Community FM Radio in Promoting Multicultural Understanding and Community Revitalization

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Most Community FM broadcasting in Japan is conducted on a micropower basis reaching a very limited audience. The Community Broadcast Act of Japan was enforced in 1992 stipulating strict licensure of such broadcasting entities by the national government. Be that as it may, community FM media mainly focuses on information tightly connected to the local area.

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995 shed light on the importance of the community media for the first time. Although the broadcast coverage of the community FM in Kobe was small, it was able to immediately send out the necessary information on water, food, safety, housing, and various life support systems for the local residents to help them cope with the crisis. In the case of the recent Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, eighteen (18) temporary disaster broadcasting stations were established in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima to aid in crisis management efforts in the affected areas of the tsunami and earthquake. (Kim 2012) This aspect of community FM significantly differs from mainstream mass media.

Community FM for Multicultural Symbiosis in the Local Community

The purpose of the community FM radio is not limited to disaster prevention and crisis management. FM YY1 in Nagata Ward, Kobe City, one of the community FM stations, started right after the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and now broadcasts programs in ten languages, such as Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino, Spanish, and Portuguese, for the local needs of the community residents, as there are diverse people from various countries living and working in the area. There are many foreign residents who are not able to understand mainstream Japanese mass media. There is a strong desire for “multicultural symbiosis” shared by the local community, so that Japanese and foreigners would support each other as partners who live together2. There are other multilingual broadcast of community FM, for example in Nagano, Miyagi, and Kagawa.

I participated in FM YY as an intern from August 2012 until January 2013 and studied its history, the process of the establishment, and the reason for being engaged in multilingual broadcast3. I realized how strongly it is connected with the local multicultural community.

In particular, I learned about some experiences of the Vietnamese who lived in the earthquake stricken areas at the time of the Hanshin-Awaji Quake. "The Kobe Earthquake Emergency Information" published by Kobe City was only in Japanese and English in the beginning. Therefore, the information did not reach the Vietnamese who can read neither Japanese nor English. They left the temporary shelter they first moved in because they found it very difficult to stay there with other

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3 This essay is based on the author’s undergraduate thesis submitted to the University of Hyogo School of Economics in December 2012.
Japanese refugees, not understanding the conversations and information only given in Japanese. So they chose to stay in a park. Thus, they were left out from all the necessary information to save them from the difficulty, until they met those Japanese who began to give information in Vietnamese.

Having noticed the language difficulties of the multicultural community, FM YY started the broadcast in many languages. Later "Easy Japanese" was added to the foreign languages to supplement the information. After the Great East Japan Quake, many community FM was initiated for the purposes to help residents cope with the crisis. A radio program for Filipino wives in Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture was also initiated in the community, thanks to the support of FM YY, so that they could convey their messages in Filipino by themselves.

Also, FM YY broadcasts "Salsa Latina" in Spanish every Wednesday. Ms. Roxana Oshiro, a Japanese Peruvian, is in charge of the broadcast of this program. She was talking to the Spanish speaking people in Fukushima on the phone during the program. One day she noticed unfounded rumors about radiation-contaminated water which was spreading among them causing strong uneasiness. So she sent accurate information with the help of an expert invited to the program. This was greatly appreciated by the community.

Community FM sends vital information that local foreign residents need in the conduct of their daily lives, such as explanation about automobile insurance, public employment security office called “Hello Work” and even of public libraries. In this way community FM can provide assistance through effective information dissemination in their harmonious integration into their communities by supporting relationships built on trust with the local people.

Photo 1: FM YY studio signs

Contribution to ‘Revitalization of the Community’

Based on my interviews with some people involved in FM YY, I found ‘revitalization of the community’ is also a very important aspect of community radio broadcasting. It contributes to form attachment to the place where you live, and creates passion for local activation for the listeners and for those who participate in broadcasting. Various people, such as neighbors, housewives, and high school students, participate in the programs as volunteer disc jockeys, and talk about the charm of the town. This experience has triggered to deepen their affection for their respective hometowns. Also from my own experience as a reporter of Akashi Cable TV, I became more aware of my affiliation to the town as part of the community playing a leading role in revitalizing the community.
Conclusion

In conclusion, multilingual community FM plays an important role in multicultural communities to fill the information gaps needed for the well-being of diverse residents who have various language needs other than the dominant language. Based on my findings, information dissemination conducted by community FM broadcasting helps deepen cultural understanding that enhances integration in their communities and at their places of work. Also community FM can create attachment to the community, which contributes to community revitalization, as well as sending important local information that mainstream mass media can not reach, especially needed at the time of crises. I believe community FM is a very important media for the local community from these aspects.

Photo 2: The author at the FM YY studio

References
