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Managing Media in Prison: The Case of Prison Radio

ABSTRACT

This study examines the governance and editorial control of prison radio across diverse regulatory environments, with a particular focus on a closed-circuit prison radio station located in one of Poland's largest prisons. Drawing on data from the Global Prison Radio International Survey covering 48 radio initiatives across 18 countries, analysis of the mission statements of selected prison radio projects published online, interviews with prison radio representatives from India, Norway, and Australia, and a case study from a prison in Grudziądz, Poland, the research investigates how institutional structures shape content creation, access, and inmate participation. While some prison radio projects allow incarcerated individuals limited editorial freedom, many are tightly controlled, with content restricted to rehabilitative messaging and available only for the incarcerated within prisons. The study reveals tensions between security-driven media governance and the rehabilitative and expressive potential of prison radio.

KEYWORDS: prison radio, radio, radio management, prison, media in prison

STRESZCZENIE

Zarządzanie mediami w więzieniu na przykładzie radia więziennego

W artykule przedstawiono modele zarządzania oraz kontroli redakcyjnej radia więziennego w różnych środowiskach regulacyjnych, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem radiowęzła więziennego działającego w jednym z największych zakładów karnych w Polsce – w Grudziądzu. Opierając się na danych z międzynarodowego badania Global Prison Radio International Survey, obejmującego 48 inicjatyw radiowych z 18 krajów, analizie misji wybranych projektów radiowych publikowanych online, wywiadach z przedstawicielami radia więziennego z Indii, Norwegii i Australii oraz studium przypadku radiowęzła Zakładu Karnego w Grudziądzu, pokazano, w jaki sposób struktury instytucjonalne wpływają na tworzenie treści, dostęp do mediów i udział w takich projektach osób osadzonych. Chociaż niektóre projekty radia więziennego zapewniają osobom pozbawionym wolności ograniczoną swobodę redakcyjną, wiele z nich podlega ścisłej kontroli, a publikowane treści mają głównie charakter informacyjny i resocjalizacyjny oraz są dostępne wyłącznie dla osadzonych wewnątrz

zakońców karnych. Potrzeba podporządkowania się wymogom bezpieczeństwa nie zawsze sprzyja pełnemu wykorzystaniu potencjału resocjalizacyjnego radia więziennego.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: radio więzienne, radio, zarządzanie radiem, więzienie, media w więzieniu

Introduction

Defining the term prison radio is difficult because of the heterogeneity of practices and institutional and national contexts in which such media emerge. Some scholars have suggested that prison-related radio can be divided into two primary genres. The first includes programs broadcast from outside prison walls—typically via community or internet radio—that are addressed to incarcerated people or discuss issues related to incarceration. These are often referred to as prisoners’ radio and tend to operate independently of penal institutions (Anderson, 2012). The second genre, commonly labelled “prison radio,” is produced within correctional facilities and often involves incarcerated individuals in the creation and presentation of content (Anderson & Bedford, 2017a). While Anderson and Bedford propose using prisoner radio as a broader term encompassing both types, the international landscape increasingly adopts prison radio as the common label for all audio activities related to incarceration. The establishment of Prison Radio International (PRI) in 2022—a global network connecting prison radio initiatives—confirms this linguistic and conceptual consolidation.

One of the most inclusive definitions of prison radio comes from McDonald (2014), who conceptualizes it as audio media produced for and often by people in prison, involving diverse actors such as prisoners, former prisoners, their families, community activists, and professional broadcasters. This definition, although remains relevant, predates a significant transformation of the media environment, in which traditional broadcasting has been supplemented—or, in some cases, replaced—by digital distribution channels, including podcasts and internet radio. The contemporary understanding of prison radio needs to encompass audio projects that extend beyond conventional radio broadcasting, while retaining key characteristics, including regular production, participation of incarcerated individuals, and alignment with the goals of prison radio.

There has been a growing interest in establishing prison radio projects, but also in conducting research in this field. Recent work by Kaun and Stiernstedt positions prison radio within the broader category of prison media, examining prisons not only as sites of punishment but also as environments of media production, technological experimentation, and information flow. The authors

highlighted the ambivalent role of prison radio as both a platform for inmate self-expression and a mechanism of institutional control (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2023, pp. 113–120). Studies conducted by leading researchers in this field, Anderson (2008; 2012) and Bedford (2015; 2018), have primarily focused on the civic and transformative potential of radio produced by or with prisoners. Subsequent publications by both authors analyzed prison radio as a space for empowerment (Anderson & Bedford, 2017b; 2019) and a tool for community development (Anderson, 2013; Anderson & Bedford, 2021). They also highlighted the diversity of approaches to operating prison radio, which is influenced by geographical, technical, and institutional factors (Anderson et al., 2022).

Regional differences are evident in media practices, including management models, as culture influences both media practices (Hanusch, 2009, pp. 621–622) and media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2017). At the same time, many similarities exist, as the idea of media convergence promotes the standardization of media content and media organizational models (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 3–4). These processes also influence prison radio, which is increasingly becoming a global phenomenon.

Prison radio forms part of the non-commercial media sector, where management practices differ significantly from those in commercial organizations. Strategic decisions are guided primarily by an organization's mission and values, shaping choices related to content, programming, and audience engagement, rather than profit maximization (Howley, 2009). The mission statements of prison radio projects around the world offer valuable insight into the objectives and identity narratives that underpin their operation. As Lister, Mitchell, and O'Shea (2009) argue, mission statements are essential to the management of radio stations, because they express brand values that shape internal culture and external perception. Research also shows that clearly defined mission statements enhance organizational performance by fostering internal cohesion and supporting consistent leadership practices (Desmidt, Prinzie, & Decramer, 2011).

This is especially important in organizations in which volunteers play a significant role, which is often the case in prison radio projects. In such organizations, managers must foster a culture where members contribute not out of contractual obligation but because of shared values and mutual benefit (Enjolras, 2009; Young, 2001). Accordingly, the first aim of this article is to address the following Research Question 1: What are the recurring elements of the mission statements of prison radio projects around the world?

Organizational structures in non-commercial media tend to be participatory, often involving volunteers and community members. This model is most commonly supported by nongovernmental organizations, but it can also be implemented through other legal forms, such as cooperatives, trusts, and

educational institutions (Lewis & Booth, 1989). Accordingly, the second aim of this article is to address Research Question 2, which examines the legal forms adopted by prison radio initiatives.

Management in these settings requires the careful allocation of limited resources, including funding, equipment, and human capital, often provided through grants, public support, or nonprofit sponsorship (Picard, 2011). Content and audience management are informed by research and consultation with target communities to ensure relevance and engagement, while human resource management emphasizes the training, coordination, and motivation of diverse teams (Howley, 2009; Lewis & Booth, 1989). Non-commercial media must also balance technological innovation with practicality, by adopting low-cost and digital platforms (Jenkins, 2006; Howley, 2009). Finally, risk and compliance management are important, as these organizations must adhere to ethical standards (Lewis & Booth, 1989). The third aim is to address Research Question 3, which examines prison radio management practices in three different radio stations: RøverRadion (Norway), Jailbreak (Australia), and Tinka Tinka (India). These practices include risk and compliance management, reflected in consent procedures; content and audience management, closely linked to balancing rehabilitative aims with security and reputational concerns; human resource management, including decision-making processes, participatory practices, the recruitment and training of incarcerated producers, and pathways for people with lived experience to move into staff or governance roles; And, finally, production and distribution management, reflected in different systems for distributing programs.

The fourth aim is to examine similarities and differences between the management model of the prison radio station in Grudziądz, Poland, and those used by other stations discussed in this article, in terms of mission, legal form, and management practices (Research Question 4). Additionally, the study examines the similarities and differences between the mission statement of the Prison Radio Service in Poland and the recurring elements identified in the mission statements of other prison radio stations, as well as the capacity of the prison radio station in Grudziądz to achieve the goals set by the Polish Prison Radio Service (Research Question 5).

The problem of management in prison radio can be understood in two ways: as the internal organizational system of prison radio projects and as a tool for managing the incarcerated community. For example, research has shown that prison radio can be an effective tool in reducing feelings of hostility and anger among incarcerated people and promoting trust between them and prison staff (Einat & Nagar, 2023). This is also confirmed by the evaluation of the functioning of RISE (Rehabilitating Inmates Seeking Empowerment) Maximum Radio (RMR), which was launched in Trinidad and Tobago's Maximum Security Prison (Prison Radio International, 2025).

Both aspects of management in prison radio are important and merit discussion. However, this article focuses on management practices within prison radio projects.

Materials and Methods

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining international survey analysis, qualitative interviews, mission statements analysis, and a case study. The Global Prison Radio International Survey is an initiative of Prison Radio International (PRI) aimed at creating a global database of prison-related radio projects. The survey was developed in collaboration with Justice Matters Ltd, with support from the Prison Radio International Advisory Board, of which the author of this article is a member. Responses that formed the basis of the research were collected between October 6, 2023, and May 29, 2024. Participants were representatives of prison radio projects from various continents and countries.¹ As a member of the Prison Radio International Advisory Board, the author had access to the raw data collected during and obtained permission to use it. The results of the analysis were valuable in identifying the organizational forms of prison radio projects, as legal form shapes management practices (Research Question 2), and in informing the selection of projects for the subsequent stage of the study.

All online mission statements of projects that participated in the above-mentioned Global Prison Radio survey during the study period were collected and compiled into a Word file. The primary source used to identify each project's mission statement was the project's website. If the mission was not available on the website, or if the project did not have a website, descriptions provided on its social media accounts were taken into account. In some cases, Spotify profiles were included. This approach was particularly relevant

1 Argentina (Acá estamos, Atravesando Muros, Es Un Cine Para 25 Espectadores y Más, Esquina la libertad producciones, FM de Adentro, Radio Mosquito, Radio Ranchito, Radio Tiempo Fuera, RadiOculto, Retumba La Radio!, Voces, Voces en Libertad, Fuera de Sietema), Australia (Beyond the Bars, Jailbreak Health Project, Justicematters, Locked In, Loddon Radio, Prisoner Radio Network Australia, Proposed: Western Plains Community Radio, The Prison Show), Belgium (Radio Haren), Cameroon (Jail Time Records), Ecuador (Proyecto radial 22.000 voces), Hungary (Adj Hangot), India (Radio Parvaz, Tinka Tinka Jail Radio), Ireland (Inside Radio), Japan (Kousei Radio), Mexico (Taller de Radio CEJUV), Denmark (Bandit Radio – RøverRadion), Kenya (Prison Radio Kenya), South Korea (Special Radio Documentary for PRI), Trinidad and Tobago (Rise Maximum Radio – Radio for Change), the United Kingdom (Breakdown Podcast, Life After Prison, National Prison Radio in HMP Brixton, Outside In, The Lived Experience Series PodcastUK, Trapped: The IPP Prisoner Scandal – podcast), the United States (Ear Hustle, Inside Wire: Colorado Prison Radio, Making Amends, Outside: Inside Radio, Uncuffed), and Uruguay (Boquete).

for podcast-based prison radio projects. In the case of RISE Maximum Radio in Trinidad and Tobago, the source of the mission statement was a Prison Radio International newsletter. All the sources are included in the bibliography. The aim of this analysis was to identify the main themes and priorities in formulating the mission of these projects. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze this material. The author familiarized themselves with the material and identified recurring thematic categories. The analysis made it possible to answer the Research Question 1 about the recurring elements of prison radio mission statements as an important factor shaping the management strategies.

To identify different approaches to organizing and managing prison radio projects and to address Research Question 3, three interviews were conducted. The interviewees were managers of the following prison radio projects: Knut Erik Wold: CFO & Daily Manager of RøverRadion in Norway (2014–2024); Kate Pinnock who manages daily operations and editorial decisions in the Jail-break prison radio project in Australia and Vartika Nanda, the founder and CEO of Tinka Tinka in India. The interviewees were asked four questions: Who is responsible for managing daily operations, and how are decisions made in the projects you supervise? How can incarcerated individuals participate in decision-making regarding program content and other key aspects of the prison radio project? How do prison authorities influence or participate in decisions regarding the program content and overall development of the prison radio project? Is there a specific procedure for content approval before broadcasting? If so, please provide a brief description. Responses were received in different formats: transcribed answers to the questions sent by email (Kate Pinnock, 12.05.2025), text messages sent via Messenger (Knut Erik Wold, 28.04.2025), and a real-time conversation conducted via WhatsApp, which was transcribed afterwards (Vartika Nanda, 17.05.2025). Where necessary, follow-up questions were sent to clarify individual responses.

The Polish case study is based on a research conducted in one of the largest prisons in the country, located in Grudziądz, which houses a predominantly female prison population. The radio program is produced by women and primarily for women. Two main research methods were used in this study. The first method involved unstructured interviews. One interview was conducted with Elwira Strublewska, the lead coordinator responsible for overseeing the prison radio service. The prison visit also provided an opportunity to interview three incarcerated women involved in producing the radio program. Although the interviews were unstructured, the main topics were defined in advance and focused on the process of creating the radio content, the participants' influence on the program, and the benefits associated with such work. They were conducted with the assistance of prison staff, who remained in a separate room but could listen to the conversation, which may have influenced the responses to some extent.

In addition, surveys among incarcerated people were carried out among potential listeners of the prison radio. The questionnaire was partly inspired by a prison radio survey distributed by National Prison Radio (2014). However, the questionnaire was adapted to the Polish context and the objectives of the research project. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed at random among women in the facility in February and March, and another 150 among men in November and December 2023. In total, 123 questionnaires were returned from the women's section and 103 from the men's section.

Additionally, the monthly radio program schedule for March 2023 was also analyzed and the visit to the correctional facility in Grudziądz provided an opportunity to observe the live broadcast of the radio program.

This part of the research, conducted at the prison in Grudziądz, addresses Research Question 4 by examining similarities and differences between the management model of the prison radio station in Grudziądz, Poland, and those used by other stations discussed in the article, drawing on the above-mentioned interviews and observations. Interviews, surveys, observations, and an analysis of the monthly program schedule were also used to address Research Question 5, which focused on assessing the capacity of the Grudziądz prison radio station to achieve the goals identified by the Polish Prison Radio Service.

The research project received a favorable opinion from the Scientific Research Ethics Committee at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (decision of 14 February 2023), signed by Dr. hab. Beata Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, Professor at the University. Furthermore, the project received official permission to conduct research at Correctional Facility No. 1 in Grudziądz from the Plenipotentiary for Science of the Academy of Justice in Warsaw, Dr. hab. Michał Tanaś, Professor of the Academy of Justice (decision of 28 February 2023). Written consent was not obtained from the incarcerated participants to protect their privacy and ensure the confidentiality of their identities.

Results

The analysis of the mission statements of selected prison radio projects

This thematic analysis explores recurring patterns in the mission statements of the prison radio projects whose representatives participated in the Global Prison Radio Survey. As the survey did not include questions about mission statements, an online search was conducted to identify if any relevant statements could be found regarding these projects and to highlight any significant information discovered in those statements. In total, 19 mission statements were found and analyzed.

A central theme across many prison radio initiatives is the emphasis on empowerment and self-expression. Many mission statements frame radio as a platform where incarcerated individuals can make their voices heard, often in opposition to stigmatizing or silencing discourses. For instance, Radio Tiempo Fuera describe its purpose as “a space where we build a life of dignity” by “becoming aware of our rights and exercising freedom of expression through education” (Radio Tiempo Fuera, 2024). Radio Escolar aims to “increasing young people’s scope for expression” (UIL, 2024). Similarly, the Uncuffed project in California frames its mission around enabling people in prison “to tell their own stories” through structured training in narrative production (Uncuffed, 2024). A similar emphasis can be found in the mission of Prison Radio (USA). It is a San Francisco-based radio and advocacy project whose mission statement is “to include the voices of incarcerated people in the public debate” (Prison Radio, 2025). In Australia, the Jailbreak program highlights the power of radio as a bridge between people inside and outside prison, stressing the importance of “talking about life inside” and offering content curated by formerly incarcerated people themselves (Jailbreak, 2024).

Another recurring theme is the use of prison radio as a platform for rehabilitation and reintegration. Mission statements often link the act of participation in media production with the development of skills and the positive changes that prepare individuals for life beyond prison. The Tinka Tinka Jail Radio project in India explicitly describes its platform as one that “provides inmates with a platform to express themselves, develop communication skills, and engage in creative activities, thereby facilitating their rehabilitation and reintegration into society” (Tinka Tinka, 2025). Likewise, Radio Haren in Belgium describes its programming as contributing to rehabilitation and its aim is to “help inmates develop skills for reintegration into society” (Radio Haren, 2024) and Jail Time Records presents itself as an initiative “helping social reintegration” (Jail Time Records, 2024).

A third recurring theme, often highlighted across the sample is the effort to challenge dominant representations of incarceration and promote more human-centered portrayals of prison life. For example, Radio Ranchito in Argentina characterizes its production space as one that enables incarcerated young people to participate with the explicit aim of challenging and counteracting the “stigmatizing narratives often imposed on them” (Radio Ranchito, 2023). Similarly, RøverRadion in Norway seeks to “shift perspectives, build bridges, and foster greater understanding” by broadcasting the lived realities of incarceration to the public (RøverRadion, 2024). In the United States, Inside Wire: Colorado Prison Radio also presents itself as offering a “rare glimpse into a stigmatized and often mythologized world,” emphasizing its role in encouraging reflection and understanding across social boundaries (Inside Wire, 2024) and Jail Time Records aims at “changing society’s perception of imprisonment” (Jail Time Records, 2024).

Many projects also highlight the role of prison radio in building relationships—both within the incarcerated community and between those inside and their families, cultures, and communities outside. In these accounts, radio becomes a medium of emotional continuity and relational resilience. The Beyond the Bars project in Australia, which focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inmates, emphasizes its role in “connecting with culture and community” (Beyond the Bars, 2024). Similarly, the Jailbreak program highlights the need for “linking families and communities across Australia,” stressing its emotional and communicative function (Jailbreak, 2024). Likewise, Retumba La Radio! is offering “a feeling of freedom, of being part of something again, and of feeling useful to society” (Quintana, 2024).

The analysis helps to better understand the goals of these prison radio projects, which are closely related to management strategies. A particularly important feature of the mission statements is their strong emphasis on the human perspective.

Legal form: an important aspect of management

An organizational structure defines the roles of (and the relationships between) the different people, departments, and functions within an organization. It helps specify the division of work and the hierarchy, authority and formal lines of communication.

The global landscape of prison radio is marked by a variety of legal structures, reflecting the diversity of contexts in which these initiatives operate. According to the *Global Prison Radio International Survey*, most prison radio projects are run by charities, non-profit organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This model is especially common in Europe, where projects like National Prison Radio, The Lived Experience Series Podcast, Outside In (UK), Bandit Radio—RøverRadion (Norway), and Radio Haren (Belgium) have adopted this approach. The now-defunct Adj Hangot/Speak Out project from Hungary also followed this organizational model. Beyond Europe, this form of organization is widely used in South America (Radio Tiempo Fuera and Atravesando Muros in Argentina; RISE Maximum Radio in Trinidad and Tobago), North America (Ear Hustle and Uncuffed in the United States), as well as in Asia (Radio Parvaaz in India and Kousei Radio in Japan), Australia (e.g., Jailbreak Health Project and The Prison Show), and Africa (Prison Radio Kenya).

Another significant organizational model is operating as part of an educational institution, such as a school, university, or college. This form is particularly common in Argentina, where the projects include Radio Ranchito, Retumba La Radio!, Acá Estamos, Radio Mosquito, and Fuera de Sistema. The same organizational model is also found in other regions, by Radio Haren

(Belgium), Loddon Prison Radio (Australia), Inside Wire: Colorado Prison Radio (United States), Boquete (Uruguay), and Outside: Inside Radio (USA) reporting educational affiliations.

Some prison radio projects are run directly by the state or government. Examples include Western Plains Community Radio (Australia, currently in the planning phase), Voces en Libertad (Argentina), and South Korea's Making Waves Behind Bars. In Israel, the Israeli Prison Service (IPS) launched Radio Focus in 2017 at Ayalon, a high-security prison, providing a rare instance of a government-operated station run by and for incarcerated people.

Privately run or individually managed projects, particularly podcasts, represent another common organizational model. This is especially the case among projects from the United Kingdom and the United States that participated in the study, where initiatives such as Trapped: The IPP Prisoner Scandal, Break-down Podcast (both UK), and Making Amends (USA) exemplify this form. Some collective projects also adopt private organizational forms, such as Justice Matters (Australia) and Inside Radio (Ireland).

In addition to these main categories, other legal structures were also identified. For example, Esquina Libertad Producciones in Argentina operates as a cooperative, while Tinka Tinka Jail Radio in India is managed by a trust.

Management practices in prison radio

Understanding how stations position themselves within their mission statements and having knowledge about organizational structures is important, but it does not directly explain the managerial practices. It is therefore useful to examine the operations of certain projects. To this end, interviews were conducted with representatives of three projects from three different continents: Europe (Knut Erik Wold, RøverRadion), Asia (Vartika Nanda, Tinka Tinka), and Australia (Kate Pinnock, Jailbreak).

RøverRadion is a Norwegian prison radio run by an NGO, established in 2013 and operated by an association. This prison radio is made for and by incarcerated people in Norway, and is produced in five prisons: Oslo, Bergen, Halden, Eidsberg and Bredtveit prison for women. The program is broadcast within Norwegian prisons, and also, uniquely, nationally through Norway's public service broadcaster, NRK. Knut Erik Wold, served as CFO and Daily Manager of RøverRadion from 2014 to 2024 and was responsible for the day-to-day management of the organization. Editorial responsibility, however, was shared by Martine Rand and Mina Hadjian, with all major decisions made collectively by the three of them.

Before any content could be broadcast, it underwent a multi-step review process. First, the material was reviewed by the Norwegian Correctional Service,

followed by approval from the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK). Only after these steps (which could take up to two weeks) was it permitted to air.

Regarding regulations and ethical standards, Wold highlighted the importance of both written legislation and editorial ethics. Legal obligations included the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and privacy laws, which are particularly important in the context of incarcerated individuals. Additionally, editorial practice was guided by the *Vær Varsom-plakaten* (Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press). Some principles that are important when reporting on prisoners or individuals involved in criminal cases include the need to respect individuals' privacy, identity, ethnicity, and religious beliefs. Journalists are advised to avoid unnecessary exposure or stigmatization, especially when such information is not relevant to the case. According to this document, journalists must not present suspects or accused individuals as guilty before final court judgment. The media should avoid publishing names, photographs, or other identifying details, particularly when they involve vulnerable individuals, minors, or ongoing investigations. Identification should only occur if there is a compelling public interest. Journalists are also required to protect confidential sources, which is especially important in sensitive environments like prisons (Presseforbund, 2021).

The Jailbreak Health Project (JHP) is run by the nonprofit organization Community Restorative Centre, based in Sydney, which supports people and families in New South Wales, Australia, affected by incarceration. The radio program has been running for more than 25 years. Kate Pinnock, the Jailbreak Health Project Coordinator, is responsible for the project's day-to-day operations and the editorial decision-making. She reports to a manager in the organization who in turn reports to the CEO of the organization.

The prison radio program has historically been supported by Australia's community radio sector, which is particularly well developed in Australia. A key part of the mission of community radio stations is to provide an alternative voice and amplify the perspectives for minority groups, which is very close to the mission of many prison radio projects around the globe. The Jailbreak prison radio program is broadcast locally in Sydney on 2SER 107.3 FM, a community radio station. Nationally, it is distributed through the Community Radio Network (CRN), enabling access to a diverse range of regional and metropolitan community radio stations across Australia (Community Restorative Centre, n.d.). Jailbreak is also available as a podcast, with episodes accessible on digital streaming platforms including YouTube, Spotify, Apple Music, and Mixcloud. Recently, the program has become accessible to everyone in the New South Wales prison system secure tablets similar to iPads, originally designed for the United States prison system and offering limited access to internet content.

The structure of the program follows guidelines developed from an evaluation study that gathered listeners' feedback about the program. Throughout

the production process, participants can decide how and what they contribute. They can listen to the program once it has been completed and before it is broadcast. As Kate Pinnock emphasized, participants can withdraw their consent to be included in the program at any stage of the production. All voices featured in the program belong to people with lived experience of incarceration, including health promotion content and station jingles. Participants with such an experience are also represented on the Community Restorative Centre committees and boards. Many go on to become staff members.

The involvement of the prison authorities focuses more on rule enforcement and damage control than program guidance. All material intended for broadcast on community radio must be submitted to the commissioner's media unit for approval. Recently, however, the production process has changed since the program is now accessible to everyone in the New South Wales prison system via tablets. As a result, the prison authorities have requested an extra layer of editorial guidelines to protect the listeners and reflect the correctional service's requirements. This includes the removal of vulgar language from music and spoken content. Prison identification numbers are also to be deleted to protect incarcerated individuals from one another. It takes approximately a month to broadcast the prepared content due to the need to receive appropriate consent.

The Tinka Tinka Foundation Public Charitable Trust supports prison reform and prisoner rehabilitation in India through art, culture, literature, and media, including prison radio. The foundation provides training and supports 14 prison radio projects, which operate through a closed-circuit cable system and the Tinka Tinka Jail Radio Podcast.

The project operates under the central oversight of its founder, who serves as CEO and creative director, Vartika Nanda, while implementation remains decentralized across India's independently managed prison facilities. Each collaborating unit designates a nodal officer to liaise with Tinka Tinka, who reviews content and grants broadcasting permission, allowing adaptation to the specific constraints of each institution.

The management process begins with recruitment coordinated through the prison superintendents. Following auditions, 10–15 incarcerated people are selected, with preference for those serving long-term sentences to ensure continuity. Training sessions, conducted in person or online for five to twenty days, develop broadcasting and social skills. Trained inmates work in rotating teams for the morning and evening show, following a schedule that accommodates prison security protocols and operational realities. Editorial control operates as a collaborative process between Tinka Tinka leadership and local prison authorities. Incarcerated participants propose and produce content, often following seasonal themes or educational priorities, but final approval for broadcast rests with prison officials. According to the CEO, most material receives minimal interference, especially in institutions where trust has been established,

though sensitive topics receive greater scrutiny, with approval typically taking up to five days.

The initiative operates with very limited resources—almost no funding and only a small number of staff. Until recently, the founder personally managed all training and production, with occasional assistance from volunteers responsible for podcast editing. While these resource constraints restrict the scale, they contribute to the project's grassroots ethos and independence.

The case of the prison radio in Grudziądz

There are 120 prisons and detention centers in Poland, each with its own internal radio station. The broadcast programs include organizational announcements, educational content, competitions, legal information, and religious services. According to the Prison Service website, the educational and rehabilitative function is the primary role of prison radio stations. It is also stressed that the radio system enables incarcerated people to spend their free time actively and meaningfully, while also allowing them to participate in cultural life. By participating in the production of radio programs, prisoners gain a sense of purpose, which in turn boosts their self-esteem. They learn to cooperate and acquire new skills that may be useful after their release (Zespół Prasowy CZSW, n.d.). This mission of Polish prison radio closely aligns with key goals identified in the mission statements of other prison radio projects mentioned above, which include empowerment and self-expression, rehabilitation, and relationship building. One element that is absent is the ambition to challenge dominant representations of incarceration. The reason is that Polish radio projects are available only within prisons, with programs distributed through closed-circuit cable systems operated separately in each correctional facility.

Prison radio in the correctional facility in Grudziądz

The primary objective of the research conducted in Poland was to examine the management practices in relation to those described above from Norway, India, and Australia and the extent to which the prison radio operating in this facility is able to achieve the goals outlined on the Prison Service website, which closely resemble those expressed in the mission statements of various other prison radio projects analyzed from around the world. The research was conducted in one of the largest prisons in Poland, located in Grudziądz, which has a majority female population. This prison's radio station is also run by women, which makes it unique in the Polish context. The station's operating model is very similar to that of other prison radio stations in Poland, as confirmed by

previous research on prison radio projects in Poland (Doliwa, 2013; Anderson et al., 2022).

The radio station is run by a small team of three incarcerated women, who are supervised by a prison staff member. In Polish prisons, cultural and educational activities are typically overseen by a cultural and educational officer. This officer is part of the prison's education or rehabilitation department and plays a key role in organizing and implementing programs that support personal development and reintegration into society for people in prison, including a radio program. In the Grudziądz prison, which houses more than 1,000 men and women, there are only two cultural and educational officers employed, and one of them is the main supervisor responsible for the radio activities. However, radio is only a one of her many responsibilities, and the time she can dedicate to radio program is limited. Furthermore, cultural and educational officers are usually not trained in media production. This is one of the reasons why the program has a relatively standardized and conventional format that has remained largely unchanged for decades.

The radio equipment is very basic. The station has no dedicated studio. Instead, the broadcasting equipment is housed in a cabinet in the supervisor's office next to the library. A microphone is connected, a stool is placed, and the broadcast begins.

The management process in this radio station follows a top-down model. Elwira Strublewska, the cultural and educational officer, is the lead coordinator, and Mateusz Górka, the second cultural and educational officer, provides support as needed. Together, they work with a group of incarcerated women in preparing the program.

The program is produced primarily and presented by three incarcerated women. One of them is dedicated only to radio duties, while the other two divide their time between the radio and work at the prison library. Only two of the three are paid; both are employed for one-eighth of a full-time contract and typically work between 9:00 and 10:30 a.m. The third works as a volunteer. The women involved in running the station range in age from 36 to 50. One holds a degree in economics and management, another in dietetics, while the third has completed primary education.

Staff selection is based primarily on recommendations from prison staff. Other selection criteria include basic computer literacy, an appropriate sentence length, and placement in a semi-open prison ward. Being involved in the station is considered a privilege and may have a positive impact on parole decisions.

Involvement in prison radio production appears to be highly beneficial for the incarcerated women involved. During the interviews, all incarcerated interviewees described the work as "meaningful," "enriching," and "empowering." It provides them with a rare opportunity for personal growth, teamwork, and learning, in contrast to the physical labor that comprises 99% of available prison jobs. Time spent at the station offers a sense of normality and a chance to do

“something meaningful.” One of the interviewees also mentioned that for her, an opportunity to be a radio presenter was a chance to overcome a kind of barrier from her childhood to present something in public.

The program

Operating daily between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m., the station primarily retransmits content from mainstream Polish radio stations, including Eska, RMF FM, Radio Zet, Jedyńska, and Radio Maryja. In addition, the station broadcasts a daily program, usually aired between 9:30 and 10:00 a.m., providing information relevant to everyday life in prison, but also helping listeners to prepare for reintegration into society after their release.

The program consists, for example, of meal schedules, prison shop opening hours, ID photo sessions, and pricing updates. Messages from the prison administration, such as updates on privileges such as television viewing hours, package allowances, or activities organized by prison staff, like auditions for the prison music group, are also provided. In the program schedule, the listeners can also find competitions (typically two per month). From time to time, music from CDs and audiobook excerpts are broadcast. Talk segments—typically around 15 minutes long—are prepared in cooperation with a psychologist, the station supervisor, and educators from the penitentiary department, but presented exclusively by incarcerated participants, who read scripts on air. The written content is approved by the prison management at least two weeks before it is broadcast.

Overall, the program can be evaluated as highly structured and somewhat old-fashioned, as it relies heavily on scripts. Additionally, the content feels outdated because the scripts must be accepted weeks before the broadcast. There is limited scope for the creativity.

The broadcast reaches approximately 1,400 inmates. While roughly 85% of cells are equipped with a television, radio is a medium available to everyone. The audience consists predominantly of women, reflecting the percentage of women in this facility (around 85%).

The survey shows that, even though radio plays an important role in prison, and more than 55% of the respondents identified as regular listeners, the level of satisfaction with the program is relatively low. For example, only 37% of respondents in the men’s and 72% in the women’s section reported that they had an opportunity to hear something useful on prison radio.

Moreover, the program’s poor quality—perceived as old-fashioned and outdated—was identified as one of the main reasons for not turning on the loudspeaker, second only to a preference for watching television rather than listening to the radio.

Discussion

The first aim of this article was to identify recurring patterns in how prison radio projects define their goals (Research Question 1). Across the sample of 19 mission statements, the most frequently identified themes were: empowerment and self-expression, rehabilitation and reintegration, challenging stigmatized representations of incarceration, and fostering human connection and community. This suggests a strongly human-centered orientation, which is reflected in managerial and strategic objectives.

The second aim of the study was to identify the different legal forms adopted by prison radio projects as another important factor influencing management practices (Research Question 2). Across the global prison radio landscape, the most prevalent legal form is that of a charity or a non-governmental organization, reflecting a strong orientation toward public service, social justice, and independence from direct state control and the human-centered orientation identified in the mission statements. Alongside this dominant model, prison radio initiatives also operate as educational projects embedded within schools or universities. Some initiatives take the form of privately managed or individually led ventures, particularly podcast-based projects. State-run services administrated by prison authorities are less common.

These variations demonstrate the adaptability of prison radio models to local legal, social, and institutional contexts around the world. The most common legal structure—a non-governmental organization—enables projects to operate with relative editorial autonomy while securing funding through grants, donations, and partnerships, and it often facilitates collaboration with prisons, community organizations, and media professionals. In general, projects led by individuals or independent organizations working in cooperation with prison staff are more likely to maintain autonomy in program production and management, as they operate according to their own agendas, values, and missions and are therefore better positioned to negotiate the terms of collaboration. By contrast, prison radio services managed directly by prison administrations operate within a highly hierarchical system, which may limit the participatory nature of prison radio management, as is, to some extent, demonstrated by the Polish case discussed in this article.

The third aim was to examine selected management practices in prison radio projects from three countries: Australia, Norway, and India (Research Question 3). In these prison radio projects, a conventional hierarchical management structure is observed while simultaneously fostering collaborative decision-making processes to varying degrees across the three cases. In some projects, an approach can be seen that Carpentier (2011) would term “maximalist participation,” institutionalizing the involvement of people with lived experience of incarceration across multiple dimensions of production and governance. This

reflects a broader concept of “the right to communicate” that transcends symbolic inclusion (Howley, 2009) and is consistent with Rodríguez’s (2001) conceptualization of citizens’ media, in which participation constitutes a form of citizenship praxis.

This kind of approach to prison radio concept is particularly evident in Australia in the Jailbreak project, where people with lived incarceration experience are integrated into decision-making processes as members of the board and committees of the organization that runs the prison radio. Content development follows a collaborative approach in which participants are involved in selecting modes of expression, maintaining editorial control, and approving final productions. The radio program exemplifies the strategic development of participatory media practices within carceral contexts. This approach may also reflect the fact that Australia’s strong tradition of community radio, and the close links between the community radio sector and prison radio projects.

A similar approach is observed, though to a lesser extent, in the RøverRadion project and Tinka Tinka in India, where people with lived prison experience have an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process regarding the daily program, but not necessarily in shaping the projects’ long-term strategies. The fact that the production is managed by external organizations—an NGO in the case of RøverRadion and a trust in the case of Tinka Tinka—allows these projects to balance an inclusive production model with the hierarchical nature of the prison institution. This organizational structure demonstrates an adaptation to the constraints of the correctional environment, a management framework satisfying security requirements and some rehabilitative goals simultaneously.

In the Polish context, prison radio continues to operate according to a model that has remained largely unchanged for decades. The fourth aim was to compare the operation of the prison radio station in Grudziądz with other stations discussed in this article (Research Question 4). Overall, the organizational and management model differs from that of most prison radio projects worldwide. Because it relies on the limited and dispersed resources of the prison staff, without support from an external organization that could provide expertise in prison radio production, the effectiveness of the medium is reduced. The power relations between the staff and the incarcerated people involved in producing the radio are asymmetrical. The model of management is predominantly top-down with limited scope for reflection on how to organize the production process in a way that is both more inclusive and responsive to listeners’ needs.

When comparing the objectives of prison radio activities published on the official Polish Prison Service website with the mission statements of prison radio stations worldwide (Research Question 5), it becomes clear that they are very similar. However, the alignment between these ideals and everyday practice is only partially achieved.

The primary role of prison radio stations in Poland is defined as educational and rehabilitative, and it is stated that the program aims to “enable inmates to spend their free time actively and meaningfully, while also allowing them to participate in cultural life”. It is worth emphasizing that this kind of content is provided by the prison radio station in Grudziądz, however, its effectiveness is limited by the old-fashioned style of presentation and the top-down model of management and production, which makes listeners more critical of the content provided.

Another goal, mentioned on the Polish Prison Service website, is that through participating in the production of radio programs, incarcerated people feel that “they are valued, which in turn boosts their self-esteem, and they learn to cooperate and acquire new skills.” This objective appears to be achieved only to some extent by the prison radio station in Grudziądz. The program is indeed presented entirely by incarcerated people, so their voices are literally heard, but the freedom of expression and the scope for creativity remain very limited.

At the same time, it is worth stressing that the potential of prison radio is only partly realized, the program is produced in a very basic way—the presenters simply read prepared scripts into a microphone, following a highly standardized format. As a result, there is little opportunity to develop new ideas, improve radio production skills, or encourage creative self-expression. In addition, no training in radio production is provided.

Despite the limitations of this model, both the producers and the listeners highlight several positive aspects of prison radio. In particular, it provides incarcerated people with access to essential information and offers participants an opportunity to spend their time in ways they perceive as meaningful and closer to the everyday life outside prison. Finally, it is worth emphasizing that Polish prison radio has considerable potential, as every prison in Poland operates its own closed-circuit radio system, making this medium accessible to all incarcerated people.

Conclusion

This article has shown that prison radio projects worldwide consistently define their goals in strongly human-centered terms, emphasizing empowerment and self-expression, rehabilitation, and reintegration, challenging stigmatizing representations of incarceration, and fostering social connection and community. These shared priorities are, to some extent, reflected in managerial and strategic choices, particularly in the predominance of non-governmental and non-profit organizational forms, which tend to support greater editorial autonomy, participatory practices, and alignment with social justice values.

An analysis of management practices in prison radio projects in Australia, Norway, and India demonstrates that while hierarchical structures remain

inherent to carceral settings, externally managed and independent organizational frameworks create greater opportunities for inclusive governance and meaningful participation. The Polish case highlights a gap between the declared rehabilitative aims of prison radio and everyday management practices, suggesting that without organizational autonomy, training, and participatory production and evaluation procedures, the full potential of the radio cannot be realized.

Overall, the findings position prison radio as a distinctive form of non-commercial media. Similarities can be observed between prison radio and student radio. Like student radio, prison radio functions as a training ground and a space for developing practical skills. Academic institutions also operate several prison radio projects. Many prison radio initiatives present perspectives that offer an alternative to those found in mainstream media, including alternative narratives about prisons and incarcerated people, while giving voice to individuals whose experiences are often absent from public debate. In this respect, prison radio is closely linked to the alternative radio sector. Prison radio also has strong ties to the community media model, within which alternative and student radio are also often situated (Doliwa, 2013). As this model of media organization has been well conceptualized, prison radio can incorporate many of the principles regarded as central to community media management. For example, Howley explicitly links non-commercial funding models with participatory production and participatory practices in management, arguing that community media management is inseparable from goals such as inclusion, empowerment, and representation. These values are equally relevant to prison radio. However participatory production and management are even more difficult to achieve in prison radio than in other community-oriented media projects because of hierarchical institutional structures and the need to balance rehabilitative aims with prison security requirements. Freedom of expression—one of the core values of community media—is also significantly constrained in prison radio by approval and censorship procedures. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that freedom of expression in community media is understood not merely as an individual right but also as a participatory practice that enables marginalized voices to articulate lived experience, challenge dominant narratives, and exercise the right to communicate (Carpentier, 2011; Howley, 2009; Rodríguez, 2001). This understanding has much in common with the prison radio phenomenon. Despite these challenges, prison radio should strive for a participatory model of production and, whenever possible, a management structure that includes people with lived experience of imprisonment. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that, despite the challenges, this model is worth pursuing for anyone seeking to develop a media project that is relevant and meaningful to its community.

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