 2009). It also employs the concept of the 'new speaker' which refers to a fluent or regular speaker of a given language who was not brought up in a community where that language is widely spoken. 'New speakers' differ from learners in that they make active social use of the target language outside a language-learning setting and often engage in transgressive linguistic practices that can be distinct from both the standard variety and traditional dialects. As native speaking populations of minority languages decline, new speakers may be seen as playing key roles in language revitalisation although all are not equally ideologically committed to such goals (O'Rourke et al, 2015). The voluntary broadcasters of Raidió na Life are almost all 'new speakers' as they were raised speaking English in the overwhelmingly English-speaking environment of Dublin but are regular users of Irish in their social practice, including the media. The authors, who come from sociolinguistic and community development backgrounds, are currently researching the extent to which stakeholders in the station, management and broadcasters, paid staff and volunteers are aware of and invested in their role of supporting and developing the community of Irish speakers in the capital city. This paper focuses primarily on the motivations of the volunteers who broadcast on the station week in, week out.

The research was conducted mainly through focus group and individual interviews. It took a twin step approach, using a focus group with seven volunteers and interviews with individuals for teasing out issues with voluntary broadcasters and with members of the management team and founders. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in Irish so the excerpts presented here are translations from the original. The names of all volunteers have been changed in the interests of privacy, the names of founders and members of management have not. The station manager, Muiris Ó Fiannachta, was particularly helpful in sourcing respondents and introducing them to the research team. He also read and responded to the views expressed by those in the focus group and much of the material relating to management's vision comes from his input. We were also fortunate that the early stage of our research coincided with the celebration of twenty-five years of broadcasting and another staff member, Judy Meg Ní Chinnéide, researched and produced a documentary, *Dúiseacht na hAislinge* (Awakening the Dream), where founders reminisced about the early days of the station and this proved to be a valuable resource (Raidió na Life, 2019a). Needless to say, these methods provide a limited sample and further research is ongoing. However, it is useful to present the findings now and to reflect on them from sociolinguistic and community development perspectives. Further focus groups with other broadcasters and with listeners will provide a richer understanding of the impact of Raidió na Life on its community. This

article provides the basis of an opportunity for discussion and reflection within the station as well as in academic circles.

Community radio stations globally build their communities through the participation of members of those communities in the broadcasting project. They use that participation as a means of building links and networks and these facilitate community development and the empowerment of disenfranchised or marginalised minority groups (Day, 2009). In the case of Raidió na Life, Irish speakers in the Dublin area are scattered throughout an English speaking majority. The capital contains a high number in absolute terms of daily speakers of Irish outside education (approximately 15,000 of a national total of almost 74,000) but these amount to only 1.3 percent of Dublin's population (Central Statistics Office, 2017). Although Irish is constitutionally the first official language of the state, English takes priority in every area and Irish speakers usually conduct most of their working and public lives through English. Irish remains the community language in a small part of the *Gaeltacht*, the officially-designated Irish speaking districts, mostly in the west of the country. Elsewhere, Irish is mainly used in the intimate sphere, meaning that the visibility of speakers to each other is often limited, or non-existent, outside of some close, personal relationships. The immersion language school movement, *Gaelscoileanna* and, to some extent, Irish language youth and sports clubs, have improved this situation in recent years and they have provided means of interacting with and identifying wider networks of Irish speakers. The most recent manifestation of this has been the so-called 'Pop-Up Gaeltacht' where Irish speakers meet, by arrangement, usually organised through social media and socialise in a pub or night club (Seoighe, 2018). Raidió na Life has come to play a primary role in this socialisation process and this paper discusses how aware the voluntary broadcasters and paid management staff are of this role.

At the time of its foundation in 1993, there was only one Irish language broadcasting medium in a landscape of over 30 commercial and three public service radio stations and two terrestrial television stations. This was Raidió na Gaeltachta, founded in 1972 and run by the state's public service broadcaster Radio Telefís Éireann (RTÉ, 'Radio and Television of Ireland'). RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, as it is now known, can be said to subscribe strongly to the traditional ideology on language variation in Irish. It broadcasts in each of the three major dialects, in separate programmes, operating for much of the time as three distinct local radio stations for each *Gaeltacht* area. In the early 1990s only one programme a week was aired from Dublin, *Cois Life* (lit. 'beside the Liffey') and this was supposed to serve the communication and entertainment needs of all Irish speakers in the rest of the nation, outside of the three main *Gaeltacht* areas (Day, 2013). Furthermore, the station promoted an essentialist link between the Irish language and traditional culture. Some examples of this were banning music with lyrics in English before 9.00pm and focusing on traditional Irish music instead and by maintaining a conservative approach to programming in spite of the changing nature of the *Gaeltacht* itself and Irish speakers in general. RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta has been widely considered a bastion of traditional *Gaeltacht* speech and was a gatekeeper of traditional linguistic and cultural heritage (Moal et al, 2018). Since before the foundation of the Irish state in 1922, Irish was promoted as the essence of national identity, a position which became copper fastened after independence and accompanied by a strongly Catholic ethos of social development. The *Gaeltacht* loomed large in the new state's language policy and the native speaker was idealised as a form of cultural touchstone from which the language revival would emanate (Ó Tuathaigh, 2011). The attention to native *Gaeltacht* speech from the outset in RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta can be said to represent adherence to that ideology.

There was widespread dissatisfaction with this state of affairs, particularly amongst people in their late twenties and early thirties, many of whom were starting to rear families through Irish and who believed that they had the right to listen to and watch broadcasts of all sorts in the Irish language. Encouraged by the Radio and Television Act of 1988 (Irish Statute Book, 1988) that removed the state monopoly on broadcasting and made provision for new, independent radio and television stations to come on air, these people organised into two, closely-linked movements, to campaign for these rights. The result was the foundation of Raidió na Life in 1993 (Day, 2013) and of TG4 (Irish language television) in 1996 (for a background to the television campaign, see Hourigan, 2004).

Dublin and Raidió na Life

Dublin is a thriving commercial and multi-cultural city of over one and a half million people, if the greater Dublin area is included (Central Statistics Office, 2017). Raidió na Life transmits on FM to a smaller area of maybe one million people and it is on air from 7.00am to 3.00am, seven days a week. The station is also available internationally online. It is primarily funded by Foras na Gaeilge, the state body responsible for promoting the Irish language on the whole island of Ireland.

Twenty-seven years ago, the founders were concerned about the lack of media provision through the language – how could you live your life through the Irish language without mass media in the language? Young Irish speakers wanted a radio station that would cater for them and for those they imagined to be like them. For them, the aim was simple, as the English language version of the station’s website explains:

The general aim of the co-operative [that owns and operates the station] was to provide ‘**A comprehensive Irish language radio** service on an educational and community basis’ Not only would this provide people with an essential cultural service but it would also provide the basis for unprecedented **awareness and enthusiasm for the language** throughout the area. (Raidió na Life, 2019b, bold in original).

One of the founders of the station, Éamon Ó Ciosáin, explained this clearly on a radio documentary about the early days of the station:

There was a sort of community radio movement, a co-operative movement you could say, coming from the bottom up, that was not fully focused, nor even at all, on just playing music and getting advertising in and making money as many were doing, as some of the pirate stations were, at the time, and Raidió na Life was, I suppose, part of that movement.

People in different areas in that movement were trying to put it up to the government, to get a license so that community radio stations could serve the community, and provide community radio training. That is part of the ideology of community development that was central to this thing they were doing, it was part of that approach - a wider approach than just radio, radio matters only - that was in the radio co-operatives that were being set up at the time (Ó Ciosáin, 2019, translated from Irish in: Raidió na Life, 2019a).

So, the idea was to provide for the media needs of a community of speakers who were widely scattered throughout the greater Dublin area.

Cormack (2004) outlines a number of important benefits for communities of minority language speakers who have access to stations broadcasting in their languages. These include ‘self-confidence, employment, the development of a public sphere, the capacity to represent itself to itself and to others’ (Cormack 2004: 4; Day, 2013: 211). Stations that broadcast in a minority language perform important symbolic and cultural roles in terms of raising the profile and status of the language both within the minority language community and in the wider society in which they exist (Cormack, 2004: 4; Day, 2013: 211). Browne (1998), writing about the value of an oral medium, such as radio, to speakers of indigenous languages in many parts of the world, also recognises the value of broadcasting through people’s own languages. He recommends it as ‘providing the opportunity to bring fresh life to indigenous languages and possibly rescue some from extinction’ (Browne, 1998: 1). While the authors do not believe that any medium can singlehandedly save a language, Browne and Cormack’s articles assist in the identification of the expected outcomes of minority language broadcast. They certainly provide a theoretical framework for contextualising the original aims of the founders of Raidió na Life and the aims of those currently in positions of management. Founders and members of management believe in the aim of building a linguistic community and we were interested to find out if this is the case for volunteers in the station. Do they share this vision of building and developing a vibrant community of Irish speakers? Do they see themselves as community and language activists?

Building a language community

We assumed that the participants in our focus group who were committed and long term volunteers in Raidió na Life would have a strong sense of themselves as *animateurs* or language activists who were consciously building a public space and community for Irish speakers, particularly new speakers, in the capital city. To investigate this hypothesis, we asked them if they knew who was listening to them? Why they might be listening? Who they believed to be the community they serve? What the aim and *raison d’être* of the station was and what their personal motivations for volunteering in the station were? We were particularly keen to see how important the concept of community was to these volunteers.

Listeners in the target community

All of the voluntary broadcasters were conscious of their listeners and wanted to build close connections with them and between them and the station. This seems to be more about the general need of broadcasters and stations to have listeners and audiences however, than any specific awareness of the need to build, nurture and develop a language community.

The entire group was convinced that they had a loyal and engaged listenership. They cited the polls they put up on social media as proof of same and they said that they regularly got tweets and comments on Facebook as reactions to their shows. They were careful about preserving these listeners’ data privacy and were concerned to act ethically.

The station is active across all social media and uses them to build audiences in advance, during and after shows. For example, Ireland’s youth decamp annually outside Dublin for a weekend of music and culture to the Electric Picnic outdoor festival. Raidió na Life goes along and takes to the stage as well – encouraging people to call into them, to follow their

antics and to post on social media their own experiences of the event. This enables real face-to-face communications and many of those who encounter the station and its programming at the picnic, return to Dublin and want to maintain that contact and involvement with the Irish speaking community. So personal social life leads to socialising and this leads to community.

Listeners on-line

In some cases, as for all stations who transmit on line, the listeners can be from abroad. For Irish speakers this is unusual but provides a special thrill. One of the respondents, Alison, has a show based around the experiences of Irish speakers abroad and she was particularly proud of those who were not Irish originally but who chose to learn the language and to tune in to her show. She makes big efforts to engage these. For example, she shared the experience she had of engaging with a self-taught Irish speaker in Liverpool who regularly listened to her show and who she interviewed as a result of his feedback to her on social media. He told her that this was the first actual conversation he had ever had in Irish.

The idea of being a station that Irish speakers would listen to all the time was rejected. The volunteers agreed that some Irish speakers did not believe that the Irish spoken on Raidió na Life was of a good standard. Such concerns reflect powerful ideologies about language variation and the valorisation of language purism over transgressive linguistic practices and in media content (Moal et al, 2018). However, they were all grateful that most of the people who in their view like to correct others' grammar seemed to concentrate on listening to RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta and ignored Raidió na Life. This, it seemed, left them happier and easier in their minds about concentrating on the content rather than on the standard of the language, in particular in terms of their pride about the music.

They were not worried about building this community further and they did not seem to believe that they had any responsibility to do so. This surprised us, as we had expected that they would see themselves as leaders or *animateurs* in the language revival movement. Many other new speakers interviewed by us positioned themselves as activists and saw new speakers in general as playing a key role in language development (O'Rourke and Walsh, 2020). This does not seem to be the case in Raidió na Life. The station manager was initially surprised by this conclusion, however, on reflection he believed that there may be more confidence in the existence of an Irish speaking community among Irish speakers than among language activists. He explained:

Maybe the bad situation of the 1980s and 1990s, when the station was founded, have changed now and for the crowd who have grown up in the last twenty years, they don't remember and they don't see that there is any problem (Muiris Ó Fiannachta).

This was one of the biggest surprises to us as researchers and as older, language activists. We were inclined initially to view this as selfishness or blindness to the plight of the minority language. On reflection and after probing the issue further with the manager, we regard it far more positively, as confidence on the part of younger Irish speakers that the language exists and is used and that the community radio station is just a part of the fabric of a vibrant Irish language community.

Irish language radio not for Irish speakers only

Part of this confidence can be seen in the attitude of volunteers towards speakers of other minority, non-indigenous languages spoken in Dublin. A limited number of programmes on Raidió na Life are broadcast in other languages such as Portuguese, Polish and Catalan. This question came up unprompted during the focus group meeting and there was general agreement that it was important for Raidió na Life to provide air space for these speakers in their own languages. This reveals a level of awareness of the utility of the media in supporting minority languages yet it is curious that they did not seem to be explicitly aware of the Irish language as a minority language in need of support and bolstering.

Another volunteer explained that she believes Raidió na Life has a role in serving groups that no one else is catering for, in particular those who don't speak much Irish, along with those who speak other languages, when she says that she sees the station as:

A community radio station that makes an effort to serve groups that no one else is serving – that's how I think of it [Raidió na Life] and I don't really count the Irish language as part of that really. I say that we use a lot of Irish on the station but I think it's very important that people who don't speak much Irish, and then people who speak different languages get a chance. That's something to do with music, as far as languages try to serve the public (Alison).

The station's support for other minority languages can be viewed as a political act because it subtly positions Irish as part of a broader spectrum of linguistic diversity in Dublin but with Irish centre-stage. Rather than focusing on the absence of Irish, the inclusion of such programmes was supported and even embraced by all participants.

Although they do not dominate the schedule, the fact that programmes in other languages were raised spontaneously by participants indicates that they are viewed as salient in the discussion about the standard of Irish. The discourse portrays speakers of other languages as unmarked and normalised, that it is entirely natural that an Irish language station would broadcast some programmes in other minority languages while maintaining Irish as its main language. This is seen as part of the broad and inclusive linguistic spectrum recognised and valorised by Raidió na Life: not only does the station support those with more post-traditional and hybridised forms of Irish, it also offers a platform for other small language communities in the city. This could be a pro-minority language or even pro-immigrant language discourse rather than one of general multilingualism as English does not feature in the mix. The reasons for the inclusion of such programmes in the schedule will need to be explored in further research with staff members. As other community stations in Dublin such as NEAR FM and Dublin South FM also broadcast programmes in immigrant languages, such communities do not need to rely on Raidió na Life alone for a broadcasting outlet. A tentative conclusion is that the Irish language station is making a subtle political statement in favour of minority and immigrant languages in general. This was not considered by the original founders of the station but has emerged over time. Perceptions around the fluid standard of Irish and the inclusion of other languages on air can be interpreted in a framework of 'translanguaging' (García & Li Wei 2014), where different linguistic varieties and styles co-exist in a state of flux and influence each other, either in the repertoire of individual speakers or across the communicative interaction. Such translanguaging practices often celebrate the ability of multilingual speakers to move easily between linguistic varieties. While there is little individual multilingual practice on Raidió na Life, as most of its output is in Irish only, we argue that translanguaging is still a useful frame as there is huge variation in the style and

variety of the Irish used and the station's schedule also contains shows in other languages which use some Irish.

Content is king

All of the volunteers stated their belief that the most important aspect of Raidió na Life's success was the quality of its content. They all agreed that their shows reached a wider audience than the community of Irish speakers, in particular the alternative and niche music shows, and they were very proud that the music that they play entices people who would have little, or even no, Irish to listen to the station.

Áine presents a music programme and clearly loves the connections she makes with musicians and the music scene in Dublin. Each of the participants in the focus group, at different stages in the discussion, stated their interest in music as a factor that contributed to their enjoyment in being involved in Raidió na Life. They each said that they believed that the quality and variety of the music played by the station was a reason why it was popular or successful. In many cases, they believed it was the principal reason why people listened in. As Roibeárd explains:

There's a really high listenership for the music programmes, because of the standard. With regards to the music programmes, we know, more than anything else, because I personally know people who listen to Áine, to Billy Ó hAnluain on Saturday, to Jama, to the other programmes – those programmes have earned a certain fame in Dublin (Roibeárd).

So, the provision of alternative music that they enjoyed themselves seemed, to this group of presenters, to be a primary reason why people tune in to Raidió na Life. It was an obvious a source of considerable pride to them that the music they played was alternative rather than mainstream.

Fundamental aims

The volunteer broadcasters did not seem to perceive the existence of a community of Irish speakers scattered throughout the wider city as a community that needs to be supported and developed, even though they address it daily. It may be that the focus group did not probe this sufficiently but it appeared that they were not conscious of the need to build a language community and that this may not have been made explicit in station training. On the other hand, it may be further proof of a genuine self-confidence in their future as Irish language speakers – a belief that they exist, that listeners they never meet exist and listen to them. They are young enough not to remember a time when the only media provision through Irish was RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta and they may take interventions that were started by others and have a relatively long history for granted for example TG4, *Gaelscoileanna* and Raidió na Life itself.

When asked to describe the aim of the station however, it became clear that they believed in the project or mission of Raidió na Life, even if they did not believe it was their personal responsibility to execute it. They agreed that Irish was important and they said that there could be no Raidió na Life unless it was through Irish but they did not seem to feel that the language is the most important aspect of the station. When asked what the aim of Raidió na

Life was, many of them believed that the station exists to provide opportunities for people to broadcast and to broadcast specifically through Irish.

Two voluntary broadcasters gave their view of its *raison d'être* in a short discussion as follows:

It's [Raidió na Life] there to give an opportunity to young people, not just for young people, but for new people (Uinsionn).

It's there to provide opportunities for participation for the broadcasters of the city through Irish and through the Irish language primarily with some exceptions like programmes in Portuguese, Catalan, Polish and it's important that we serve other minority languages in the city but to give them opportunities while primarily giving them to Irish speakers in the city to broadcast in Irish (Roibeárd).

So, the opportunity to broadcast, to learn and to practice broadcast skills or the opportunity to have your voice heard, these were the main reasons given for the existence of the station rather than viewing broadcasting through Irish as a way of supporting or growing the community of Irish speakers, as we had expected to find. Very few volunteers stated clearly, without any prompting, that Raidió na Life exists primarily to build a community and only one of these claimed that its aim was to build an Irish speaking community. As one volunteer put it 'Raidió na Life fosters a kind of modern community – it's not old style tradition – it's a different and mixed community' (Naoise). This is in stark contrast to the discourse of endangerment (Duchêne and Heller, 2007) often observed by sociolinguists researching minority language communities. A discourse that this minority language is on the brink of extinction may be common among academics, the public and language promotion agencies. It may be fostered by the mainstream media but there was no evidence of any awareness or sense of endangerment among the participants in the study.

Another volunteer said that she believes Raidió na Life was set up to normalise the use of Irish and to make it more social or 'sociable' and this met with general agreement, for example as Uinsionn put it:

It is important to show that the language is alive and is to be heard and is in use outside of the *Gaeltacht*. We know that Raidió na Gaeltachta does that in a way but anyone can walk into Raidió na Life and I think that the way that they accept anyone lets people know emotionally that the language isn't just ours – it belongs to everyone in some way (Uinsionn).

This is one of the clear benefits for a minority language community of having their own station - that of raising and enhancing the profile and the status of the language both within the minority language community and in the wider society in which they exist. It would appear that those who work as volunteers in Raidió na Life believe that the station performs this function, although they may not state it as explicitly as expected.

Áine saw the aim of Raidió na Life as being to create an Irish language radio community rather than an Irish speaking community and she sees this as one where a wide variety of music is the most important thing. She describes the station as 'An Irish language community radio station but also one where there are huge differences in music, that's where I'm coming from, for the whole station and not just for my programme' (Áine).

At least three others in the focus group made similar statements at different points throughout the discussion. The station manager reflected on this finding and believes that this is normal in community radio stations generally, that the actors are not necessarily aware of the impact and importance of their actions and that they volunteer for personal gratification rather than for altruistic reasons. He said:

I think that if you looked around at all of the community radio stations in the country, I'd say that you would see the same thing in each station. That is that not every broadcaster in the station looks at themselves as a social activist and again ego underpins a lot of this and it's just that people like to hear themselves on the radio (Muiris Ó Fiannachta).

This is quite far from the original aims of the founders of the station which was to support and develop the community of Irish speakers in the capital city through broadcasting. That was to use radio as a tool to achieve language goals, rather than perceiving broadcasting and the broadcasting of contemporary and alternative music as the ultimate goals of the project.

Motivations of volunteers

When we probe the motivations of individuals to volunteer and to broadcast with the station, we begin to get a better understanding of what they believe the project of this community radio station is about. In other words, we begin to understand what they want to get out of their volunteering and we can ask if this can be said to build community. Our research found that the primary motivation to volunteer with Raidió na Life for most broadcasters was social – to enhance their personal social lives through the Irish language –and to a lesser extent, for career purposes. In pursuing these social and professional aims we believe that the volunteers develop networks that ultimately build the community.

The participants of the focus group reported having a love of radio; an interest in the Irish language; the provision of occasions to practice and speak the language and the opportunity to socialise through Irish as their reasons for being involved in the station. No volunteer singled out the promotion of Irish as the principal trigger for their involvement, as this volunteer's statement shows:

I love the radio, I always loved the radio and I've a big interest in the Irish language. So, I knew Raidió na Life because I had friends who were involved...and when I heard that they needed a news reader I decided to apply, so really, it was the radio and the enjoyment I get out of it rather than the Irish (Shona).

Some of them mentioned the enhancement of employment prospects as an incentive. For example, one participant, Áine, wished to retrain as a teacher following a period abroad and used Raidió na Life as a means of improving her fluency in Irish. This motivation was linked to her career and not apparently based on an active ideology of Irish language promotion.

The station manager, reflecting on his own reasons for joining the station as a volunteer, could understand the motivation of career enhancement as being more important to volunteers initially than an interest in developing the linguistic community. He said:

When I think back on it, I think maybe I thought it [the station] would work as a place for training and that I would learn the trade of broadcasting and that maybe that would be the first step on the ladder I would need to climb up into the mass media. TG4

[Irish language television station] had just come on air a few years before and I was studying Irish in the university and I suppose the message that was being pushed in the university was that there are careers out there in the Irish language media and Raidió na Life was mentioned as a place where you could call in and try something out. Therefore, I suppose really it wasn't language activism that was foremost in my mind at first when I started my first day and sometimes, for those of us who do engage in language activism every day, maybe we forget that maybe it is not something that everyone who happens to speak Irish thinks about and that they don't think too deeply about it, that they are not losing sleep over the state of the Irish language (Muiris Ó Fiannachta).

In terms of motivation, the benefit of finding employment identified by Cormack (2004) was found to be a factor for some of members of the focus group but the enjoyment of socialising with other Irish speakers was the primary motivation for the majority.

This social aspect of media participation for speakers of minority languages has not been emphasised in previous studies of minority language media, where authors have tended to concentrate on economic benefits, identity formation, political activism or the projection of a positive image of the minority to the majority population. Moriarty (2011) and Kelly-Holmes (2011) have studied the media use of Irish through informal genres such as comedy and hip-hop but these have focused on output from media outlets that are predominantly in English. It is similar to, but not the same as, the phenomenon described as 'social capital' by Putnam, (2000). Our finding is unusual in the case of Irish language media where the research focus has tended to be on harder policy dimensions and is largely ignored in studies of community media where little attention is paid to fun and enjoyment as motivations for participation. Social enjoyment was of major importance for those in our focus group and they spoke very clearly about the social and personal benefits that accrued to them as a result in their involvement in the station. For example, one young musician explained to us that he became more confident in speaking Irish but also increased his social circle through being involved in the station:

I suppose the interactions that go on here too as I am kind of involved in the Irish life of Raidió na Life too and as I said I play music through Irish and stuff like that and I've even got to know other musicians from working in Raidió na Life. I got lots of experience talking live about music, not just through Irish but through Irish and English. Now when you have to speak live, sometimes you'll be nervous and you are not able to make the points so with practice it becomes easier and it's in every area of your life and I think those are the biggest things. (Naoise).

There was general agreement on this and volunteers repeatedly stated their belief that their participation in the station greatly enhanced their personal social lives. They talked of the role of the station in widening the range of friends and in deepening relationships that they would not otherwise have. As Áine explains:

I love coming in here and talking to Marc and Muiris and Feargal and everyone...I made one of my best friends, she was a co-presenter on my music show...I just love coming in, you can talk Irish and we have great craic and mm, yeah, I get press passes to gigs and simple little things like that and I'm quite friendly with lots of bands and musicians and that I admire and they say 'Hi, Áine!' and I love that and it's wonderful, you know when bands come in to play live on my programme and you know they are right in front of me, singing, just for me! (Áine).

Perhaps the most poignant testimony to the powerful networking that leads to community came from one young man who explained that when he was newly arrived in Dublin, participation in the station gave him an introduction to a whole circle of friends:

I suppose, for me as a person who was coming to Dublin, without knowing anyone, I landed in September and Raidió na Life made it much easier for me to make friends. There was that connection from the radio and I have made very few other friends outside of the world of Irish and the football team, Raidió na Gaeltachta and Raidió na Life, these are the majority of the friends that I have made since I came to this place and that is a wonderful thing. And that is the reason I keep going, to get to know more people and I enjoy it too, there's a bit of craic [enjoyment] about it (Uinsionn).

These young people volunteer primarily to enhance their social lives and through doing so they meet others and speak Irish with them and form close friendships and more loose relationships through music, clubbing, drinking and in this way they seem to build the network and by extension the Irish speaking community. The importance of new social spaces in allowing 'new speakers' of Irish to socialise, and their influence on consolidating Irish speaking identities has been explored by Seoighe (2018). We believe that this is an interesting phenomenon worthy of further study in the case of radio because it appears to have a positive impact on the development of a linguistic community. These volunteers seem to be unwittingly fulfilling the vision and dreams of the early founders and of current management. So, although the original aim of building a vibrant linguistic network and community was not mentioned as a motivation for joining the station by any of those we spoke to, the aim of making friends, of finding others to speak Irish with and of accessing social circles of Irish speakers most certainly did. It would seem that instead of the conscious and idealistic activism of the early founders of the station, the current volunteers are unwitting *animateurs* in that they are concretely building networks and communities and they are thereby achieving that original aim.

Conclusions

All participants agreed that joining Raidió na Life had positively influenced the amount of Irish that they use and, in some cases, had enhanced their competence in Irish. They all agreed that the standard of Irish broadcast on the station was mixed but they welcomed what they saw as the station's inclusive approach to a variety of new speakers and to other small language communities in the city.

They clearly enjoy being part of a community of Irish speakers who meet each other and socialise through the station and they all expressed pride in finding listeners who they did not know previously. However, they did not seem to feel any responsibility to actively promote the language or to build and develop the Irish speaking community. This was a surprise, as it had been one of the original aims of the station. We were further surprised to interpret their discussion as a vote of confidence in that language community, one which they seem to believe exists and is vibrant without the need of overt interventions by them as broadcasters on the station. An alternative interpretation would be that they are blind to the linguistic pressure on Irish, particularly in the *Gaeltacht*. Our conclusion at this point, however, is that this represents a subtle vote of confidence in the strength and vibrancy of the Irish language community.

Their responses confirm our view that Raidió na Life functions as an alternative public space for new speakers of Irish although they do so in an even broader way than we had expected.

As Irish is not widely used socially or publicly in Dublin, the station creates a shared public space that can be accessed by all of those who wish to present radio programmes in Irish, even by those with limited competence. There is no evidence of a discourse of endangerment being used in relation to Irish. Rather, a sense of confidence in Raidió na Life as an open and inclusive space for a range of new speakers of Irish and of other languages seems to be widespread amongst volunteers. An explicitly activist discourse around the station's role as a means of building a community of Irish speakers was absent, with participants instead expressing support for the tolerance of linguistic diversity and translanguaging practices heard on air. Discourses of national identity were also noticeably absent as motivating factors for volunteer broadcasters in this station.

Such findings are in line with the work of Cormack (2004) who argues that normalisation; enhanced speech opportunities; informal learning; employment opportunities; supporting weaker speakers and terminology development and dissemination are the main advantages of broadcasting in minority languages. The aim of community building was not found to be prominent amongst the volunteers we met but the enjoyment of socialising and of engaging with the Irish speaking community were both found to be hugely important to them. These latter two – socialising and engaging – have the effect of building the community and of strengthening networks of Irish language speakers. The net result is the realisation of the station's original aim of strengthening and building the Irish language community in Dublin.

It is difficult to classify or define this phenomenon when it appears to be spontaneous and personal rather than planned and political. It seems to have been overlooked in much sociolinguistic research on Irish and in community media research in general. This finding is tentative as it was made on the basis of preliminary research but it clearly deserves further scrutiny and research from those engaged in the fields of Sociolinguistics, Media Studies and Community Development in Ireland and internationally.

As the identification of a gap between the motivations of volunteers and the aims of management and founders was a surprise to us, we conclude with an intriguing question for fellow researchers, academics and activists:

Does it matter if a community is being built by people who are simply enjoying themselves rather than acting as politically conscious *animateurs*?

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