

Tuning In: Challenging Design for Communities Through a Field Study of Radio Amateurs

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Abstract

This paper reports a field study of radio amateurs. It details their communicative practices, interests and technologies. Radio amateurs are taken as a perspicuous in-stance of an amateur and voluntary community with the aim of informing ITC design for communities. We characterise radio amateurs as being essentially motivated by the challenges of radio propagation, of understanding it and taking advantage of it for communicative purposes. The challenges of being a radio amateur are life-long, detailed, diverse and seemingly inexhaustible. Far from being an obstacle to the formation of an enduring community, these features enable it to thrive. Based on these observations, we propose that design for communities should recognise the core challenges and contingencies addressed by that community and engage in design practices which themselves are rich in challenge.