

# Internet radio and podcasts as alternative to the public service and commercial mainstream media in Poland: the cases of *Radio Nowy Świat*, *Radio 357*, and *Raport o stanie świata*

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to show to what extent alternative audio media can be built online, not only by amateurs but also as a combination of the energy and involvement of professional journalists and the community of listeners who are ready to support them. Moreover, the topic of the extent to which this form of production is similar to the model of alternative media produced by amateurs described by Hackett and Carroll (2006), as well as Atton and Hamilton (2010), is also discussed. Special attention is paid to the ways this can challenge the institutional media logic and provide an interesting alternative to pro-government public media and commercial mainstream media in a country in Central and Eastern Europe that is dropping down the rankings of the Democracy Index. The podcast *Raport o stanie świata* and two Internet radio stations, *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Radio 357* from Poland, which are analysed in this article, were born in an act of protest against the negative changes in public service broadcasting, which became a propaganda tool. They are financed by listeners via the crowdfunding platform *Patronite* and do not broadcast advertising. A framework for analysing their functioning is devised using, in particular, theories of the public sphere and of alternative media. The study is based on content analysis of the call-in broadcasts disseminated for the first anniversary of the stations, *Radio Nowy Świat* (April 16 and July 9, 2022) and *Radio 357* (January 5, 2022). Pre-structured interviews with the patrons of *Raport o stanie świata* are also used. Websites and social media accounts of these initiatives, as well as press coverage and data gathered by the *National Broadcasting Council* in relation to *Polish Radio*, are analysed as well. The research found that all three initiatives *Raport o stanie świata*, *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Radio 357*, despite being started by professionals, share some of the characteristics of alternative media and can significantly change the model of audio production, financing and consumption routines in Poland.

## Keywords

Radio; Internet radio; Digital audio; Web radio; Radio stations; Podcasts; Podcasting; Public radio; Media; Audio communication Poland; Central and Eastern Europe; Media system; Independent media; Public sphere; Alternative media.

## 1. Introduction

The media ecology has mutated from the traditional broadcasting system to a new media ecology, adapted to new models of media consumption (Scolari, 2018).

Streaming media started with radio in the mid-1990s, and it was radio that made the text-and-graphics-based web a fully multimedia platform (Bottomley, 2016, p. 3). Internet radio—an audio signal delivered through the Internet (Black, 2001), including web-only radio stations—permeates the logics of radio, making participation and co-creation by audience the central point (Bottomley, 2016, pp. 18-19).

The term ‘podcasting’, introduced in 2004 by the journalist Ben Hammersley, is a combination of the particles ‘pod’ after the name of the mp3 player –iPod– and ‘cast’ from the word ‘broadcast’. The term was introduced to describe the emerging phenomenon of production of audio content and putting it on the Internet (Bonini, 2015). Podcasting’s eureka moment came with the release of *Serial* in October 2014, telling the story of a 1999 murder at a Baltimore high school. It was downloaded more than 80 million times (Frery, 2017).

The more popular podcasting has become, the more often it has been suggested that podcasts are rather ‘complex multimodal texts’ (Vasquez, 2013, p. 240), distinguishable from traditional radio due to the ‘hyper-intimacy’ of close and active listening to people from one’s own community or specific sphere of interest (Berry, 2016, p. 667).

As reported by Mark Frery, podcasts have proven the perfect tool to share knowledge and information also in the world’s most highly censored areas, and become part of the free-speech movement. For example, he discusses the case of Vietnam and *Loa.fm* podcast under the editor Quỳên Ngô, which appeared in April 2015. In Zimbabwe, Christopher Farai Charamba and Tawanda Henry Biti have produced the weekly *Politics and Beyond* podcast since the end of 2016 (Frery, 2017). *Sinica*, a weekly podcast on events in China hosted by long-time Beijing residents Kaiser Kuo and Jeremy Goldkorn used to be very popular as well (Sinica, 2018).

The topic of the role of digital audio in providing an alternative to mainstream media is rather understudied. There are many studies about community radio as a form of alternative discourse on the air (Howley, 2005; Gordon, 2012), however, they rarely concentrate on Internet radio or podcasting as a form of community broadcasting. Yet, as underlined by some authors, public-purpose podcasting has created a unique (and uniquely valuable) space of public discourse, especially in the pre-commercial phase of podcasting (Aufderheide et al., 2020).

This article examines to what extent alternative digital audio media can be built, not only by amateurs, but as a combination of the energy and involvement of professional journalists and the community of listeners who are ready to support them. The geographical context of this study is important—Poland is a country located in Central and Eastern Europe in which freedom of speech still exists, but it is increasingly difficult to exercise, especially in public service media. The goal is to show of how this kind of media, as in the model of alternative media produced by amateurs described by Hackett and Caroll (2006), can contest the concentration of institutional media power (Atton; Hamilton, 2010, p. 124) and is becoming an interesting alternative to the commercial and pro-government public media.

## 2. Media in Central and Eastern Europe

After World War II most countries of Central and Eastern Europe were found in the Soviet sphere of influence. The media certainly had an impact on the overthrow of communism in the region after 1989, being the accelerator of change (Ociepka, 2003, p. 18). The transformation of the system from communism to democracy resulted in the emergence of new media centres, including broadcast media: private radio stations and television stations, which began to play a very important role in individual countries. After a brief period of exultation in the freedom and diversity of the media in Central and Eastern Europe, the media became subject to political and economic conflict. The attitude based on market expectations also left a deep mark on the emerging media systems, resulting in their commercialization and globalization. What is more, as Jakubowicz and Sükösd (2008, p. 18) point out, in Central and Eastern European countries, public policy in the media field served party goals rather than the public interest. It was also rarely seen in terms of a set of clearly defined values the media are supposed to serve (Sparks; Reading, 1998, p. 180).

Slavko Splichal emphasizes that despite the commercialization of the media system in Central and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, communist methods of control were evident (Splichal, 1994, p. 86), and even in the late 1990s there were “a surprising amount of the old order” (Sparks; Reading, 1998, p. 175). Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska accurately diagnoses that we should associate the phenomenon of the politicization of mass media with the immaturity of political elites and with the inheritance of certain habits developed during the communist period (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2002, p. 28). For new political parties that were poorly embedded in social movements, control of the media was extremely important (Hallin; Mancini, 2012, p. 21).

Unfortunately, these problems are still visible in countries from the region. Central and Eastern Europe is characterized by a much more visible top-down role of state power in the media than in Western societies (Bognar, 2018, p. 228). Politicians in individual countries, despite the democratic systems in these countries, still use, to a greater or lesser extent, power and influence to exert pressure on media (Williams, 2008, p. 149). Peter Bajomi-Lázár underlines that while a certain degree of state interventionism in the media market is advisable and necessary, in Central and Eastern

Europe it is too often confused with the destructive interventionism of the ruling elites, which he places in the context of partisan media politics (**Bajomi-Lázár**, 2017). In this context, it is worth recalling Karol Jakubowicz's assertion that most post-communist media systems are "free but not independent" (**Jakubowicz**, 2001, p. 59). However, it is worth stressing that periods of some de-politicization are interspersed with periods of greater control.

### 3. The Polish case

Poland, which was able to draw from the experience of underground opposition journalists, was, along with the Czech Republic and Hungary, among the leaders in the region in terms of the pace of media privatization and recognition of their independence after 1989 (**Curry**, 2006, p. 92). However, Poland did not avoid problems typical of other countries from Central and Eastern Europe. Former communists, as well as opposition representatives, tried to have an influence on media. There are noticeable characteristic backward steps in the process of the democratization of media, which led to increased control over the media (**Curry**, 2006, p. 92). What we can now observe is a serious backward step on the path of media democratization. After a phase of stable growth, Poland has dropped down the rankings in the *Democracy Index*, published by the *Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)*. The country is no longer ranked in the highest category of 'consolidated democracy', according to the report's methodology. Instead, it is classified as a 'semi-consolidated democracy'. The *EIU* put the blame squarely on Poland's nationalist and populist ruling *Law and Justice (PiS)* party for the country's reduced rank and stated:

"The ruling conservative-nationalist *Law and Justice (PiS)* party continued its efforts to turn the country into an illiberal democracy, by constraining the independence of the judiciary and consolidating media ownership in Polish hands" (*EIU*, 2020).

In the *World Press Freedom Index*, Poland fell to its lowest ever position of 64th, following consecutive years of decline from a high of 18<sup>th</sup> (*World Press Freedom Index*, 2021).

The negative changes in the media system are becoming increasingly visible and include, but are not limited to, converting public media into a propaganda tool, giving financial support to media outlets that support the government from state-owned companies in the form of advertising (whereas oppositional media outlets cannot count on this kind of support), large private media companies being taken over by state-owned companies supervised by government supporters, attempts to eliminate private companies that are in opposition to the government from the market through changes in the media law.<sup>1</sup> The media landscape has become very polarized, reflecting a division in Polish society between government supporters and opponents. In contrast to the situation in Hungary, many private media entities in Poland are highly critical of the government (**Karolewski; Benedikter**, 2016), but the environment for conducting such an activity is becoming increasingly unfriendly.

In the context of this article, especially interesting changes are these related to the public media sector, which gave rise to independent audio initiatives on the Internet and have significantly changed the media landscape in this field.

After the *Law and Justice Party* won the elections in autumn 2015, they successfully changed the legal system under which public media authorities were elected. This new regulation, called the *Small Amendment of the Broadcasting Act of 29 December, 1992 (Polish Parliament, 2015)*, allowed an immediate replacement of *Telewizja Polska i Polskie Radio Boards*. According to Stanisław Jędrzejewski, because of these changes,

"the principle which formed the basis of the regulatory philosophy (...) of this system was also questioned, i.e. that the government's authority over public media is exercised by an authority other than that directly subordinate to the government or a part of it" (**Jędrzejewski**, 2021).

This reform was followed by others, the most important of which was the establishment of the *National Media Council (Rada Mediów Narodowych)* in 2016 with the right to hire and fire management staff for *Telewizja Polska i Polskie Radio* – a power that had been previously in the hands of the *National Broadcasting Council (Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji)* (*Polish Parliament, 2016*).<sup>2</sup> These changes in the legal system were the start of significant changes in the programmes of *Telewizja Polska i Polskie Radio*.

It is true that before *Law and Justice* became a ruling party in 2015, the preceding governments tried to have an influence on what was broadcast in public media and who the chairman of Polish TV and Radio broadcasting might be, but this influence was never so immediate, so severe and so deeply questioning of the basic rules under which the public service media was functioning. *Telewizja Polska i Polskie Radio* have become propaganda tools which openly support the government. As shown by Piotr Żuk on the basis of the analysis of the programme of Polish TV, this propaganda is based on the promise of social assistance from the populist authorities as well as nationalist, homophobic and exclusionary ideology (**Żuk**, 2020). This is the reason why people in Poland started

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to call the station *TVPIS (Television of the Law and Justice Party)* instead of *TVP (Polish Television)*. Several independent portals and social media accounts were created to document and mock official propaganda, especially on Polish TV, like [tvpis.org](http://tvpis.org), [pasek-tvpis.pl](http://pasek-tvpis.pl), [www.facebook.com/tvpisstop/](http://www.facebook.com/tvpisstop/)

The changes in *Polskie Radio* arouse especially strong emotions in the society in the case of the *Third Channel of Polskie Radio*. This channel was created in 1958 and obtained national coverage in 1962. The programme was based on radio personalities and had a musical angle. It had been dedicated to an educated and very devoted audience (Oleszkowicz, 2021) seeking a different style of radio than was offered by other channels; not so official, in which more Western music was presented and a little bit more freedom of speech in the Communist Era was tolerated (Gutowski, 2012). The unique character of the Third Channel was built over the years and survived to a greater or lesser extent until spring 2020. It is true that major personnel and programme changes, and the shift of the general tone in the pro-government and conservative direction, can be observed in the *Third Channel* since 2016, however, the unique formula was finally removed by direct political intervention into the programming of the station in 2020.

On 15 May, 2020, the *Third Channel* broadcast the weekly listing of the *Hits List*, which was led by one of the leading personalities of the station, Marek Niedźwiedzki. According to the information provided during the programme, the first place on the list was taken by a Polish rapper, Kazik and his song “Your pain is better than mine”, which contains references to Jarosław Kaczyński’s (a leader of the *Law and Justice* party) visit to a cemetery on 10 April, 2020, despite its closure due to the pandemic. After the broadcast, the song was removed from the official website of the radio, and the website of the *Hits List* stopped working. It caused the mass exodus of the most popular journalists of the *Third Channel* from the station, which was preceded by the dismissal, or the leaving of the station by other *Third Channel* celebrities. As the popularity of the channel and its unique character was based on them, it caused a complete change in the programme as well in the audience that was closely related to the station and showed solidarity with the journalists leaving the station.

The attempts to rescue the programme with such a long history did not end with success despite several protests organized by the listeners, politicians and the support of different organisations. The listenership of the station decreased to the lowest level in its history of less than 2% (Kurdupski, 2021). However, this situation paved the way for innovative alternative solutions of how to deal with an unfavourable environment for audio broadcasting in Poland. This is how the history of the podcast *Raport o stanie świata* and two Internet radio stations, *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Radio 357* started, as well as some other media initiatives. The success of these projects even exceeded the expectations of the founders.

Dariusz Rosiak, who used to be the host of a well-known high-quality *Third Channel* broadcast *Raport o stanie świata* [*World Status Report*] in which current international affairs were discussed, was taken off the air in January, 2020, without any explanation from the *Channel’s* Board of Directors. The only chance to say goodbye to the listeners who listened to the broadcast for 13 years was a post on the *Facebook* fan page (*Raport o stanie świata*, 2020). He decided to ask the listeners for help to be able to continue his activity in the form of an independent podcast. The production is financed by the listeners via the crowdfunding *Patronite* platform.

“The new life of the *Report* begins now” –with these words, the first episode of the podcast, published on 7 March, 2020, on podcasting platforms, was started. It is worth mentioning that the host of this podcast, Dariusz Rosiak, turned out to be not only very successful in collecting money for his project but also the community of journalists placed high value on his production. He was awarded the prestigious award, *Journalist of the Year 2020* (Press, 2021). Other major journalists of *Third Channel*, who were either dismissed from *Polskie Radio* or resigned, advised by loyal listeners who could not



<https://raportostanieswiata.pl/>

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stand the disappearance of the bellowed radio personalities from the air, also decided to look for Internet solutions for their activity. Those who left the station a little earlier decided to start the Internet radio station *Radio Nowy Świat*. The foundation of the station was preceded by collecting money for this purpose via the crowdfunding platform *Patronite* in April, 2020 (Bochyńska, 2020a), which was a resounding success and made it possible to launch an Internet radio station in July, 2020. The station became very popular in a short period of time and led to skyrocketing sales of receivers adapted for online radio use. They were advertised on the most popular selling portal in Poland as receivers via which “it is possible to listen to *Radio Nowy Świat*”. That is why we can call this station the one that started a small radio revolution in Poland on the market of Internet radio receivers. The station proved that despite only being active on the Internet, it could attract a large audience, who were not only ready to listen to the radio online but also to buy new equipment if needed and finance the station on a daily basis.

This station was followed by *Radio 357* –another online radio station created by former journalists of *Third Channel*. It started broadcasting in January 2021 and is also financed by listeners via the crowdfunding platform *Patronite*. During the first year of its functioning, the station overtook *Radio Nowy Świat* in the amount of people who regularly support its functioning.

#### 4. Internet, new media and an alternative public sphere

The term public sphere was originally defined by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas who characterised the public sphere as being

“made up of private people gathered together as public and articulating the needs of society with the state” (Habermas, 1989).

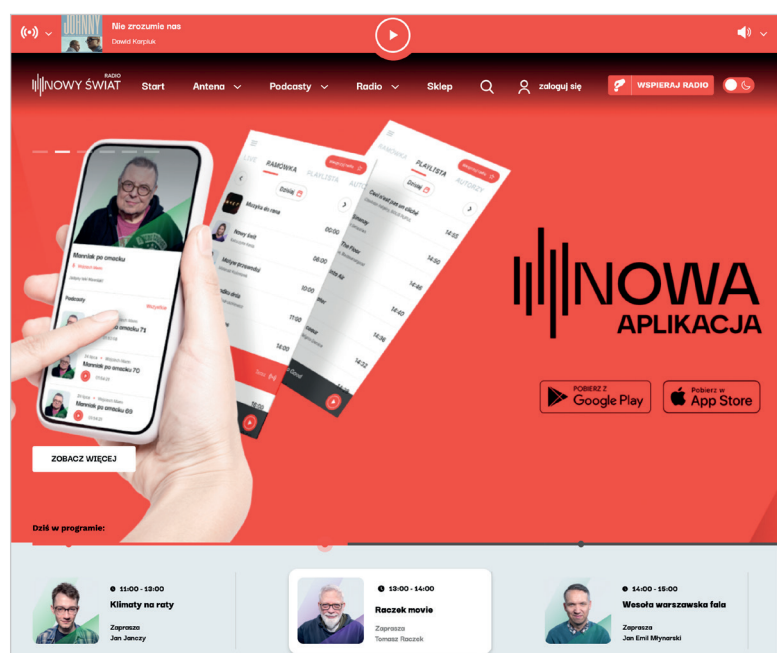
Public sphere is a place common to all, where ideas and information can be exchanged. In *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas argues that the mass media, which should facilitate the debate and provide space for different voices, is not very successful in this field, because of its commercialization and the influence of public relations (Habermas, 1989).

The public sphere in the media context can be analysed in the three dimensions introduced by Dahlgren (2005): structural, representational and interactional. The structural dimension of the public sphere refers to the manner of organization of a particular communicative space –this dimension is connected with issues such as access, freedom of speech and the level of inclusiveness. The representational dimension is a structure built on openness and accessibility. This dimension is related to issues such as agenda-setting, pluralism of views, accuracy of coverage and others. The last dimension is the interactional one. It is connected with the exchange of views between citizens and the media and between citizens themselves (Batorski; Grzywińska, 2018).

Since the Internet became popular in everyday life, scholars have argued whether the emergence of the Internet would support the development of democracy and public debate (Dahlgren, 2005). Many researchers were convinced that it would contribute to the democratization of society (Papacharissi, 2002) and encourage citizen activity (Kling, 1996).

However, despite declarations that the digital age heralds new opportunities for plurality, the reality is different –not all voices are equal and not all are equally heard (Luce et al., 2017). The public sphere in the era of big online media platforms became heavily commercialized, and as underlined by Sekloča (2019), reciprocity exists between users when they exchange content, but not between users and the content-based media or political centre. The Internet is far from revitalizing the public sphere, and it quite often instead adapts to the current *status quo* (Morozov, 2011).

Yet there are many examples that the Internet can serve as an alternative discussion platform to traditional media discourse. This phenomenon is largely observed in authoritarian countries (Etling; Roberts; Faris, 2014), where it becomes a mechanism for political communication that can lead to remarkable democratic victories (as witnessed, for example, what social media did, by the Arab Spring) (Ingram; Bar-Tura, 2014). Blogs were recognized as a platform that provided an alternative public sphere: a space for civic discussion and



<https://nowyswiat.online/>

organization that differs significantly from that provided by the mainstream media, TV, and government (Etling; Roberts; Faris, 2014) as well as some *YouTube* channels (Antony; Thomas, 2010, pp. 1280-1296). Hyperlocal media is defined by covering very small geographic areas, having a community orientation, providing coverage of spaces forgotten by the mainstream media, producing original content and having a majority presence on the Internet (Metzgar; Kurpius; Rowley, 2011, p. 714; Harte et al., 2019) and are also worth mentioning in this context. However, an alternative can also be offered by Internet-based audio content.

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## 5. Characteristics of alternative media

The growing popularity of audio content online, especially in the form of podcasting, but also web radio, makes digital audio a perfect tool for providing an alternative to mainstream media.

Alternative media is generally understood to include non-dominant media (in contrast to what is often termed mainstream media, linked to hegemonic discourses and great economic power) (Atton, 2002).

Hackett and Carroll (2006) presented three characteristics of alternative media.

1. Alternative media tend to be ‘relatively autonomous from corporate capital and the state’. Their independence from the dominant methods of organizing media encourages them to experiment with more inclusive and egalitarian forms of control, such as collective and consensus decision-making;
2. Alternative media tend to pursue politically progressive aims; they ‘give voices to issues marginalized in hegemonic media’;
3. The promotion of ‘horizontal communication between members of marginalized groups and across these groups’.

Hackett and Carroll (2006) underline the importance of alternative media in transforming audiences from consumers of media to participants of the media production process. What is more, as Curran and Seton showed (1997), based on the example of the English Radical press, alternative media leads to the redrawing of technical and professional roles and responsibilities, together with social and cultural transformation.

As pointed out by O’Donnell, within a public sphere context, alternative media on the Internet could offer an alternative to mass media by using different production practices, such as those fostering capacities for reflection on the experiences of media audiences (O’Donnell, 2001).

## 6. Methodology

A framework for analysing *Radio 357*, *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Raport o stanie świata* activity on the Internet is devised using particular theories of the public sphere and of alternative media.

The analysis is based on the content analysis of the call-in broadcasts disseminated for the first anniversary of the stations *Radio Nowy* (two broadcasts from 9 July, 2021) and *Radio 357* (one broadcast from 5 January, 2022). Two of them were received directly from the stations –they were not published online, or the access to them was limited only to patrons. Four pre-structured interviews with podcast *Raport o stanie świata* patrons which were carried out in June 2021, were also analysed (Doliwa et al., 2022).

In the research on these projects, statements published on official websites, *Patronite* profiles, as well as *Facebook* fan pages proved useful. Additional data were derived from press articles. Information about the budget of the national *Polskie Radio*, used in the discussion section to better understand the effectiveness of newly established Internet radio stations, were derived from official reports published by the regulator *National Broadcasting Council*. The radio listenership of the *Third Channel* of the *Polskie Radio* is provided by a recognised research centre responsible for regular research in this field: *Track Kantar Polska*. The data about the number of streamers of the *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Radio 357* comes from the stations themselves and they were at first collected by the journalists of the online portal dedicated to media *wirtualnemedial.pl*.

The complete list of sources used is available in the reference list.

The starting point of the analysis is the date of taking the broadcast *Raport o stanie świata* [*World Status Report*] by Dariusz Rosiak off the air of the *Third Channel* of the *Polskie Radio* in January, 2020. This event encouraged the author to start a podcast under the same name, financed by the listeners via a crowdfunding platform and it paved the way for the development of two other successful Internet audio projects *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Radio 357* also started by former *Third Channel* journalists. The end of the study is marked by the first anniversary of the functioning of the youngest of the discussed projects –*Radio 357* in January 2022 and a summary of the financial results of all three initiatives provided by the crowdfunding platform *Patronite* in February 2022.

## 7. Results

The analysis of the functioning of the three projects was conducted to in reference to the elements of the characteristics of alternative media provided by **Hackett** and **Carroll** (2006) and described earlier.

### 7.1. Relatively autonomous from corporate capital and the state

The independence of *Radio Nowy Świat*, *Radio 357* and the podcast *Raport o stanie świata* is secured mostly by the model of funding of all three discussed initiatives. They decided to base their activity on the financial support of their listeners and not broadcast advertising. This makes them independent from corporate capital, or state funding. In the case of the discussed online radio stations, support from listeners is the main source of income, however, occasional sponsorship and collaboration agreements between the companies and these audio initiatives does occur. But, at this moment, they can certainly be sustainable even without this additional financial support.

*Raport o stanie świata* was the first project from this group registered at the crowdfunding platform –it was on 25 February, 2020. *Radio Nowy Świat* soon followed and started collecting money via *Patronite* less than two months after *Raport o stanie świata*. This initiative also collected the largest amount of money since its inception. However, as for now, the largest number of patrons support *Radio 357*, which results in the biggest sum of monthly payments, not only in the context of these three initiatives, but also in general in Poland.

Table 1. Basic data about the functioning of *Radio Nowy Świat*, *Radio 357* and *Raport o stanie świata* in the *Patronite* crowdfunding platform (9 February, 2022).

Name	Registration date	Number of patrons	Monthly income in PLN/€	Income in total in PLN/€
Dariusz Rosiak ( <i>Raport o stanie świata</i> )	25.02.2020	6,067	91,440 / 19,202	1,646,885 / 345,846
<i>Radio Nowy Świat</i>	16.04.2020	30,976	632,043 / 132,729	14,641,353 / 3,074,684
<i>Radio 357</i>	05.10.2020	43,387	817,591 / 171,694	10,386,402 / 2,181,144

What is important is the fact that the patrons seem to be very loyal and ready for long-term financial support. This is confirmed by the research conducted among the patrons of *Raport o stanie świata* (**Doliwa et al.**, 2022), but also data collected by the *Patronite* platform, which was admitted by one of the employees of the platform, Marcin Skonieczny, during the anniversary broadcast of *Radio 357* (*Radio 357*, 2022).

The independence from the state in the case of the three analysed initiatives is also secured by way of disseminating the programme –via the Internet, which means that no special permission or formal license of broadcasting is needed. These two foundations –financing system and Internet, whose implementation makes these projects resistant to not only governmental, but also business pressure.

This independence is seen and admired by the listeners. The opinion of one of them, expressed during the anniversary broadcasts in *Radio 357* can serve as an example.

“*Radio 357* is the first free, truly free medium in Poland, because contrary to what could be seen on the streets lately, the fight for free media, *Radio 357* is independent from politics and aggressive advertisements” (Marcin; *Radio 357*, 2022).

### 7.2. They tend to pursue politically progressive aims, they give voices to issues marginalized in hegemonic media

The model of functioning of the analysed media outlets is different from other media, which itself makes them different and alternative to what is offered by traditional radio stations. This is related to a different model of financing and organizing of the station, but also different programming.

One of the differences is the fact that politicians are not invited to the station (their voices appear only in news bulletins in the case of radio stations). Instead, political journalists and experts comment on current affairs.

What is more, no advertisements are broadcast on air. Instead, on *Radio 357* a jingle is provided “Advertisements? Thanks to you –we do not have them” and short sketches are offered which are advertisement parodies.

What seems to be important in the case of the analysed radio stations, they support young journalistic, thespian and musical talents. As declared by the chief editor of the station *Nowy Świat* [*New World*]

“It is not ‘New World’ only in name –we want to educate future generations of professional radio broadcasters who will take over the reins in a few, or a dozen years, and will do it skilfully” (**Bochyńska**, 2020b).

“The station proved that despite only being active on the Internet, it could attract a large audience, who were not only ready to listen to the radio online but also to buy new equipment if needed and finance the station on a daily basis”

The team offered not only air time to young talents who were selected during the application process, but also provided training for this group of people.

Both stations strongly support young artists. As underlined by one of the former celebrities of the *Third Channel of Polskie Radio*, now employed by the *Radio 357*, Piotr Stelmach,

“We strongly support Polish artists and help young artists. We ourselves receive a lot of support from patrons and we want to share it by passing it on” (Jk, 2022).

Both stations organize concerts of young musicians, invite them to the studio and also give them the chance to be radio presenters.

Moreover, the programme of both radio stations is not strictly formatted. This means that they are open to a variety of music styles. Additionally, both stations do not resign from high quality and expensive production content; examples include radio features and documentaries, as well as radio drama, genres that were previously limited to public radio.

Tiziano Bonini describes podcasters as the heirs of the free spirit of the creators of independent pirate radio (Bonini, 2015). When we compare the ‘big wave’ of pirate radio in Poland from the early 1990s (Doliwa, 2022) with those discussed in this article, two online radio stations and the podcast *Raport o stanie świata*, we can find a lot of similarities as well. What is worth stressing, in particular, is the unique enthusiasm that accompanies such initiatives by the creators as well as the listeners of such stations, who, as in the 1990s, are ready to support such projects.

### 7.3. Horizontal communication

One of the aspects of communication which unites all three initiatives is the strong relationship with the audience in general and patrons in particular. When describing the project, their creators often use terms like ‘our podcast’ and ‘our station’, making the supporters an important part of these initiatives. For example, the author of the podcast *Raport o stanie świata*, Dariusz Rosiak, calls it on the official website,

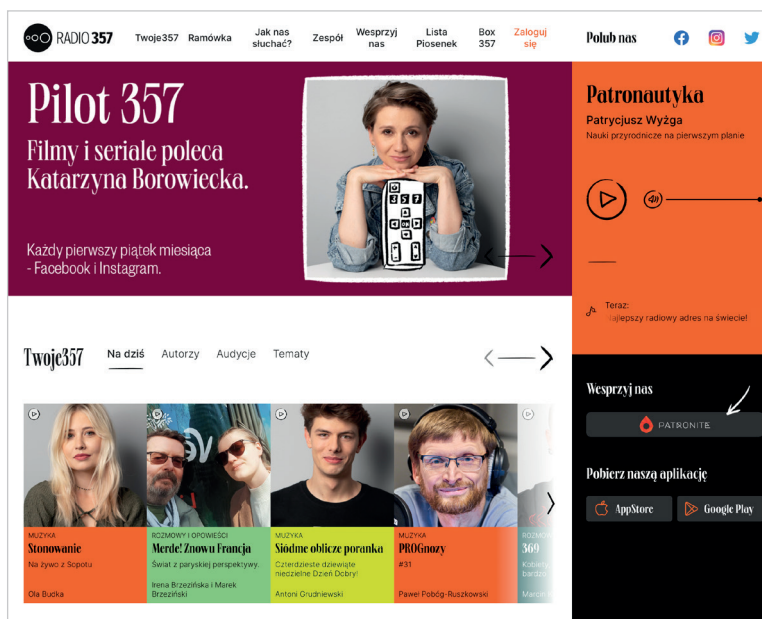
“a home for thousands of listeners who want to get to know the world in all its richness, a complex but fascinating, ambiguous and inspiring world” (*Raport o stanie świata*, 2022).

The creators of all three initiatives feel responsible before the listeners and patrons and all of them communicate the importance of this relationship and involve the audience in several initiatives. These are not only live concerts and broadcasts from public places (which during the pandemic had to be limited) but also special platforms that can be used as a channel of two-way communications, for example, closed Facebook groups for patrons. ‘Old-fashioned’ ways of communication are also in use, for example, for the *Polish TOP Radio 357* (the list of the best songs in the world published since the time when most of the journalists of *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Radio 357* used to work at the *Third Channel of Polskie Radio*) over 9,000 postcards with suggestions of songs were sent. Making the patrons the indispensable element of the project is also provided at the symbolic level. For example, *Radio 357*, when preparing a video clip for a song specially recorded for the first anniversary of the station, decided to use not only the faces of popular presenters of the station, but also those sent by patrons (Ørganek; Komoszyńska, 2022).

The close relationship between the broadcasters and the listeners is also possible to be reported from an audience perspective. An example can be a statement coming from one of the interviews with the patrons supporting *Raport o stanie świata* financially. As admitted by one of them, Maciej Adamczyk,

“I have established a relationship with the authors. It is a form of closeness or familiarity, the listeners are closer to the senders” (Doliwa et al., 2022).

“What is worth stressing, in particular, is the unique enthusiasm that accompanies such initiatives by the creators as well as the listeners of such stations, who are ready to support such projects”



<https://radio357.pl>



Similar opinions were shared during the anniversary call-in broadcasts in *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Radio 357*.

“*Radio 357* works in collaboration with its listeners and thus is a truly independent medium that can actually do what it wants with the listeners who actually co-create this radio. Happy birthday” (Marcin; *Radio 357*, 2022).

“I am a patron from the very beginning, as soon as I found out that the channel would start. This news really moved me. After completing the formalities and joining the group of patrons, we only had to wait, because we waited together with my wife, and in fact the whole family. This waiting, it was like being a child waiting for Christmas to come, you basically look at the calendar –is it already? Oh no, not yet (...). So we waited until it finally took off. It was great excitement” (Mariusz; *Radio Nowy Świat*, 2021a).

The listeners also do not hesitate to give some advice to the station via email, social media or phone calls, like Dawid, who called the station during the anniversary broadcast.

“Such a small comment, I think, organizational. It is very important to reply to e-mails from the listeners” (Dawid; *Radio 357*, 2022).

They are also involved in organising some radio events –like the anniversary meeting of the patrons and *Radio Nowy Świat* journalists in *Przypki* (*Radio Nowy Świat*, 2021a).

The stations feel responsible before the listeners and try to be as transparent in their functioning as possible. This can be illustrated by the statement of the chief editor Magdalena Jethon of *Radio Nowy Świat*, who, in the broadcast for the first anniversary, presented a short description of how the money from the patrons is spent and announced the date when the detailed report on finances would be made official (*Radio Nowy Świat*, 2021b).

Moreover, the analysed radio stations’ initiatives seem to have a more democratic model of functioning inside the station. This is particularly visible in *Radio 357*, which has a form of limited partnership based on an employee cooperative and two leading personalities behind this initiative –Kuba Strzyczkowski and Marek Niedźwiecki, and the Board, which is responsible for the fulfilment of the goals agreed on with the patrons. As underlined by Tomasz Michniewicz, one of the creators of *Radio 357*, this is a far more democratic and transparent radio structure than in a typical radio station.

“We have chosen this form because it is the closest to us. It enforces consensus, there is no prescriptive, hierarchical corporate governance. We have already worked in such a structure. Now we want to build a place that we will all host. This does not mean that every matter will be decided by everyone, but the point is to agree on the directions and strategy, to choose it with the vote of the majority” (Kozielski, 2021).

*Radio Nowy Świat* also has a legal form of partnership with limited liability, but the shares are in the hands of the most important journalists and people involved in making this project possible.

It is worth stressing that the journalists have the feeling that it is their radio, which can be illustrated by a statement by one of the leading journalists of *Radio 357* during the anniversary broadcast.

“I remember the delivery, when everyone admired the first console, the microphones that came in such large packages. When unpacking, we felt a bit like children with Christmas presents. We arranged the schedule, we came up with new programme titles, paying attention to what it costs because it was known that we could not afford everything” (Strzyczkowski; *Radio 357*, 2022).

Especially at the initial phase of the radio creation, the journalists had to be involved in activities which are not typical for them, like planning the budget and securing the technical and legal aspects of radio. They were happy in that because they had the feeling that they were taking part in something important, what they had an influence on.

## 8. Conclusion

All three initiatives, *Raport o stanie świata*, *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Radio 357*, despite being started by professionals, share some of the alternative media characteristics in all three aspects described by Hackett and Carroll (2006). They proved that what seemed to be up to that point unlikely was, in fact, possible. For example, they showed that it is possible to collect money for such initiatives among listeners and resign from advertising. The model of financing these projects is completely different from what was known before, especially if we take into account the scale of these initiatives and the number of listeners and patrons supporting them.

“ Both stations do not resign from high quality and expensive production content; examples include radio features and documentaries, as well as radio drama, genres that were previously limited to public radio ”

“ These two foundations –financing system and Internet– makes these projects resistant to not only governmental, but also business pressure ”

They also proved that a lack of a license and disseminating the programme only on the Internet is not a big problem anymore. The two analysed stations became game-changers as far as listening to the radio via the Internet is concerned and played a similar role in Poland in popularizing this way of listening to audio content that *Serial* performed in America in popularising podcasting (Spinelli; Dann, 2019). Poles of different ages showed that they were ready to listen to *Radio Nowy Świat* or *Radio 357* on a daily basis, not only via computers and mobile phones but also by investing in new Internet radio receivers.

The analysed initiatives also proved that they could offer high-quality programmes (the quality, for example, was confirmed by prizes and nominations won by the journalists of *Raport o stanie świata*, *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Radio 357* in the *Grand Press 2020* and *2021*) for much less money than a public broadcaster. Taking into account the fact that, as declared by the chief editor of *Radio Nowy Świat*, the station costs around 6 million PLN (1,260,000 €) per year (*Nowy Świat*, 2021b), the sum is several times smaller than that spent for the *Third Channel* of the *Polskie Radio*, which in 2020 received public support of more than 45 million PLN (9,450,000 €) (KRRiT, 2021), despite the fact that the station can count on additional money from advertising.

In light of this fact, a kind of paradox is also the popularity of *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Radio 357* as opposed to the listenership of the *Third Channel* of the *Polskie Radio*. Of course, there are important differences in the methodology of the research in the case of FM and Internet radio, which makes a comparison very difficult. However, the listenership of the *Third Channel* station decreased to the lowest level in its history (less than 2% of Poles aged from 15 to 75, which means that the number of listeners oscillates around half a million Poles (Kurdupski, 2021)), whereas in December 2021, the *Radio Nowy Świat* and *Radio 357* stream was downloaded by a total of 1.3 million IP addresses in the case of each station (Ram, 2022).

## 9. Notes

1. The case of the leading television news channel in Poland *TVN24*, which was to be eliminated from the market by changes in the *Broadcasting law* that would have forced the owners of the company *TVN-Discovery* group to sell its shares because of the American origins of the capital involved in this venture can serve as an example; in December 2021 this amendment to the *Broadcasting Act* was vetoed by the President.

2. The *National Broadcasting Council* is a regulator in the broadcast media market, whose members are appointed by the President, the *Sejm* (lower house of the *Polish Parliament*) and the *Senat* (the upper house of the *Polish Parliament*), and whose autonomy from the changes in the government is to some extent secured by the rule that every two years only one-third of the *Council* can be replaced, which makes the immediate changes in the Board of the public service media impossible.

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“ The analysed radio stations’ initiatives seem to have a more democratic model of functioning inside the station ”

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