Hybrid Radio everywhere for everyone

Reporting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Information</th>
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<tbody>
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The growing power of media content convergence

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Radio is still one of the major forms of mass media and listening activity remains constant over time. In Europe, the average daily listening time is still about 2h30 for European Citizens. Radio also remains a very inclusive medium, with an average weekly reach of 85% in Europe or 447 million people. However, listening figures are decreasing, particularly amongst youngsters. According to a BBC survey, 48% of the younger listeners would change their listening behaviour if they could connect their mobile device wirelessly with the car. “When younger people lose the connection to radio, it’ll be hard to get them back” said BBCs Helen Boaden.

So even though radio is still a successful medium, it is facing major challenges. First there is a strong risk that FM radio -where it is not switched off- will remain an analogue island in the digital ocean of modern mobile digital systems. Digital natives are accustomed to rich media experiences on their smartphones and tablets, including time shifting, recommendations and access to content anywhere and anytime, which standalone FM radio cannot offer. Radio must respond to the range of content and functionalities offered by today’s mobile devices (social media, streaming services, podcasts, etc.), in order to remain attractive.

Second, the integration of service features in the radio world is often not satisfying. Radios are radios and IP radios are IP radios. Both are often sold together as a single device, but a real integration of both has never happened. Regular IP radios do not simply play after unboxing, like a standard DAB/FM device. Social media services are often not or are poorly integrated into the context of the currently received radio programme or into the context of the brand and intended target group. Return channels promise heaven for advertisers and consumer/audience research but are also seen as a threat to the anonymous consumption of radio services. Social media interaction is also mostly not properly integrated into the user experience and happens on external platforms. Subsequently, the external platform provider can exploit the generated user data, but the actual content provider or broadcaster is mostly cut off from the added value that is created.

The HRADIO project demonstrates the vast potential of a hybrid service model using broadband connections and radio broadcast signalling and how this can revolutionise radio itself. While preserving and even strengthening the unique characteristics of the live radio experience, HRADIO enhances that experience with the personalisation and interactivity features media users have come to expect from any 21st century medium.

Work performed from the beginning of the project to the end of the period covered by the report and main results achieved so far
Throughout the project lifetime, HRADIO achieved all its objectives in full:
- 47 hybrid radio user scenarios were designed and evaluated from the ground up. From this, a compelling set was selected for implementation in the project, and a detailed list of 78 user, 15 external and 130 system requirements was drawn up;
- A complete set of libraries and tools for the realization of the use cases was developed. This includes client libraries to be used by application developers, a playout system enabling quick an easy provision of radio signals and time independent streams to HRADIO clients as well as a communication platform offering access to service and programme data as well as service recommendations and privacy preserving collection of usage data. Extra work not foreseen in the DoA concerned the creation of a cheap, easy to deploy DAB over IP system allowing broadcasters without DAB transmission infrastructure to also realise HRADIO functionalities;
- Three compelling, working prototypes: a platform-centric one (car or mobile platform giving access to multiple broadcasters), a broadcaster-centric one (a mobile application for one broadcaster) and a brand-centric one (focusing on a value proposition for one particular radio station). The applications enable enticing functionalities such as itemized, server-based time shifting, service and item recommendations (stations and podcasts), RadioWEB information, signal following, item sharing via social media, enriched EPGs, music substitution, item tagging etc.;
- A multi-country, multi-method, multi-prototype, iterative pilot involving hundreds of users. Free download of the final platform application was combined with focused tests (surveys, focus groups, interviews and even driving tests) across Belgium, Germany and the UK. Insights of each piloting phase were fed back into the application design;
- A multi-method exploitation strategy including an impact plan, business clinics, a productization roadmap and a hackaton;
- A structured and maintained standardization strategy, including early standardization in ETSI of the OMRI specification;
- An ambitious communication strategy, with an artistic demo booth designed in collaboration with the H2020-MARCONI project and offering an end-to-end hybrid experience at high-level events such as IBC, Salons de la Radio and Radio Days Europe. Dozens of interventions at other events, 9 scientific publications and an active website
Through its conceptualisation of the opportunities, diverse and qualitative implementations, and convincing demonstrations at top events, HRADIO has clearly proven that the only possible future of radio is a hybrid one; that adding hybrid functionalities to radio radically increases its attractiveness especially with younger audiences; and that the systems for implementing hybrid radio have a high TRL.

Progress beyond the state of the art and expected potential impact (including the socio-economic impact and the wider societal implications of the project so far)

With HRADIO completed, a full stack of ready-to-use, standardized components is available openly and with flexible licenses, so that any radio platform provider, broadcaster (big or small), car or domestic radio equipment manufacturer can start to offer hybrid radio services. All these players can also build on the vast practical experience and user insights gained, which are all publicly available on the HRADIO website. Project members are now in contact with broadcasters, B2B radio platform
providers and manufacturers to implement the features developed.
In the broader sense, HRADIO is contributing to making the radio medium, with its strong traditional user base and very high public and socio-economic value in Europe and beyond, future proof. This is helping an entire industry in need of innovation in the face of stark competition from other digital media consumption methods. By some specific features such as interactivity and recommendations, it is increasing the value of radio for citizens, contributing to important values such as diversity and serendipity, cohesion and inclusion. Finally, it opens the door to new monetization models (freemium models, additional advertising channels) while at the same time respecting user privacy.