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through the lens of podcasters in Austria"

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Abstract

In the last twenty years, podcasting has been hyped as “the next big thing” several times, most recently in relation to platform actors like Spotify, Audible, YouTube or Podimo. However, enclosing podcasts in such a “walled garden” platform goes against the decentralized architecture of their original distribution mechanism RSS. This has considerable cultural implications and can affect the nature of podcasts themselves. Platformization further poses significant risks to the ecosystem, including uneven or monopolized market structures leading to a disproportionate concentration of power, and a loss of autonomy for podcasters and listeners. In this case study, I explore how podcasters in Austria frame the current podcasting ecosystem through qualitative semi-structured interviews, and develop a categorization of podcasters – hobbyist podcasters, indie podcasters, actors from podcast labels/networks and public broadcasting – as well as distribution platforms. I sketch different forms of hosting and monetization models and give an overview on the history of podcasting and platformization. I argue that podcasting in Austria is currently in the process of platformization (Poell et al., 2022a), and show that the interviewees perceive it as increasingly commodified (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) and, above all, formalized (Sullivan, 2021). Based on my findings, I lastly present four implications for podcasting in practice. With this research project, I want to improve the understanding of the current podcasting ecosystem and podcasters’ stance towards it, in order to provide a nuanced counterpoint to the hype-driven industry enthusiasm that uncritically celebrates platformization.

A German-language, adapted audio version of this Master’s thesis will be published end of March 2024 and can be found on www.zuckerbaeckerei.com/podcast-plattformisierung.

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1. Introduction

This thesis begins with an introduction in three parts: first, I tell a short story of how podcasting came to be, how it was hyped as “the next big thing” at least three times in the past twenty years and why the latest hype – proprietary podcast platforms – deserves more than eighty pages of exploration. Second, I introduce myself, or rather my personal connection to podcasting, that got me interested in this topic and led me to write all of this. And third, I give a brief overview of what you can expect from the rest of this thesis.

1.1. Podcasting as “the Next Big Thing” ...For Two Decades

As the story goes, the first one to mention “podcasting” in press was Ben Hammersley in an article for *The Guardian* in February 2004, combining “broadcasting” and Apple’s then most popular product, the iPod (Hammersley, 2004). Ex-MTV host and media personality Adam Curry popularized the term and the medium, while developer Dave Winer kept on working on the distribution technology RSS. The acronym stands for “Really Simple Syndication” or “Rich Site Summary” and is an web syndication format that allows users to subscribe to content from different sources, which are then aggregated within a RSS reader or so called podcatcher (see Berry, 2006; Sterne et al., 2008, for a detailed history; or Winer, 2001, for a first hand report). Its latest version, RSS 2.0, was specified by the RSS advisory board in 2009 (*RSS 2.0 Specification (Current)*, 2009). Developers, podcasters and listeners alike can adopt and use it freely, there is no way of centrally controlling RSS distribution.

On the occasion of its twentieth birthday in 2023, the RSS advisory board emphasized the advantages of the technology in today’s web:

“As long as there are social media gatekeepers using engagement algorithms to decide what you can and can't see, there will be a need to get around them. When someone offers an RSS or Atom feed and you subscribe to it in a reader, you get their latest updates without manipulation” (Cadenhead, 2023).

In this thesis, RSS is central to my understanding of a podcast. Following Bottomley (2015, p. 166) – who argues that “it is the RSS feed that distinguishes podcasting from streaming audio and a plethora of other downloadable audio media files online” –my working definition of a podcast is an audio file that is distributed via RSS and thus downloadable.

Audio distributed online via RSS, as I have just defined a podcast, started appearing in the early 2000s. By the mid-2000s, podcasting was hailed as “the next big thing” for the first time. Many reports portrayed it as revolutionary because theoretically, RSS could provide anybody with the means for distributing their own broadcast. The top-down logic of mass media could be turned upside down, or at least complemented by participatory DIY media with a more even relationship between sender and receiver (Acohidio, 2005; Hammersley, 2004; Scheibe, 2004).

Compared to today, the technology was still very clunky, podcasters and listeners needed a certain degree of digital literacy. Listening to a podcast involved starting a computer, connecting it to the internet, manually copying and pasting a RSS feed address to subscribe, either automatically or manually downloading the podcast files to the hard drive and then manually transferring them to an mp3 player via USB. iPodder as one of the early podcatchers, and soon later, the iTunes repository were the main instances to find podcasts – which, by the architecture of RSS, were dispersed over the web. As a consequence, the early podcasting scene was on the one hand mostly populated by tech savvy people and on the other hand fully decentralized. This holds true for the English speaking world to which the sources above mostly refer, and according to my observations also for Austria which has not been subject to research yet.

Starting in late 2014, podcasting experienced a hype that (retrospectively) was mainly attributed to the large international success of the investigative true crime series *Serial* by Sarah Koenig from Chicago Public Radio (Berry, 2015)¹. Now, *podcasting* was not only associated with (DIY) talk and interview shows anymore, but also with intricately produced audio series. This new wave of podcast enthusiasm soon reached the German-speaking area as well. Podcasting became “the next big thing” again, slowly beginning to diffuse into the Austrian media mainstream. Commercial services to facilitate podcast production and publishing started to gain a foothold among producers (see section 2.2 for a timeline). In 2015, Spotify expanded their music streaming offer with podcasts (Crook, 2015), which made the medium easily available for those people that had either never heard of podcasting or were not used to a podcatcher app. Observers of the market noted that this new Spotify feature significantly boosted the popularity in the German-speaking area (Schroeder, 2020).

In the late 2010s, many German-speaking legacy media organizations as well as celebrities and online personalities started their own podcasts. For example, German newspaper *ZEIT Online* launched their first podcasts in 2017 (Wegner, 2017)², so did the Vienna newspaper *Falter* (“Episode 1,” 2017). In the same year, influencer and fashion entrepreneur Madeleine Alizadeh, better known as *dariadaria*, started her podcast *a mindful mess*, which would go *Spotify Exclusive* two years later (see section 2.3.2 for a discussion of platform exclusivity). Audiences quickly caught on: In 2016, only 14 percent of Germans occasionally listened to podcasts, by 2018 this number had risen to 22 percent and by 2023 to 43 percent (Statista, 2023, p. 11; unfortunately no such survey exists for Austria). Around the same time, startups began taking notice of business opportunities, and financial capital was poured into the podcasting space. Suddenly, podcasting was “the next big thing”, again!

¹ To this day, this heightened attention is also noticeable in academic research on podcasting, many more scholars have focused on *Serial* (see e. g. Hancock & McMurtry, 2018; McCracken, 2017; Ora, 2018).

² In the announcement for the new shows, the responsible editor proclaimed to “be running late” regarding podcasting, despite the fact that *ZEIT Online* was among the first German(-speaking) newspapers publish audio content.

This time around, the hype was closely related to platform actors that tried to position themselves as central to the podcasting ecosystem, which – unlike other parts of the web – had remained largely decentral until this point. Because of these platforms, podcasting became increasingly associated with streaming instead of downloading. This is a departure from its roots in the open web, and also stands in contrast to my working definition of podcasts.

These tendencies of centralization and platformization caused unease with many veteran podcasters, because they clash with values that are considered fundamental to the community (Schroeder, 2016). At the same time, the increased interest in and funding for podcasting meant growth opportunities for all involved actors. Fueled by this hype, the threats of platformization for podcasting have faded into the background in the media discourse.

However, as many scholars (Andersson Schwarz, 2017; Plantin et al., 2018; Poell et al., 2022a; Van Dijck, 2018) show, platformization processes urgently require critical analysis, and consequently action. If platformization were not kept in check, private for-profit platforms might otherwise become (quasi-) monopolists with excessive power over central infrastructures and sectors of our society. Cultural production, including podcasting, is affected profoundly by platformization. If one platform actor went to monopolize the field, podcasters and listeners alike would become largely dependent on it, as for example it is currently the case with YouTube for online videos. This hypothetical proprietary platform with a monopoly in the podcasting ecosystem could proceed to change and shape the medium in whichever way it pleased, disregarding podcasters' and listeners' wishes and needs.

Focusing on Austria, my thesis sheds light on the current state of the podcasting ecosystem and ongoing platformization processes as seen by local German-speaking podcasters. It contains qualitative research on how podcasting is understood, offers a glimpse into production realities, and outlines how podcasts themselves are changing in the dynamic ecosystem facing commodification and formalization. My case study provides insights into a geographical and linguistic area that is understudied in both platform and podcasting studies.

Ultimately, I argue that podcasting in Austria is currently undergoing platformization (Poell et al., 2022a) and that interviewees perceive it as becoming increasingly commodified (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) and formalized (Sullivan, 2021).

1.2. Situatedness: My Personal Connection to Podcasting

I believe I first consciously came into contact with a podcast around 2011 or 2012, while still in high school. Back then, I had been following a couple of food blogs via RSS on Google Reader (and had been food blogging myself³) for a few years already, and Joy Wilson of *Joy the Baker*⁴

³ I still regularly publish new baking recipes and posts on everything I am interested in – including the topics I cover in this thesis – on my blog, www.zuckerbaeckerei.com.

⁴ www.joythebaker.com

and Tracy Benjamin of *Shutterbean*⁵ started a podcast, *Home fries*, talking about what happened behind the scenes of their blogs. So every other week, I downloaded the mp3 file of the current episode from their website onto my laptop and transferred it to my mp3 player via USB. In 2013, I got a smartphone onto which I immediately installed the (open source) podcatcher app AntennaPod which allowed me to listen to several podcast episodes a week, both in German and English, both from hobbyist podcasts and radio stations or other legacy media companies. This awakened my interest in producing a podcast myself – setting up a blog by myself as a young teenager had given me the confidence that I somehow would be able to do so – but I didn't have a microphone or recording device and no means to buy one, so I quickly abandoned that plan.

In the fall 2015, I moved to Vienna to study at the University, and by pure chance, discovered a tweet by podcaster Daniel Meßner (who had just started his *Zeitsprung* podcast that is now called *Geschichten aus der Geschichte*) announcing a meetup for podcasters, called *Podcasterei*⁶, at Vienna hackspace Metalab. I attended the event, and Stefan Haslinger (host of the now discontinued coding podcast *Aua-uff-code!* and creator of the podcast discovery site *Panoptikum.social*⁷) subsequently lent me his audio gear – so that I would not have any excuse for not starting my own podcast project. It took another few months, but in August 2016, I published the first episode of my podcast *Lieblings-Plätzchen*⁸ – first using the open source static site generator Jekyll Octopod and later Wordpress with the Podlove plugin – which I would continue for 18 episodes until December 2019. In the meantime, I became a regular at the *Podcasterei* meetup and attended several other podcasting events throughout Vienna and Germany.

In summer 2018, I started an internship at ORF radio Ö1, to learn more about audio production and journalism. The internship transformed into the job that would financially support me during my studies, and I became an audio journalist with a focus on culinary topics. At the public radio station, I began noticing the differences in the self-image of radio professionals and journalists more generally in comparison to the podcasters I had met thanks to the *Podcasterei* meetup. While the groups of radio journalists and podcasters never were mutually exclusive in Austria, the latter had a strong DIY mentality and often emphasized the openness of their medium. From 2017 onward, many media companies in Austria launched

⁵ www.shutterbean.com

⁶ www.podcasterei.at

⁷ <https://panoptikum.social>

⁸ In every episode, I met a guest at their *Lieblings-Plätzchen* (favorite place) to talk about themselves and the place and eat *Lieblings-Plätzchen* (favorite cookies) together: www.lieblings-plaetzchen.com/

their own podcasts⁹, often (implicitly) claiming to be pioneers in the space, and with seemingly no contact to the hobbyist and indie podcasting scene that had existed years earlier.

Even though I was not continuing to publish my own podcast, and was employed as a radio journalist at *Ö1*, I became one of the co-organizers of the Podcasterei meetup in late 2019, a volunteer position that I hold until this day. The tacit knowledge I gained and the people I connected with through this played a crucial role in the becoming of this thesis. Without this background and without having met many (Austrian) podcasters personally, I probably could neither have developed my typology of podcasters (see section 2.1) as easily nor come up with such a specific questionnaire.

I do not want to transform this section into a CV, but to convey my situatedness, I need to talk a little bit more on how I earn(ed) my living in the past few years. In December 2022, I quit my job at *Ö1* because of the precarious working conditions that had been burdening me for years, a step that was covered by several national newspapers a few weeks later after a tweet of mine on the topic became “viral”¹⁰. It is safe to say that I would have had a much harder time getting access to a representative of *ORF* for this thesis if I had asked for an interview after this media buzz, but fortunately, I had already conducted it in November 2022, while still being an employee. In December 2022, I also began working for the podcast production company *OH WOW*, whose founder – my current boss Jeanne Drach – I also interviewed for this thesis.

To sum up, I have had personal and professional connections into the Austrian podcasting scene and media industry years before this thesis became reality, and they definitely inspired and influenced me along the way. Also, as apparent on the technologies I mentioned as part of my own “internet past” – blogging, RSS reader, open source podcatcher and podcast publishing software – I have strong sympathies for web 2.0 and its openness. My motivation for this research project is to provide a nuanced counterpoint to the hype-driven industry enthusiasm for podcasting platforms which I talked about in the very beginning of this thesis.

1.3. Overview

So, what is there to expect in the remainder of this thesis? It focuses on the ongoing platformization of the podcasting ecosystem through the lens of seven different podcasters in Austria, which are either hobbyist podcasters, indie podcasters or representatives of podcast labels or the *ORF*. The main question I intend to answer is how these different podcast producers frame the current podcasting ecosystem. With this close description, I want to offer a systematic

⁹ The beforementioned *Falter Radio* by *Falter* was first published in September 2017 (“Episode 1,” 2017), *Thema des Tages* by *Der Standard* in August 2019 (Wilhelm, 2019), *Die Presse* started their podcast *18’48*, later renamed *Was wichtig wird* in September 2019 (“Die Presse’ startet Podcast 18’48” mit allen...,” 2019).

¹⁰ I published my original statement – identical to the tweet – on leaving *ORF* due to its unbearable working conditions which are enabled by a paragraph in the *ORF-Gesetz* on my blog, where I also collected all newspaper articles that reported on the issue (Wiese, 2023).

insight into the attitudes of these crucial actors of the industry, whose needs or best interests nevertheless are not always prioritized by e.g. platforms.

In the following chapter, I introduce background knowledge that is necessary to understand my case. This includes the beforementioned typology of podcasters which I developed – hobbyist podcasters, indie podcasters, podcast labels and public broadcasting – a brief historical overview on platforms and podcasting, a typology of distribution platforms – open discovery platforms and podcatcher apps, walled garden platforms, mixed platforms and the public broadcaster's own ORF Sound – types of hosting and relevant monetization models – advertising, crowdfunding, donations and merchandising products.

In chapter 3, I present the State of the Art, with literatures on podcasting and platformization, as well as the platformization of media more generally and podcasting specifically. I outline the research gap I intend to fill with this thesis: Tying different layers and aspects of the platformization of the podcasting ecosystem together, explicitly through the lens of podcasters, illustrating their production realities facing commodification and formalization, and providing insights into a understudied geographical and linguistic area – Austria.

Chapter 4 contains the research question “How do German-speaking podcasters in Austria frame the current podcasting ecosystem?” as well as three sub questions that help break down the main one: First, “How do they engage with different ways of distribution and what are their reasons?”, second “What relevance do they attribute to platformization tendencies in their industry and how is that reflected in their work?” and third “How do different podcasters (hobbyist, indie, actors from podcasting labels or public broadcasting) perceive the podcasting ecosystem?”

Chapter 5 is concerned with the theoretical perspectives that inform my analysis, namely platformization and “contingent cultural commodities” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2022a) as well as the formalization of podcasting (Sullivan, 2021).

In chapter 6, I explain how I collected my data – seven semi-structured qualitative interviews – and analyzed it along 34 deductive and inductive categories, following an approach by Rivas (2018). I also elaborate on the limitations of my research.

In chapter 7, I present the results of my analysis of the interview data. Using quotes to illustrate, I show the eight key themes that emerged – (1) podcasting as an elusive practice, (2) nostalgia for RSS, (3) platformization as a threat, (4) platformization as an opportunity, (5) platform indifference, (6) perceived (non-)influence of platforms, (7) formalization and (8) democratic ideals and collaboration – and answer the three sub questions.

In chapter 8, I discuss my findings in the light of the theoretical perspectives. I argue that podcasting in Austria is currently in the process of platformization (Poell et al., 2022a), and show that interviewees perceive it as increasingly formalized (Sullivan, 2021) and commodified (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). I further make my contributions to the literature explicit.

Chapter 9 concludes this thesis with the implications of my findings for podcasting in practice and an overall summary. The references at the end are split into two parts: First all the cited literature, second an alphabetical list of all the podcasts mentioned in the text. The appendix includes the abstract in English and German, the interview guidelines I used as well as the quotes I cited throughout the thesis in their original German verbatim transcription.

2. Background Knowledge

To be able to conduct my research, but also to make it more accessible to you, a reader I do not automatically expect to be a podcast enthusiast¹¹ with far-reaching knowledge on the Austrian podcasting scene, I collected a significant amount of background information, which I present in this chapter. First, I elaborate on the classification of podcasters that is reflected in my research questions. I also give a historical timeline of platforms in podcasting and an overview on the types of podcast distribution platforms currently relevant in Austria. I then list available hosting options, that is, where podcasters store their audio files. Lastly, I give an overview of current monetization models.

2.1. Types of Podcasters

Podcasters are really diverse: One could classify them by the type of podcasts they make, whether they monetize their content or not and along many other characteristics. To my knowledge there is no prior scientific work on the classification of podcasters in the German-speaking area¹². I believe it is necessary to distinguish different types of podcasters to sufficiently address my research interest. Drawing on literature about English-language podcasting and my experiences in the German-speaking and Austrian podcasting community, I came up with a classification myself, based on podcasters. These can either be actual individuals, or people representing the collective which is the publisher of the relevant podcast(s) in a legal sense. The existence of the latter could already be seen as an indicator of formalization, a notion which I will define further in section 5.2.

It would of course be possible to distinguish between different types of podcasts along several dichotomies as well, e.g. “unedited conversation” vs. “storytelling with music and sound

¹¹ If however, you are a German-speaking podcast enthusiast who is not necessarily well-versed in STS literatures, and/or does not want to read dozens of pages, I suggest that you read the final summary in section 9.2 and/or listen to the podcast version of my thesis. It is planned to be published by the end of March 2024 and from then on can be found at <https://zuckerbaeckerei.com/podcast-plattformisierung/>.

¹² After developing my categorization of podcasters, I encountered Caplan and Gillespie's (2020, p. 9) typology of YouTube creators. They suggest to differentiate between “creators who enjoy the revenue they can accrue but have no professional aim beyond it; creators who come to depend on that revenue, but not as part of a media-producing institution; professionals in other venues, who enjoy reputational benefits from being on YouTube without drawing revenue from them; media professionals who use YouTube as a secondary venue for distribution; media institutions who partner with YouTube to take advantage of its distribution power”.

design” or “low-budget” vs. “well-funded” etc. For my project, and considering my theoretical perspectives (see chapter 5), it is more useful to look at the people directly, without the “detour” to their projects.

2.1.1. Hobbyist Podcasters

First, there are *hobbyist podcasters*, (groups of) individuals without organizational affiliation, podcasting for “fun” and not primarily with the intent to make money – like the majority of podcasters Attig (2020) describes in her characterization of German-speaking podcasters. They are often deeply rooted in the open web community and take a critical stance towards the commercialization of the medium (Attig, 2020). In Austria, hobbyist podcasters were early adopters of the medium, the first projects can be traced back to the community radio and hacker scene of the late aughts (Fälbl & Eckrieder, 2022). Some early hobbyist podcasters around Daniel Meßner (*Geschichten aus der Geschichte*) and Melanie Bartos (*Zeit für Wissenschaft*) started meeting regularly from 2015 on (Bartos, 2015) at the Vienna hackspace Metalab. This loose group of hobbyist podcasters came to be Podcasterei, the Austrian Podcasting Meetup, which I have been co-organizing since late 2019 (see section 1.2 for more information on my situatedness).

Examples for such podcasts are *Die physikalische Soiree* by science teacher and radio journalist Lothar Bodingbauer (started in 2002, albeit as community radio), *Flip the Truck* by movie enthusiast Wolfgang Steiger and others (started in 2014), *Donau Tech Radio* by Thomas Einwaller and others (started in 2013) or *Mund:Art* by linguist Lisa Krammer (started in 2018). My own podcast project *Lieblings-Plätzchen* (started 2016, discontinued in 2018) falls into this category as well.

According to e.g. Markman and Sawyer (2014), this group is the historical foundation of podcasting and includes the largest number of individuals.

2.1.2. Indie Podcasters

A second group are *indie podcasters*, which I define as individuals with clear profit motivation, often with an existing personal brand as a journalist or media personality more generally, but without direct institutional affiliation. Examples for Austrian podcasts by indie podcasters are *Erklär mir die Welt* by former *DerStandard*-journalist Andreas Sator (whom I have interviewed for this thesis) or *Große Töchter* by author Beatrice Frasl. Both use crowdfunding/membership-platforms to generate revenue, but the former mostly relies on advertising.

The “indie” category is often evoked in industry talk as well as in research on podcasting, but there is no consistent definition. For reference, in her study on independent podcasters in Denmark, Adler Berg (2021a, p. 114) points out that it is hard to draw a clear line between fully independent and somehow dependent podcasters. She suggests to count a podcast as independent if it “has not undergone any kind of gatekeeping and is unaffiliated with pre-existing traditional institutions”.

2.1.3. Podcast Labels

The third group in this classification are *podcast labels* also known as *podcast networks*, for-profit businesses that produce several podcasts – thus similar to the aforementioned group. In this category, I subsume podcasters from actual podcast labels or private media companies. In Austria there is a small number of podcast labels, for example Jeanne Drach's *OH WOW*¹³ (producing e. g. *Jeannes Welt*), Daniel Roßmann's *Podcastwerkstatt* (producing e.g. *Keine Hand Frei*) or Stefan Lassnig's *Missing Link* (producing e.g. *Ganz Offen Gesagt*) which also collaborates with indie podcasters for marketing purposes. Most newspaper publishers run their own podcast departments, for example, as mentioned earlier, the eponymous Viennese weekly newspaper produces *Falter-Radio*.

According to Sullivan (2018), in the US, podcast networks' importance is growing as advertisers increasingly collaborate with them instead of individual podcasters. Podcasting networks also allow for economies of scale and developing a certain brand that helps with discoverability (Heeremans, 2018).

2.1.4. Public Broadcasting: ORF

A fourth type of podcasters are public broadcasting stations. In Austria this is the *Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF)*, which through its ORF Sound platform actually is a platform actor as well (see section 2.3.5). The *ORF* consists of four TV channels, nine state (Bundesländer) radio channels, national radio *Ö1*, *Ö3* and *FM4*, online-stream only channel *Radio Campus* as well as the news website *orf.at*.

The podcasts¹⁴ by these actors can be further subcategorized: on the one hand there are *secondary use* shows that have a regularly scheduled spot in linear programs (like *Ö1 Journale*) which are published as podcasts without any changes. On the other hand, there are podcasts which are extended versions of linear radio shows (e.g. *Agamemnon reist durchs All* which expands the *Ö1* show *Wissen Aktuell*).

Formerly, *ORF* also published many *podcast-first* formats, often with hosts that were not part of the public broadcasting corporation's staff (like *Ö1 Sprechstunde* with Melisa Erkurt). I cannot reconstruct when these formats were taken offline, but I am certain they were still available in summer 2023.

Interestingly, in the Internet Archive, there is a capture of *ORF's* early podcast offer from 2007, including a *FM4 Podcast (Fm4.ORF.at / FM4 Podcast, 2007)* and several *Ö1* podcasts

¹³ Disclaimer: I am employed by *OH WOW* since December 2022.

¹⁴ Quick reminder: With *podcasts* I explicitly refer to contents that are available through a RSS feed and thus downloadable. Including all streamable audio content here (or in this whole thesis) would make the amount of material unmanageable, and would also lead away from the historical starting point of podcasting that is RSS. To my knowledge, all *ORF* programs can currently be re-listened or re-watched, but this does not count as podcast in my classification.

(*Oe1.ORF.at / Ö1 Podcast*, 2007), all of which look like secondary use, a suspicion I cannot confirm, as all links on the page are dead. There is also an explanation of what a podcast is, and information on how long the files are available for download through the RSS feed¹⁵ (*Oe1.ORF.at / Frequently Asked Questions*, 2007).

At the time of my interviews, and until the end of 2023, the Austrian public broadcasting law (Bundesgesetz Über Den Österreichischen Rundfunk (ORF-Gesetz, ORF-G), 2021)¹⁶ did not allow the public broadcaster to publish any contents *online only* or *online first*, they always need to air on linear radio or TV¹⁷. Many (of the seemingly now discontinued) podcast-first formats were aired on online stream only channel *Radio Campus*¹⁸, probably to not interrupt the broadcasting schemes of the main channels. One legal loophole was the notion of “Sendungsbegleitende Inhalte” (contents accompanying linear contents)¹⁹, which must not be *independent* from reporting on linear radio or TV²⁰. Furthermore, with small exceptions, content could only be made available for seven days after airing on linear radio or TV²¹. Some

¹⁵ This FAQ page states that news shows are available for three days on the feed, the children’s show for 14 days and all others for 7 days. There is no mention of the reasons for this difference in treatment.

¹⁶ Disclaimer: I have no special legal education, everything I write in this section is my best try at understanding these complex laws and what they mean for podcasts within the ORF.

¹⁷ See ORF-G (2021) §3 (4a): „Der Österreichische Rundfunk kann nach Maßgabe der technischen Entwicklung und der wirtschaftlichen Tragbarkeit die Programme nach Abs. 1 Z 1 und 2 sowie nach Abs. 8 gleichzeitig mit der Ausstrahlung ohne Speichermöglichkeit online bereitstellen. Er kann weiters diese Programme um bis zu 24 Stunden zeitversetzt ohne Speichermöglichkeit online bereitstellen. Der Beginn und das Ende der zeitgleichen und zeitversetzten Bereitstellung eines solchen Programms ist der Regulierungsbehörde anzuzeigen. Die Bereitstellung kann nur unverändert erfolgen.“

¹⁸ I know this through personal communication with Momo Kunishio, former main editor of *Uni Radio Campus* that is producing several shows that are aired on *Radio Campus*.

¹⁹ See ORF-G (2021) §4 (1) and (3): „Sendungsbegleitende Inhalte (Abs. 1 Z 3) sind: 1. Informationen über die Sendung selbst und die daran mitwirkenden Personen sowie damit im Zusammenhang stehender Sendungen, einschließlich Audio- und audiovisueller Angebote und ergänzender interaktiver Elemente sowie Podcasts (Audio und Video), und 2. Informationen zur unterstützenden Erläuterung und Vertiefung der Sendungsinhalte, einschließlich Audio- und audiovisueller Angebote und ergänzender interaktiver Elemente sowie Podcasts (Audio und Video), soweit dabei auf für die jeweilige Hörfunk- oder Fernsehsendung bzw. Sendereihe verfügbare Materialien und Quellen zurückgegriffen wird und dieses Angebot thematisch und inhaltlich die Hörfunk- oder Fernsehsendung unterstützend vertieft und begleitet. Sendungsbegleitende Inhalte sind jeweils durch Angabe der Bezeichnung und des Ausstrahlungsdatums jener Hörfunk- oder Fernsehsendung zu bezeichnen, welche sie begleiten. Sendungsbegleitende Angebote dürfen kein eigenständiges, von der konkreten Hörfunk oder Fernsehsendung losgelöstes Angebot darstellen“

²⁰ ORF based its Social Media presence before 2024, for example the TikTok-account of the TV news show *ZIB*, on this paragraph.

²¹ See ORF-G (2021), §4e (2): „Die einzelnen Elemente der Berichterstattung sind nur für die Dauer ihrer Aktualität, längstens jedoch sieben Tage ab Bereitstellung zum Abruf über die Plattform des Österreichischen Rundfunks bereitzustellen. Die Bereitstellung älterer Elemente der Berichterstattung, die in unmittelbarem Zusammenhang zur aktuellen Berichterstattung stehen, ist für die Dauer der Veröffentlichung der aktuellen Berichte zulässig. Die Berichterstattung darf nicht vertiefend und in ihrer

ORF podcasts (that all have aired in linear programs) were also available on Spotify for seven days.

In summer 2023, a revised *ORF* law (Bundesgesetz Über Den Österreichischen Rundfunk (ORF-Gesetz, ORF-G), 2024) was passed in the Austrian parliament, it became effective on January 1st 2024. For the first time, it acknowledges podcasts as something that can be downloaded and not only streamed²². Online only and only first contents are possible as long as they are “Überblicksberichterstattung”, which can be roughly translated as “overview reporting”. The new law also allows the *ORF* to make more contents available for 30 instead of just seven days, for contents concerned with contemporary or cultural history, no limitation is intended. For example, all episodes of the beforementioned podcast *Agamemnon reist durchs All* are still available via RSS and on Spotify in January 2024, even though the first one was published in September 2023. Because of these changes in law, *ORF* has more possibilities in producing podcasts (as conceptualized in this thesis) from 2024 onwards.

In October 2023, the *Angebotskonzept für das ORF-Angebot in Sozialen Medien* ("concept for the *ORF* offer on social media", Österreichischer Rundfunk, 2023) was published. It sheds some more light on how the public broadcaster is dealing with third party platforms. Spotify and YouTube – but none of the other platform actors I am focusing on in this thesis – are listed among the “social media platforms” on which *ORF* is currently active. The document asserts that *ORF* does not make special agreements to make use of (otherwise unavailable) additional functions of platforms, but uses them “typically”. Furthermore, according to the document “an on-demand service of (entire) shows that aired on *ORF* channels on social media is not planned”²³ (Österreichischer Rundfunk, 2023, p. 2, my translation). This is contradictory to *ORF*’s practice of already distributing their podcasts (sometimes entire shows in secondary use, see above) on Spotify, which is classified as “social media” a few paragraphs earlier.

ORF is the largest media corporation in Austria and, as already explained, is publicly funded and legally obliged to ensure its public service mandate. This is why I would argue – in line with Schroeder (2020) and Van Dijck (2018) – that this fourth group’s stance towards the platformization of the podcasting ecosystem is especially relevant, because it might have an influence on the Austrian media ecosystem as a whole.

Gesamtaufmachung und -gestaltung nicht mit dem Online-Angebot von Tages- oder Wochenzeitungen oder Monatszeitschriften vergleichbar sein und kein Nachrichtenarchiv umfassen.“

²² See ORF-G (2024) §4e (4) “Die Bereitstellung zum Abruf hat ohne Speichermöglichkeit (ausgenommen Podcasts) und für einen Zeitraum von bis zu sieben Tagen nach Ausstrahlung [...] zu erfolgen.“

²³ “Ein Abrufdienst von in ORF-Programmen ausgestrahlten (ganzen) Sendungen in Sozialen Medien wird nicht angestrebt“ (Österreichischer Rundfunk, 2023, p. 2).

2.2. Platforms and Podcasting: A Timeline

Before I introduce the different podcasting distribution platforms currently relevant in Austria (see section 2.3.), I want to present a brief historical timeline of distribution platforms and podcasting, expanding the story I have told in the Introduction.

To some degree, podcasting seemed to resist the transformations towards single quasi-monopolistic platforms that happened to other types of media on the web. In his historical overview on the platforms of podcasting, Sullivan (2019) argues that its technical backbone RSS is an “Anti-Platform”, due to its decentralized architecture. Until today, it connects podcasts that are hosted all over the internet, without a necessary intermediary (platform) actor. In 2005, Apple, with its iTunes directory, became the first platform in podcasting by offering “a centralized repository of podcasts for ease of discovery, while also enabling podcasters to easily reach audiences by bundling their respective RSS feeds into a seamless digital interface” (Sullivan, 2019, p. 4).

Morris and Patterson (2015, p. 223), see 2012 as a turning point. That year, Apple introduced a podcast app, separate from the music app, in the iOS software update, which “in a way, represents podcasting’s evolution from a fringe technology to significant mobile activity distinct from music”.

In 2017, Amazon’s Audible brought exclusive podcasts on their platform. Starting around the same time, Sullivan (2019) observes a slow move away from RSS towards (paywalled) platform exclusive contents. One major milestone in this development was Spotify’s first exclusive deal a year after starting to include podcasts: In 2016, they signed Jan Böhmermann and Olli Schultz for *Fest & Flauschig* (formerly *Sanft & Sorgfältig*, produced and aired by *radioeins*²⁴), locking this previously free and open podcast within their proprietary platform (*10 Jahre Spotify Deutschland*, 2022). In 2018, the first exclusive deal for a English speaking podcast followed, it concerned hip hop-podcaster Joe Budden (Sullivan, 2019). In 2019, Podimo entered the German market as a paywalled podcast platform, in 2021 Apple podcasts included the option for paywalling podcasts.

Summing up this prior research, the first signs of platformization in podcasting were visible early in its history, however the process seems to be happening slower compared to other media.

2.3. Types of Distribution Platforms

In this section, I elaborate on podcasting distribution platforms. I divided them into five categories: (1) open discovery platforms and podcatcher apps fully based on RSS, (2) walled garden platforms, (3) crowdfunding/membership platforms, (4) mixed platforms and (5) the

²⁴ Officially, *Fest & Flauschig* is a successor project of *Sanft & Sorgfältig* and not its direct continuation. The main reason for the switch from public broadcasting to Spotify was better pay, according to media reports (Simon, 2016).

national public broadcaster's own ORF Sound. Like with the typology of podcasters before, I came up with this classification myself, due to the lack of a pre-existing one.

There are two possible ways to approach these platforms: On the one hand, there is the podcaster who is distributing, on the other hand there is the listener who is consuming. For my thesis, the podcasters' perspective is most relevant, but I will also touch on the implications for users.

2.3.1. Open Discovery Platforms and Podcatcher Apps

As mentioned earlier, RSS as a distribution technology is rooted in the open architecture of the pre-social media open web, with little centralization. This is why Sullivan (2019, p. 2) refers to it as the "Anti-Platform". Podcast files are hosted all over the web, because podcasters choose where to put them, for example on their own web space or specific commercial hosting services (see section 2.4). Listeners can subscribe to the RSS feed of a podcast through a podcatcher app which aggregates all RSS feeds they have subscribed to, and fetches the relevant audio files from their original server. These files are then usually downloaded to the device in a standardized format (e.g. .mp3) and can be listened to within the podcatcher app or outside of it. This possibility distinguishes it from most other types of podcasting distribution platforms that usually do not allow for direct access to the file. Some podcatcher apps also allow for direct streaming as long as there is a connection to the internet.

Podcatcher apps usually also function as open "discovery platforms" (Sullivan, 2019), which means that they include a searchable, categorized repository of RSS feeds. This helps listeners to find and subscribe to a podcast, and makes the more complicated process of first finding a RSS feed address on a general search engine and then copying it into the podcatcher app to subscribe obsolete.

The first widely adopted open discovery platform and program – pre-smartphone, so originally without an app – was Apple's iTunes, which included podcasts from 2005 on. As the first commercially successful actor in this field, it set a norm that still exists today: The pass-through of RSS feeds (with files hosted all over the web and not centrally stored on Apple's servers, like it is the case with the music to be downloaded from iTunes) meant "essentially adopting the decentralization model of RSS", "rendered paywalls, pay-per-download, or other monetary exchanges for podcasting impossible via iTunes" and made advertising the first predominant monetization model (Sullivan, 2019, p. 4). In 2012, Apple introduced a dedicated "Podcasts" app (separate from the Music app) with its iOS software update (Morris & Patterson, 2015).

Even though Apple dropped the name "iTunes" and called the service "Apple Podcasts" from 2017 on (Mayo, 2017), the term "iTunes" stays hard coded in millions of RSS feeds through

several tags²⁵ whose values are rendered by most podcatcher apps. Furthermore, the repository of Apple Podcasts stays important for the podcasting landscape in general, as many podcatcher apps rely on it for their search functions. Apple Podcasts itself changed its affordances significantly in 2021, which is why I classify it as a “mixed platform” (see section 2.3.4).

Today, the main disadvantage of open discovery platforms and podcatcher apps (e.g. AntennaPod or PocketCasts) for podcasters with profit interests is the relative difficulty of monetization. There are usually little data available for targeted advertising, because the audio files are downloaded and listened to offline, with little or no demographic information on the user or feedback on completion rate. On the positive side, this allows listeners to access podcasts (more or less) anonymously.

2.3.2. Walled Garden Platforms

Besides open discovery platforms, there are walled garden platforms. On these closed and proprietary platforms, content is available to registered (sometimes even to paying) users only. Some podcasts on these platforms are exclusive, which means they can only be streamed on the platform itself, and not downloaded with any podcatcher or device (as it is possible with RSS feed based podcast distribution).

Spotify

Spotify expanded their music streaming offer with podcasts in 2015 (Crook, 2015). As Sullivan (2019, p. 7) notes, it was the first platform to “essentially remove content that was previously distributed via RSS and lock its distribution into a propriety platform”. For Morris (2021b),

“Spotify is the biggest and most popular example of a new breed of interfaces and services that replace RSS feeds with other forms of display—such as custom players, direct streams, etc.—to create a ‘lean-back’ listening experience that relies more on automated recommendations and promotional placements for podcast discovery” (Morris, 2021b, p. 217).

Podcasters need to actively submit their podcast’s RSS feed for it to be available on Spotify. The audio files are then usually cached and delivered by Spotify. For listeners, there is little information visible where the podcast originates. This cuts the direct connection between podcasters and listeners and gives Spotify full control regarding distribution and data collection.

²⁵ These tags include <itunes:author>, <itunes:type>, <itunes:summary>, <itunes:owner>, <itunes:name>, <itunes:email>, <itunes:image>, <itunes:subtitle>, <itunes:block> and <itunes:explicit>. Hansen (2021) discusses podcast meta data, RSS feed tags and their connection to big tech corporations in more detail.

Some podcasts are delivered “passthrough”, that means the audio files are fetched from their original servers, not from Spotify’s. This arrangement is only available per special agreement²⁶.

To listen to contents in the app or on the website, users must register and log in. Ad-free listening is available starting at 10,99 Euros per month. Users cannot manually add RSS feeds to listen to a podcast whose producer has not submitted it themselves. Spotify also algorithmically suggests podcasts to users and aggregates charts that are updated daily (*Podcast-Charts*, n.d.).

By listener numbers, it is probably the most important walled garden platform in Austria – in Germany, 50 percent of listeners used Spotify to access podcasts in September 2022 (Rabe, 2022). Until this day, Spotify distributes exclusive German language podcasts in Austria, however, in the US, backs down from the exclusive strategy to some degree, making several formerly exclusive podcasts available via RSS again (Tani, 2023). In April 2023, Spotify CEO Daniel Ek announced that the platform will limit its spending on exclusive podcasts, as the podcast business still was not profitable for the platform (Khalid, 2023).

Spotify positions itself as “an all-in-one podcasting platform” (*How to Start a Podcast*, 2023). It strategically acquired several companies for this, horizontally and vertically, in a manner that Srnicek (2017, p. 103) would call “rhizomatic”: In 2019, Spotify bought the hosting service Anchor.Fm which today is free to use for podcasters (Mignano & Zicherman, 2019), and was renamed “Spotify for Podcasters” in 2023 (*Wir stellen vor*, 2023). In March 2021, Spotify took over the podcast advertising firm Megaphone (*Spotify Announces Strategic Acquisition of Podcast Technology Leader, Megaphone*, 2020), in February 2022 the ad tech companies Chartable and Podsights that enable podcasters to measure e.g. whether listeners bought something through a podcast ad (*Spotify Acquires Podsights and Chartable To Advance Podcast Measurement for Advertisers and Insights for Publishers*, 2022). In November 2022, Spotify announced to expand their service Audience Network and Podsights from the US to Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Spain and the UK, which makes targeting listeners for ads and following up on their reactions easier for advertisers (Spotify Advertising Redaktion, 2022; Spotify Editorial Team, 2022).

Spotify thus ties podcast producers, listeners and advertisers to their platform, by providing all necessary services for the relevant groups, or as Vonderau (2019, p. 15) puts it: “Spotify today should be regarded less as a Swedish music streaming service than as a U.S.-based media company operating at the intersection of technology, advertising, finance, and music”.

As Morris (2021b, p. 216) points out, Spotify’s “paywall and premium models have obvious implications for amateur and everyday podcasters, since platforms will most likely promote

²⁶ Richard Hemmer of the *Geschichten aus der Geschichte* Podcast explained this at a podcasting event by Medieninitiative der Wirtschaftsagentur Wien and FJUM at the Presseclub Concordia in summer 2023 (Hemmer et al., 2023). The hosting company Podigee claims to be the only one in Germany with such a passthrough agreement with Spotify (Podigee Marketing Team, 2019).

their original podcasts and will recommend and pursue licenses with shows that have received visibility and popularity elsewhere”. But it offers the ability to host podcasts on their platform without restrictions for anybody, so the author concludes that it “still sees everyday, amateur podcasters as a potential form of growth”.

According to Seemann (2021), Spotify does not have much economical growth possibilities left with its music streaming service. He sees the platform itself as a mere vehicle of the music industry which exercises immense power through its licensing. For Spotify, podcasts are one way out of this precarious position, and the author expects them to become market leader for the German speaking area.

Podimo

Podimo, launched in Denmark in 2019 (Adler Berg, 2021b), boldly claims to be “the startup that changes the podcast world” (*Das Startup, das die Podcast-Welt verändert*, 2022) by providing orientation to listeners in the abundance of available podcasts and audio books. The Podimo app allows users to listen to many podcasts whose RSS feeds are publicly available and does not allow listeners to add podcasts via RSS feeds manually²⁷. To get access to the *Podimo exclusive* ones, a user must register and subscribe for at least 4,99 Euros per month. The app suggests new podcasts to listeners through an algorithm, but also has a recommendation system by editors.

Revenues from the app subscriptions are shared with the podcasters through what they call a “Nutzer*innenbasiertes Erlösmodell”: Podcasters earn 50 percent of revenues, proportionally to the listening duration²⁸ (*FAQ für Podcaster*innen*, n.d.), which are only paid out if the amount surpasses 100 Euros (*Die nächsten Auszahlungen sind verfügbar*, 2021). If a podcast is exclusively distributed on Podimo, the company promises to highlight the relevant podcast to listeners, but forbids the podcasters to place advertisements or accept sponsors. According to Adler Berg (2021, p. 6) who examined Podimo in Denmark (where the business/revenue model might differ), “listeners’ subscription money is distributed among the podcasts that each subscriber listens to, the podcasts are in competition against each other”. When using Podimo, podcasters also get access to listening statistics.

RTL+ Musik und Podcasts

RTL+ Musik und Podcasts (*RTL+ Podcast: Jetzt Die Besten Podcasts Hören!*, n.d.), formerly known as “Audio Now” is the audio app and website of German TV channel RTL. It highlights the inhouse podcast productions, but also includes other podcasts. Podcasters need to register on the platform to submit their podcast and if it complies with its terms (which are not openly

²⁷ In 2019, with its launch in Germany, Podimo included all podcasts that were listed on Apple Podcasts back then into their paid app and sent an e-mail to podcasters to opt out, which led to some outcry in the German-speaking hobbyist podcaster scene. I also received such an e-mail for my *Lieblings-Plätzchen-Podcast* (which is CC-BY-NC-SA licensed, thus explicitly not to be used commercially) and asked them to remove it from their walled garden platform.

²⁸ This is very vague, but there is no further explanation given on the Podimo website.

accessible) it is listed. RTL+ notes that it does not insert advertising into submitted podcasts, and ads already included in the audio file from the podcaster's RSS feed stay untouched by the platform (*RTL+ Podcast: Jetzt Die Besten Podcasts Hören!*, n.d.). I could not find out whether RTL+ Musik und Podcasts fetches audio files from their original server or delivers them itself, like Spotify mostly does.

Amazon

Amazon is operating two podcast distribution platforms. On the one hand, there is Amazon Audible Hörbücher & Podcasts, which started out as an online shop and streaming portal for audio books. In 2017, it added German language exclusive podcasts to its offer, in cooperation with German print publishers (Bentz, 2017). It has several subscription pricing models, ranging from 4,95 to 9,95 Euros per month, with discounts for students (Jonas, 2021). On the other hand, since September 2020, its music streaming service Amazon Music also includes podcasts in US, UK, Germany and Japan (Perez, 2020). At its launch, it also offered exclusive content, and there is algorithmic as well as editorial selection to highlight certain podcasts. Amazon Music also has several subscription pricing models from 10,99 to 16,99 Euros, with discounts for students, and also a free tier with advertisements.

Podcasters need to submit their podcast on Amazon Music for Podcasters, agreeing to Amazon's licensing agreement²⁹, for it to become available on both distribution platforms. The audio file is delivered from its original server and not hosted by Amazon. The platform collects user data and shares it with the podcaster.

2.3.3. Crowdfunding/Membership Platforms

The third type of distribution concerns crowdfunding/membership platforms (also known as social-payment-services) like US-American Patreon or German Steady. Listeners pay a monthly fee (a percentage of which stays with the platform) and in return receive, for example, a unique RSS feed address they can subscribe to with a podcatcher of their choice (*Best Way for Artists and Creators to Get Sustainable Income and Connect with Fans | Patreon*, n.d.; *Steady – People-Powered Media*, n.d.). With crowdfunding memberships, podcasters (and content creators more generally) can directly monetize their work, without "locking" their content within a walled garden platform.

In addition to member-only private RSS feeds, Patreon allows podcasters to livestream, create further "benefits" and different payment tiers. Podcast producers pay a fee of five to twelve percent of their monthly income they generate on the platform plus payment processing fees, they decide how much the listeners pay per month (Patreon, 2021).

²⁹ This licensing agreement grants Amazon extensive rights: "You hereby waive, to the fullest extent permitted by law, for the benefit of us, our Affiliates and sub-licensees all moral rights in your Content" (*Terms and Conditions*, 2022).

Steady keeps ten percent of the monthly income podcasters generate on the platform, plus transactional costs depending on the payment currency and the value added tax depending on the residence of the podcaster. Podcast producers decide on the monthly fee, the minimum price is 2,50 Euros. They can provide ad-free RSS feeds and member-only episodes which can be distributed via Spotify (*Steady für Podcasts* | *Steady – People-Powered Media*, n.d.; Wunderlich, n.d.).

Substack, originally a service for monetized e-mail newsletters, also added a podcast feature in 2019, it works by and large like Patreon or Steady. Substack, too, keeps ten percent of the revenue, plus credit card fees (Substack, 2019). Substack also offers a browser based audio editor for podcasters.

The member-only RSS feed on crowdfunding membership platforms sometimes comes ad-free or with bonus episodes, sometimes the monthly fee is purely idealistic and subscribers do not get any return service for paying.

2.3.4. Mixed Platforms

Apple Podcasts

Apple Podcasts occupies a special position in the platform landscape. For once, as already mentioned, under its former name iTunes it was the first “big” one on the market, which accounts for its ongoing importance. On the other hand, in 2021 it launched “Apple Podcasts Subscriptions”, rendering it a combination of what I call open discovery platform, a crowdfunding membership and walled garden platform.

As the quasi original open discovery platform, it still functions as one of the largest repositories of RSS feeds. Through the paid subscription feature, podcast producers can also directly monetize their content by charging monthly fees, making it a crowdfunding membership platform. Apple Podcasts keeps 30 percent of a podcaster’s revenue at each billing cycle, plus applicable taxes, and “after a subscriber accumulates one year of paid service, [the] net revenue increases to 85% of the subscription price, minus applicable taxes”. Additionally, podcasters from the Euro zone need to pay an annual fee of 19,99 Euros (Apple Podcasts Program Overview - Apple Podcasts for Creators, n.d.). The fact that listeners can only access this paid content with the Apple Podcasts app or on Apple devices makes it partly a walled garden platform.

YouTube (Music) and Google Podcasts

YouTube is also hard to fit into this platform typology, because podcasts happen on several forms there. On the one hand, there is videos for podcast episodes on YouTube, which are uploaded by podcasters themselves, and can only be listened to by watching the video. On the other hand, there is the discovery-app-like podcatcher Google Podcasts, which will be discontinued in 2024, according to the company blog (The YouTube Team, 2023). Its functionalities were integrated into YouTube Music in late 2023. The music streaming app also works in a browser and supports

subscriptions via RSS. For this, the podcasters do not need to upload their content anywhere, because listeners can also manually add whatever RSS feed to the app.

YouTube and YouTube Music both are accessible without logging in, but subscribing to video channels or podcasts is only possible with an account, giving these platforms aspects of a walled garden. Ad-free tiers start at 10,99 Euros per month.

2.3.5. ORF Sound

ORF³⁰, as a public broadcasting company, is one type of podcaster in my classification (see section 2.3.5), but also functions as a platform actor: In September 2022, ORF Sound was launched as a website as well as an Android and iOS app, as the first part of the planned larger streaming platform for all public broadcasting contents.

It is difficult to classify: It is not an open discovery platform, because it only includes content produced by *ORF*, namely audio from all radio channels, but also from TV and podcast-first formats. It is not possible for podcasters nor listeners to add external content via RSS feeds. It is not a walled garden platform, because users do not need to register or directly pay for it. It is certainly not a crowdfunding membership platform, because like *ORF* as a whole, it is funded with fees that are obligatory for each household in Austria.

The *ORF* press department called it “a further step in the development of *ORF* from a classic broadcaster to a multimedia public service platform” (ORF Presse, 2022, my translation), prominently applying the term “platform”. It is not “neutral”, as a team of journalists selects recommended content for users, who can make playlists with all available audio. The app and website and all its contents are freely available (Seiringer, n.d.), a few months after the launch, in-app advertising was added.

In the memo *ORF-Strategie 2025*³¹, leaked by netzpolitik.org (Dobusch, 2021), the so-called “platform challenge” is prominently acknowledged. It refers to the “unlimited financial firing power”, “the best technological and human resources”, the “globally networked marketing machinery”, “monopoly in many market segments and oligopolistic position in many advertising markets” of globally active streaming platform giants (*ORF-Strategie 2025*, n.d., p. 5, my translations). The suggested solution is “creating a counterweight” with *ORF*’s own platform, adhering to the “platform principles (On Demand, personalization, user centeredness, cooperation, longtail development, connection of device/customer journey, economies of scale)” (*ORF-Strategie 2025*, n.d., my translation) and becoming the most used audio-visual media platform in Austria. There is no mention of a specific strategy regarding content distribution on third-party-platforms, “social media” is largely addressed in a superficial

³⁰ Disclaimer: I worked for *ORF*’s radio *Ö1* from summer 2018 to the end of 2022, see section 1.2.

³¹ The first page of this scanned document is missing so it is not apparent when it was published, but I assume it must have been either 2020 or 2021. I could not find out whether there is a newer version by now.

manner. In his analysis of the ORF's strategy for 2025 (published in 2021, thus before the launch of the ORF Sound platform), organizational scientist and board member of the German public broadcaster *ZDF* Leonard Dobusch points out that the Austrian public broadcaster is quite ambitious in its expectations of success for ORF Sound. According to his interpretation, ORF aims at reaching all target audiences with their own platform, which could be very difficult with younger audiences that are already used to consuming most content on third-party platforms (Dobusch, 2021).

Podcasts are also only briefly touched upon in the strategy paper, by stating that “offers for the podcast world are to be developed from the strengths of the radio programs. This especially concerns Ö1 and FM4“ (*ORF-Strategie 2025*, n.d., p. 11, my translation). From the fact that *ORF* “sticks with VHF as the most important way of distribution” for audio, that is regular radio waves, “way beyond 2025”, one can assume that podcasts are no priority for the public broadcaster and its digital platform (*ORF-Strategie 2025*, n.d., p. 12, my translation).

2.4. Types of Hosting

In tracing the platformization of the podcasting ecosystem, hosting is an aspect that should not be overlooked. In early, RSS-only podcasting, files were hosted on the podcaster's own web spaces, like any other file they would publish on their websites. This necessitates a certain level of technical proficiency, and with an increasing number of podcasters, new tools and services launched to make podcast publishing easier.

Today, broadly speaking, there are two possibilities for podcasters to host and publish their podcast files: self-hosting, or using a hosting platform. Usage shifted completely in the past ten years: in 2013 (as well as 2015, and 2016), more than half of Austrian podcasts were self-hosted. By 2023, the share of self-hosted Austrian podcasts has sunken to less than 20 percent (List, 2023).

Some distribution platforms (see section 2.3) also started integrating hosting services, blurring the boundaries between publishing and distribution. This is a step towards building an all encompassing platform that positions itself as central within the ecosystem (see State of the Art, section 3, for a problematization). Notably, Spotify acquired the hosting platform Anchor.FM in 2019 (Mignano & Zicherman, 2019), and creating Spotify for Podcasters – which combines hosting, distribution, analytics, marketing and monetization– shortly afterwards. Crowdfunding-/membership platforms like Patreon also offer hosting and distribution at the same time (see section 2.3.3 for details).

2.4.1. Self-Hosting

Self-Hosting means that a podcaster stores their files on their own web space, usually on their own server or from a general web hosting provider. From there, they generate a RSS feed that includes necessary metadata (title, description, date, chapters, etc.) which then enables listeners to subscribe to the podcast and directly download the file from the podcaster's webspace. As

mentioned earlier, doing this manually requires some technical knowledge and can also be very tedious. Pricing depends on the general web hosting provider, and is not podcast-specific. Generally it is not free of cost like some hosting platforms, see below.

In the German-speaking context, Podlove, a plugin for the free and open CMS WordPress, soon became very popular among hobbyist and Indie Podcasters after its launch in 2012. Within the group of German-speaking hobbyist podcasters, it is still common. It integrated the steps of uploading a file, adding meta data and generating the RSS feed into the browser user interface of WordPress. Currently, it consists of three plugins, the Publisher (that enables podcasters to publish their episodes including metadata directly within the WordPress backend in a browser) the Web Player (that easily can be embedded into any website, supports chapter marks, transcripts and offers a “share” buttons) and the Subscribe button (that allows users to subscribe to the podcast on any open discovery platform or podcatcher app with one click). These tools are developed and maintained by a group of volunteers that are strongly rooted in the open source community and the German hobbyist and indie podcasting scene. There are several other plugins for the same purpose and different content management systems.

Another possibility for self-hosted podcasts is a static site generator for a podcast website that at the same time produces an RSS feed, for example Jekyll Octopod. This option requires a relatively high amount of coding skills and to my knowledge is a niche phenomenon in the Austrian podcasting scene.

2.4.2. Hosting Platforms

Hosting platforms make the publishing process even easier, because podcasters do not need to have a website with their own web space in the first place. They only need to have an account with such a service, and everything else – publishing the file with metadata and generating the RSS feed, as well as automatically submitting it to distribution platforms with a few clicks and generating a landing page on the web – happens in an accessible browser based interface. The backend of these hosting platforms usually offers listener statistics, some of them also allow for so-called dynamic ad insertion (see section 2.5 on Monetization Models).

There are different pricing models of hosting platforms. German Podigee and Austrian Stationista for example charge per podcast, that is per RSS feed, both starting at 12 Euros per month (*Funktionen & Preise für Podcast-Hosting bei Stationista*, n.d.; *Podcast Hosting Pricing - Start a Podcast with Podigee Today*, n.d.). Acast has a free tier, and charges podcasters for additional services like marketing tools and the ability to change the look of the landing page, starting 14,99 Euros per month (*Beginne einen Podcast – Jetzt loslegen | Acast*, n.d.). Spotify for Podcasters, formerly known as Anchor.FM, is free of charge, and unites all steps from publishing, distributing and monetizing to listening in a single service (*How to Start a Podcast*, 2023).

Soundcloud, originally intended for musicians to upload their tracks, also is used as a podcasting hosting platform. Their current pricing model allows for three hours of audio to be uploaded for free, for 85 Euros per year there is no limit on audio uploads (*Verschaff Dir Gehör Mit Next Pro*, n.d.). As the platform is not centered around podcasts, a RSS feed is not automatically generated, but requires a opt-in.

2.5. Monetization Models

In the previous sections, I have already touched upon the topic of monetization several times. Because financial interests play such an important role in the platformization of the podcasting ecosystem, and for the sake of clarity, I offer a brief overview on different monetization models below.

2.5.1. Advertising

Advertising in podcasts can be distinguished along several lines. The first distinction is format-related, so either the ad is a preproduced spot (like on traditional radio) or read by the host, often accompanied by a personal anecdote. Host-read advertisements tend to be more valuable because they are thought to be more popular with listeners and consequently more effective (Brinson & Lemon, 2023).

The second distinction concerns the delivery. An audio ad (be it a preproduced spot or host-read) can be “baked-in”, that means it is part of the audio file of the podcast itself and stays there “forever”. It is however increasingly replaced by so-called dynamic ad insertion. The (preproduced) ad is only inserted into the podcast file or stream upon download. This means that it can be targeted specifically to the listener, depending on available data – age, gender, location, etc.

For example, if a listener downloads a two year old episode, it will include an up-to-date ad, in contrast to the baked-in ad which would be two years old as well. Dynamic ad insertion is more precise for advertisers, because they can determine an exact number of deliveries (for example, an ad should be presented to exactly 1000 listeners) or a certain period of time (for example, only on weekends). Accordingly, pricing for the ads is more precise.

2.5.2. Crowdfunding

I have explained the functioning of crowdfunding in section 2.3.3. Economically, it currently plays a minor role in the Austrian podcasting market, it only accounts for a small share total revenue generated with podcasts.

2.5.3. Donations

Especially in the early indie podcast scene, donations via cash transfer or services like PayPal were a common means of generating a small income. Like with crowdfunding, fees might be deducted, and it is generally unpredictable for podcast producers how much funding they could generate.

2.5.4. Merchandising

One other potential revenue option for podcasters is selling branded merchandise like t-shirts, mugs or similar. Sometimes this is combined with crowdfunding, where these products are offered as a reward for the financial support.

3. State of the Art

In this chapter, I first present the State of the Art concerning the research on podcasting, platforms, platformization of the larger media industry and podcasting specifically, ultimately carving out my research gap.

3.1. Podcasting

Before diving into literatures on platformization, I want to give a short introduction on what people mean when talking about podcasting, including a brief historical excursion, a distinction from radio and discourses of democratization.

The definition of podcasts has been up for debate ever since the term was coined – combining “broadcasting” and the iPod – by Ben Hammersley in February 2004 (Hammersley, 2004). In these early times, the term podcast referred to “any audio-content downloaded from the internet either manually from a website or automatically via software applications” (Berry, 2006, p. 144). Berry (2006, p. 144) describes podcasting as a new “converged medium (bringing together audio, the web and portable media devices)” as well as “a disruptive technology”, as it is not gate-kept like traditional media. He furthermore characterizes it as moveable, not fixed to a time, pauseable/replayable, and generally free from strict requirements in format and style.

There is no consensus in the podcasting scene nor in academia whether podcasting can be defined stylistically in itself or definitely differentiated from radio through its aesthetics. One often cited defining characteristic is the special intimacy of podcasts (Berry, 2016; Hilmes, 2022; Sienkiewicz & Jaramillo, 2019), which is based on the praxis of listening with headphones, actively choosing a show as a listener, and partly on the style of production and choice of topics.

Distribution via RSS quickly became an essential part of podcasting’s definition. Bottomley (2015, p. 166) – who in his dissertation (2016) insists that podcasting is more of a new radio practice than a medium in its own right – observes that “it is the RSS feed that distinguishes podcasting from streaming audio and a plethora of other downloadable audio media files online”. According to him, early podcasts were clearly native to the web, sometimes even with an anti-radio stance. However, he also argues that public perception of podcasting has long become more ambiguous, because traditional radio and media companies started publishing podcasts as well. He furthermore sees podcasting going in the same direction as radio

broadcasting, which had started out as a participatory practice, and is now an established, regulated commercial activity (Bottomley, 2020)³².

Only a few years ago, Sullivan (2019, p. 2) again described the openness of podcasting's distribution mechanism as one of its "distinguishing features". Berry (2022) clearly delineates it from radio and states that it is not a mere extension of it, even though the radio industry also engages in it. He proposes to take the cultural side of podcasting into account, that is the lack of formal institutions as well as underlying conditions like participatory values, community-orientation and "produsage" (a merging of producers and users of content). He underlines the importance of RSS through its "political status [...] as a freely available tool" (p. 404) which supports interoperability and thus a certain user experience.

Several authors (Berry, 2022; Llinares, 2022; Sterne et al., 2008) warn us of a podcast definition based on technology alone – technological developments can happen quickly and thus are anything but a stable characteristic feature.

Sterne et al. (2008) dispute the claim that RSS and Apple's iPod were the only building blocks in the emergence of podcasting, pointing to a whole "network of actors, technologies and behaviors" instead. Against the backdrop of the Californian Ideology (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996), they also contest the narrative of podcasting being a particularly democratic, democratizing or anti-corporate medium. This view had been circulated by tech journalists who hailed podcasting as a new "frontier". But according to the authors, from its beginnings, podcasting had a strong link to the iPod and had been considered a suitable medium for commercial exploitation by podcast evangelist Curry³³. And despite its cultural connection to blogging, its contrasting positioning towards radio, and all claims to do otherwise, podcasting mostly consists of a one-to-many-relation between sender and receiver.

Bonini (2015) locates a relevant shift in the US podcasting landscape around 2012, when crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter allowed former public radio producers to pursue their productions independently, outside of traditional broadcasting structures, for example Roman Mars and his show *99% invisible*. Bonini argues that by 2015, podcasting has transformed from a "do-it-yourself, amateur niche medium to a commercial mass medium" and that it "has now definitely entered the market, following the same history as radio when broadcasting over the

³² In the same article he, also takes up the "failed technologies" of "proto-podcasting" that were predecessors for, or partly, competition of podcasting in the 1990s, which I cannot include here as it leads to far from my actual topic, but is nevertheless interesting, especially from an STS perspective.

³³ In an early news report on podcasting for USA TODAY, Byron Acohido (2005) already shows potential commercial opportunities in podcasting: "A few corporations have begun exploring the notion of using podcasts to push training programs. And some advertisers are examining whether to sponsor podcasts that cater to homogeneous groups of listeners likely to use their products, says Steve Rubel, [...] "This year, not only will podcasting become a popular tool for corporations, but also for celebrities and musicians who want to stay in regular touch with their fans".

airwaves was adopted by American corporations and transformed into a commercial activity” (Bonini, 2015, p. 27).

In using the Podcast Movement Conference as a case study, Sullivan (2018), also argues that the amateur medium of podcasting is becoming more formalized. While it sticks to its “long tail” environment, that is its viability in the thematic niches, it is leaving its democratic founding ethos behind:

“These panel sessions served to socialise amateur podcasters into the routines and structures of mass media production, to emphasise the importance of audience metrics, and to firmly establish the centrality of advertising sponsorship as the most viable form of revenue support” (Sullivan, 2018, p. 53).

Later, he argues that podcasting is being formalized from two sides: on the one hand top down as traditional broadcasters venture into podcasting. On the other hand bottom up, because podcasters are institutionalizing their production practices. He furthermore suggests that “industry-related talk and industrial narratives among podcast practitioners are similarly instrumental in creating a sense of what podcasting is all about” (Sullivan, 2021, p. 96), an assumption I share in my research project here. He concludes that the discourse in the US podcasting industry is characterized by professionalization, entrepreneurialism and affective labor – tending closely to the audience and their wishes. Behind lies a “powerful and seductive message of meritocracy” that is at odds with the precarious conditions of the gig economy and cultural production online.

Bonini (2022, p. 19) points out that podcasting has long become more than an “audio-based object”, as visual components in the form of cover art or accompanying videos have gained importance. He also questions the idea that podcasting is its own medium, and argues that it merely re-mediate radio and other media. Instead he suggests to consider podcasting as “an emerging network of material and non-material elements” and

“a complex hybrid cultural form constantly reproduced by an evolving network of different, and dynamic, clusters of human (audio producers, editorial curators, software developers, graphic designers, listeners) and non-human actors (platforms, recommender algorithms, mobile media devices, distribution technologies, and internet infrastructures)” (Bonini, 2022, p. 26).

To summarize, podcasting is understood as a hard-to-define practice which is constantly evolving and includes a large array of human and non-human actors. My research contributes an Austrian case study to these literatures, especially regarding the understanding of podcasting within the local community of podcasters, e.g. on the spectrum of radio—not radio. It is taking

narratives of openness and democratic values into account as well as commercialization and formalization tendencies that have been observed for the English speaking scene.

3.2. Platformization

I continue this State of the Art with a look at platforms and platformization. Depending on the discipline one is coming from, platforms are conceptualized very differently, with changing emphasis on certain aspects like markets, infrastructures and power relations. In this section, I put particular emphasis on the potential downsides of platformization and how it might change the status quo of the web (and the world) for the worse. The particularities of platformization and media, as well as its interplay with podcasting, are discussed in the subsequent sections. Srnicek (2017) who popularized the term “platform capitalism” has a mostly economic approach and defines platforms as

“a new type of firm; they are characterised by providing the infrastructure to intermediate between different user groups, by displaying monopoly tendencies driven by network effects, by employing cross-subsidisation to draw in different user groups, and by having a designed core architecture that governs the interaction possibilities” (Srnicek, 2017, p. 48).

Their driving force is data accumulation, which is accelerating itself through network effects which Srnicek likens to colonialist extractivism, or casually summarized: Who gets there first gets to extract most and can get better (the best) at extracting before any competitor catches up. What is extracted is the (financial) value of social interactions captured in platforms. Their expansion functions through “rhizomatic connections driven by a permanent effort to place themselves in key platform positions” (Srnicek, 2017, p. 103). Crucially, this includes horizontal, vertical and conglomerate mergers at once, which as Srnicek argues, ultimately results in ownership of societies’ infrastructures. The author points out that this underlying development stands in strong contrast to the belief that platform capitalism replaced ownership with use – which is only true for the user side.

Here it seems useful to make a brief excursion to the notion of *infrastructure* as a sociotechnical concept. Slota and Bowker (2017, p. 529) describe it as “pervasive and ubiquitous” and note that it “holds values, permits certain kinds of human and nonhuman relations while blocking others, and shapes the very ways in which we think about the world”. Importantly, “it is not so much a single thing as a bundle of heterogeneous things [...] which involves both organizational work as well as technology” (p. 531) and is inherently relational as well as fundamentally political. Furthermore it is characterized by its (partial) invisibility, which makes it difficult to grasp (Poell et al., 2022a, p. 60).

Andersson Schwarz (2017, p. 375) sees platforms “as an instance of digitization proper” and as

“infrastructural arrangements that situate digital operability on proprietary systems that are, to some degree, programmable and/or customizable by the system users, making possible one- or multisided market exchanges”
(Andersson Schwarz, 2017, p. 375).

Programmable means that third party actors (other companies, possibly also users) can build their own services or functions on top of the platform infrastructure. *Multisided market exchange* means that the platform facilitates transactions between multiple actors that otherwise would have had difficulties “meeting” each other. Put the other way around, platforms can dramatically lower transaction costs. Importantly, relationships on platforms are never informal, but always traceable through their materiality, and user’s agency is limited through infrastructural affordances – code being de-facto law, executing ultimate control. Notably, from his definition he explicitly excludes

“open infrastructure (i.e., protocol- and/or standard based), focusing instead on those arrangements that involve specific, designated software setups that are proprietary to the platform owner [...] with clear rules of engagement, and defaults and setups that put considerable limits on (while often also involving rents on) usage, modification, and adaptation of the system in question” (Andersson Schwarz, 2017, p. 377).

Andersson Schwarz (2017, p. 379) suggests a stack-model for mapping platforms in an interdisciplinary manner, from the micro level (“platforms in and of themselves), meso level (“connections (interrelations) between platforms and other surrounding systems”) to the macro level (“ecologies (superstructures) cultivated through platform-world interconnection”). The micro level entails local control, over users and possible actions – e.g. a user failing to comply with platform rules could easily be banned. The meso level refers to generativity, that is the possibility of larger ecologies by building new platforms within or on top of existing ones. The macro level concerns corporate accumulation that can lead to ever-increasing dominance. When platforms are globally dominant on the macro level, their services basically become utilities, for which the author recommends regulation, especially because

“It appears as if we are dealing with an organizational principle, which, like Fordism and Taylorism before it, is becoming actively embraced by all kinds of actors, standing in all kinds of relationships to each other—direct competition as well as interdependence” (Andersson Schwarz, 2017, p. 384).

Zooming out to the bigger picture of the platformized web and world, it becomes clear that the relationships between platform companies are anything but simple. Van Dijck et al. (2019, p. 8)

show that they “may be competitors in one segment, [...] partners in others”, leading to an “opaque and complex ecosystem in which connections are invisible to the public eye and hence largely beyond societal control”. They argue that some platforms can be considered “hard-to-avoid necessities”, on which even state actors have come to depend on to some degree, inverting the traditional hierarchies between government and private entities. Simultaneously, “the integrated platform ecosystem imposes the market dynamics of online economic transactions and consumer behaviour on every type of online activity” (Van Dijck et al., 2019, p. 11). This interdependency of platforms is based on what they call infrastructural nodes, “through which data flows are managed, processed, stored, and channeled, and upon which many other online services, complementors, and users have come to depend” (Van Dijck et al., 2019, p. 9). In order to reveal platforms with infrastructural qualities – that, in their opinion, should be specifically regulated to serve societies instead of harming them – they advocate for more case studies, which I want to provide with this thesis.

Helmond (2015) looks at the processual dynamics around platforms. She defines platformization as

“the rise of the platform as the dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web and the consequences of the expansion of social media platforms into other spaces online” (Helmond, 2015, p. 5).

She furthermore locates a double logic within platformization. On the one hand, platforms aim to provide infrastructure for other actors to build on, “decentralizing platform features”, on the other hand, they format external data to fit their own purposes, “recentralizing platform ready data” (Helmond, 2015, p. 8).

Plantin et al. (2018) argue similarly: while infrastructures are increasingly transformed to fit platform logics, platforms are becoming infrastructuralized. In addition to their initial characteristics – “programmability, affordances and constraints, connection of heterogeneous actors, and accessibility of data and logic through application programming interfaces (APIs)” (Plantin et al., 2018, p. 294) – some platforms have become reliable, durable, mostly invisible, but ubiquitous essential parts of human life. Facebook for example can be considered “de facto infrastructure” (Plantin et al., 2018, p. 304), as the social media platform fulfills many functions in the daily life of billions of people worldwide. In contrast to the decentralized, interoperable open web, it functions like a walled garden, controlled by a single for-profit corporation.

On the premise that “widely available, universal, and relatively stable infrastructure [is] a foundation of social justice” (Plantin et al., 2018, p. 307) commercial platforms becoming infrastructure-like is potentially problematic: On the positive side, they can increase efficiency and spark innovation. However, as they are commercially motivated, users’ agency is always aligned to the platforms’ profit interests in one way or another. There is little incentive to provide interoperability, on the contrary, “the platform builder reaps profits due to increased by-in (or

lock-in) by both sides” (Plantin et al., 2018, p. 298). Applying this idea on the topic of my thesis, access to podcasts (which are undeniably part of the public discourse) might be unfairly distributed and clearly profit-driven through the effects of platformization.

Helmond et al. (2019) examined Facebook as a “platform-as-infrastructure”, pointing out the crucial role partnerships played in its evolution: The more external actors, especially corporate ones, engage with a platform, the more its position in the platform ecosystem as well as in the wider economy is solidified.

“While platformisation speaks to Facebook’s growing capabilities to mediate the interactions between multiple stakeholder groups and their diverging needs and interests, infrastructuralisation speaks to Facebook’s growing ubiquity by embedding itself in other markets and industries to render technical and business operations more widely and immediately available. [...] becoming infrastructural is an effective platform strategy to ‘survive in the long run’ (de Revuer et al., 2018)” (Helmond et al., 2019, p. 141).

Poell et al. (2022b) argue that platforms are never static, but part of an ongoing evolution in three steps:

“(1) how a platform functions and subsequently changes as a multi-sided market, which is determined by a platform’s adoption among consumers and external institutions, such as news organizations; (2) the stage of a platform’s infrastructural development, which concerns creation and distribution facilities as well as monetization capacities, and (3) its governance framework, or the rules, guidelines, and norms that structure both a platform’s business model and infrastructural access” (Poell et al., 2022b, p. 6).

While the latter two steps, infrastructure and governance, are within a platform’s power, the first part, markets, lies largely outside its direct influence. This means that no actor, not even the platform itself, can have full control over the platform ecosystem. Poell et al. (2022b) thus demand a more nuanced, less essentialist and less deterministic understanding of platform power.

This point reminds of the essay *You’re Doing It Wrong: Notes on Criticism and Technology Hype* by STS scholar Lee Vinsel (2021)³⁴: Vinsel’s main argument is that excessive academic criticism towards a new technology only feeds the hype around it, determining it to look bigger

³⁴ In the essay, published on the blogging site medium.com, the author states that it is supposed to be expanded into a scholarly article. However, after I had emailed him on this matter, he confirmed that this is not likely to happen.

than it is and might ever get: “Critic-hypers play up fantastic worries to offer solutions, and [...] often they do this for reasons of self-interest”, including getting funding for their academic projects. The problem with this is that promissory “industry bullshit” – as Vinsel calls it – might be legitimized by the scholarly attention, while scholarly attention gets diverted from actually existing relevant techno-scientific issues.

Seemann (2021) points out possible alternative scenarios to continued platform dominance. Despite their seemingly irrefutable position in the current web, platform’s business model of “building higher fences” to make digital resources (that in reality are intangible, durable and non-rivalrous) scarcer will not work forever. Possible routes of decay are a new, alternative platform (like Napster in the early 2000s) which will enable users to access contents from the walled gardens, or political regulation.

Van Dijck (2018, p. 30) considers platform infrastructures – and platforms’ activities more generally – as performative, constructing new value regimes and economies, “bypassing, or battling local, national, and supranational levels of social organization”. He deems it essential to understand how platformization works to prevent corporate power from taking over crucial parts of societies’ functioning, ensuring a “fair, democratic, and responsible platform society”. He sees it above all as the duty of public institutions to address these issues of responsibility and accountability.

This quote provides a nice pathway to arguing for the relevance of these literatures in the context of my case: Platformization – no matter in which sphere – can pose significant dangers to the foundations of a fair and democratic society. If (fundamental) infrastructures become privatized through platformization, their public value and equal access to them cannot be ensured. This is especially critical in the domain of media (including podcasts) which bear the crucial function of facilitating public discourse within a society. In order to take countermeasures to such potentially problematic developments, one must first understand how exactly the interactions of platforms, platformization and infrastructures are playing out, while keeping in mind that all of this is performative. My thesis provides detailed illustration of the nature of platformization and its performativity in the domain of podcasting in Austria, contributing a new case study.

3.3. Platformization and Media

After the basics on platforms and platformization are clear, I want to get closer to the field of podcasting by looking at the interaction of platformization and the media industry. It is a dynamic fight for sovereignty which shows signs of historical continuity, like larger, established organizations having better options for negotiation, but also instances of disruption, meaning a break with longstanding strategies and power relations.

Historically, journalism and news production tended to be platform independent, but with decreasing advertising revenue they are financially struggling. Platforms – which usually do not

charge for hosting contents – potentially provide access to new audiences and monetization possibilities (Poell et al., 2022a, p. 51). But there are significant downsides, for example strong “winner-take-all effects” common in platform markets, which allow for a single actor (e.g. a platform) to outpace others by many times over in terms of user numbers, revenue, and power. This pushes smaller actors, like news organizations, towards adopting a “platform-native strategy” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4282) and aligning themselves with the affordances of said platform.

In this process, the “cultural commodities become fundamentally ‘contingent’” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4275). The authors conceive this contingency as twofold: On the one hand, cultural production is increasingly dependent on these digital platforms and thus less autonomous and less economically sustainable. Media organizations are degraded to mere “platform complementors” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4283). Due to the multisided nature of platform markets, some sides can be neglected or eliminated with little consequences for platform-builders, which puts media organizations in the precarious position of potentially becoming dispensable for the platform. On the other hand, cultural products on these platforms are “malleable, modular in design, and informed by datafied user feedback [and] open to constant revision and recirculation” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4283). Traditional indicators of quality might lose importance when media organizations try to reach their audiences by relying on the markers of popularity that the platforms set or trying to “game” platform’s algorithms. As a consequence, platforms are explicitly or implicitly taking on editorial tasks, without necessarily acknowledging their responsibility. Additionally, most platform actors are rooted in US cultural and legal standards and do not necessarily take into account local or (news-)industry-specific values and sensitivities (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Van Dijck, 2018). Nieborg and Poell conclude that media that distribute content on GAFAM platforms (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft)

“are effectively complicit in accepting economic mechanisms, managerial strategies, and governance frameworks and infrastructures that equal disproportionality, dependency, and inequality” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4289).

Duffy et al. (2019) see platformization of cultural production as driven both by institutional changes and user practices. They locate transformations mainly in the creative process, labor and citizenship. The authors describe changes in the creative process paradoxically: On the one hand, there is greater diversity of topics and creators, on the other hand, platform characteristics constrain content production. Regarding labor, producers of cultural goods might find new audiences (and sources of income), at the same time it is necessary to be “always on” to generate revenue. Citizenship, power and autonomy of creators are constantly negotiated, or in other

words, “while platforms are becoming central nodes in virtually every cultural industry, their power is based on mutual dependency” (Duffy et al., 2019, p. 6).

In their study on YouTube’s tiered platform governance³⁵ and the so called “Adpocalypse”, Caplan and Gillespie (2020, p. 7) point out that “the terms of participation can be changed by the platform arbitrarily, unilaterally, even capriciously – changes that could have an immediate impact on a creator’s audience size and reach”, and thus livelihood. Importantly, this does not affect all YouTubers in the same way, as those with a larger following (including legacy media organizations) often have direct contact to employees of the platform, while others are left with algorithmic decisions that are difficult to appeal to. The authors argue that YouTube is leaving its model of participatory culture and partnership behind, in favor of “contractual arrangements of traditional media” (Caplan & Gillespie, 2020, p. 9). The platform’s private governance however is often poorly communicated, leading creators to speculate on the reasons for their disadvantage/demonetization – some of them politically motivated. They conclude that

“These tensions are indicative of the broader attempts to fit social media with an industrial apparatus of commercial production and distribution that will survive as a set of arrangements and sustain the profits of all the stakeholders” (Caplan & Gillespie, 2020, p. 9).

Nielsen and Ganter (2018) deal with the topic of platformization and the media in a case study of a large European legacy media organization. On the positive side, they observe that it does receive opportunities for reaching new or larger audiences, and also potentially helpful data by joining platforms and/or collaborating with them. But at the same time, the relation is highly asymmetrical: the media organization suffers from certain decisions by the platform, loses agency and direct access to their audience and only gets a fraction of the data that the platform probably holds themselves. It is not a given that the interests of both parties align over long term, putting the media organization in question in the danger of losing its economic and editorial viability.

Donders (2019) analyzes public service media facing the platformization tendencies of the industry. In this environment, they need to compete with international media organizations as well as streaming services, with which they sometimes collaborate. But commercial interests and the platforms’ editorial requirements are often at odds with public service values like universality, cultural diversity and identity. Again, the relation between the two parties is highly asymmetrical, with platform actors ultimately keeping the upper hand.

³⁵ See Suzor (2018) for an in-depth discussion of the legitimacy of governance by platforms, and the fundamental problem of constitutional rights (of free speech etc.) not applying to private platform actors, no matter how much of a “public space” they provide. As a way to address this, Van Dijck et al. (2019) suggest to shift the focus of regulatory frameworks from “consumer welfare” to “citizen wellbeing”.

But scholars have also observed adverse developments, of platforms struggling for power: Exploring the competitive strategies of music streaming platforms, Hracz and Webster (2021) argue that distinction through price or contents (even exclusive ones) has recently become more difficult and less important, because everything has become available basically everywhere. Instead, platforms' focus has shifted towards creating "compelling experiences" for their users, for example by providing the impression of a perfectly personalized playlist, for passive "lean-back" listening, as well as discovery tools for active "lean-forward" listening. Another crucial strategy for platforms to tie their customers to their service is through lock-in: after a user has "taught the algorithms" their tastes and put together their playlists, they are unlikely to switch to another service, as their inputs and playlists are not easily transferrable, and they would need to start from a blank slate. Looking at the whole ecosystem, this means that there are strong first-mover advantages: the first platform actor present with a certain service has more time to harness user data and optimize their product.

In his book on platform power, Seemann (2021, p. 339) uses Spotify as one case study. Considering the crowded music streaming market, he concludes that the platform is actually at the music industry's mercy, leaving little space for growth towards profitability. This is why Spotify is counting on podcasting as a cornerstone of their business model. He expects that Spotify will soon become market leader in the German speaking area, and along the way will transform podcasting (as it is currently practiced in the open and independent scene) to something completely new.

The interaction of platforms and actors in the media industry is very dynamic. In some instances, platforms can exercise considerable control on media producers and products. In other instances, media producers and other actors can significantly influence platforms. With *ORF* being part of my sample, my research contributes further details on this dynamic between platforms and legacy or, more specifically, public service media.

3.4. Platformization and Podcasting

As indicated above, platformization and platforms are changing all media, including podcasting. In section 2.2, I already provided a historical overview on platforms in podcasting. In this section I elaborate on the interrelations of financialization and platformization and present literatures dealing with the cultural shift that platformization brought to podcasting.

Morris and Patterson (2015) observe that

"there may be money to be made in podcasting, though it more frequently comes from the platforms rather than the content. This is partly why producers and programs are creating their own apps; controlling the platform provides a means to profit from content that is otherwise freely available. The interfaces for organizing, managing, and consuming content generate more value than the content itself" (Morris & Patterson, 2015, p. 224).

They point out that podcatching apps – or “people-catching technologies” – are crucial for organizing and segmenting audiences which makes podcasting economically viable in the first place.

Like the news industry, podcasting initially leaned more towards the platform-independent side, as for example (Sullivan, 2019) argues. However, Morris (2021b) considers early podcast directories and aggregators as platforms as well. This pinpoints the start of podcasting’s platformization process in the early days of the medium. He however observes a qualitative shift, “a heightened form of platformization” which he calls “spotification”, referring to Andersson Schwarz (2014) who coined the term:

“the rising presence of newer, well-funded, and more populous platforms like Spotify in podcasting and its ever-deepening insinuation into all facets of podcasting make podcasters (and the podcasts they produce) increasingly dependent and contingent on the affordances, policies, and business models of the platform providers” (Morris, 2021b, p. 213).

This means that the spotification does not only entail a “technical feature update”, but is a “cultural reimagining of how podcasts should be distributed” (Morris, 2021, p. 214). For example, Spotify is normalizing the fact that some podcasts are exclusive to certain platforms or behind a paywall. The author notes that this effects all podcasters, including amateurs, because

“platforms will most likely promote their original podcasts and will recommend and pursue licenses with shows that have received visibility and popularity elsewhere, making it more difficult for less-established podcasters to break through, find an audience, and create a sustainable audio project” (Morris, 2021b, p. 216).

Additionally, Spotify as a music *streaming* platform shifts the logic of podcasts from downloads to streaming. At the same time, the platform cuts the connection between listener and podcaster by omitting a link to the podcasts origins like a website or RSS feed.

Bottomley (2016, p. 200) on the contrary, argues that “the significance of RSS has been somewhat exaggerated”. It had merely been a technical solution for the problem of low bandwidths of the early 2000s that made streaming audio or video contents impossible. According to his analysis, the cultural opposition between streaming and downloading is a more recent phenomenon.

To my knowledge, there is no academic work on platformization and podcasting in the German speaking area (which is why I cited only work from other regions so far) but the dilemma of platforms certainly is being discussed. According to media journalist Sandro Schroeder (2020) for example, Spotify played a significant role in popularizing podcasts in Germany by reducing the entry barrier for people who lack competence in digital technologies.

On the downside, the platform is rather aggressively trying to cash in on the winner-takes-all effect in the German speaking market, for example by cooperating with public broadcasting. Schroeder strongly criticized the move of WDR (a public broadcasting station in western Germany) to launch a Spotify Original podcast with their prolific TV presenter Sandra Maischberger. Initially, the publicly funded podcast – which has been discontinued in 2021 – was only available on Spotify, but not on the public broadcaster’s own channels. This had many advantages for the Swedish platform and barely any for WDR. Similar to Helmond et al. (2019), Schroeder argues that the public broadcaster legitimizes Spotify in its quasi-monopolistic position as *the* podcast platform. This also means that WDR weakens its own stance as a neutral, public and ad-free provider of audio content, paving the way for other public broadcasters to work with Spotify in order to reach younger demographics.

Adler Berg (2021b) explored another Scandinavian platform actor in the podcasting market: Podimo which launched in Denmark (and Germany) in 2019. She interviewed podcasters from four Danish podcasts that switched from free-of-cost RSS feeds to paid subscriptions on this platform along the aspects of commerce, autonomy and discovery. She pointed out that it is impossible to know beforehand whether going platform-exclusive will be financially profitable, while it “represent[s] a potential threat to the autonomy of podcasters” (Adler Berg, 2021b, p. 4). With exclusive deals, they are prohibited to distribute their content elsewhere and might be pressured to align it with mainstream interests. She concludes that “all podcasters publishing on platforms, whether open or paid subscription, are commercialized and contribute to the further commercialization of the podcast medium”(Adler Berg, 2021b, p. 5).

Another example for the dependency and contingency on platform’s affordances is Apple’s change of podcast categories. In 2019, the platform renamed and added some categories, but also removed many, in a top-down-process that did not include the affected actors, like app developers or podcasters. As Morris (2021a, p. 9) writes, “specific topics and subjects can be literally written in and out of existence”, demonstrating the immense power that comes along with controlling infrastructure.

“The push to optimize for discovery – to engineer for audibility and visibility – privileges a mode of production that places technical challenges of discoverability at the center of the creative process, possibly at the expense of other ways of conceiving of and creating cultural goods” (Morris, 2021a, p. 18).

As these literatures show, platformization seems to render money more important in the field of podcasting, and podcasters are incentivized to adjust to the platforms’ aims for profit. However, there is little research on how podcasters themselves experience these shifts. Platformization also influences the understanding of what a podcast actually is and whether it is synonymous

with an RSS feed or potentially a certain platform. With my thesis, I provide insights on these aspects for the Austrian podcasting scene which has not been subject to scholarly research yet.

3.5. Summary and Research Gap

With the State of the Art above, I showed first, that there is no such single thing called podcasting, but many competing definitions and understandings of the practice. Second, I sketched platformization as an ambiguous and dynamic process with some advantages but significant threats both for podcasters (or media producers generally) as well as for listeners. Notable risks include increasingly uneven or monopolized market structures and for-profit platforms becoming infrastructure-like with the consequence of them gaining disproportionate power over other actors like podcast producers and listeners. Crucially, due to the complexity of platformization, no single actor can ever gain full control over the ecosystem and it remains a struggle with changing power relations. Furthermore, the platformization process is performative, and all actors can influence its progress. Third, I summarized how platformization changes labor in media production as well as media products: producers are transformed into “platform complementors”, losing parts of their autonomy along the way, especially if they are not part of a larger, established organization or institution. Media products become unstable because they underly constantly evolving conditions of creation and distribution. And fourth, I laid out how platformization is changing podcasting, among other things through the importance of profits, shifting the logic from downloading to streaming, and facilitating new cultures and practices.

Focusing on Austria, my thesis ties these different layers and aspects of the platformization of the podcasting ecosystem together. It provides insights into a geographical and linguistic area that is understudied in both platform and podcasting studies. It shows how podcasting is understood by its practitioners in Austria, offers a glimpse into their production realities, and follows how podcasts themselves are changing in the dynamic ecosystem facing commodification and formalization.

4. Research Questions

After establishing background facts on podcasters, distribution and hosting platforms as well as monetization models, and presenting the State of the Art, I want to transition to the core part of this master's thesis, namely my research interest. The main question guiding this project is:

How do German-speaking podcasters in Austria frame the current podcasting ecosystem?

- SQ1: How do they engage with different ways of distribution and what are their reasons?
- SQ2: What relevance do they attribute to platformization tendencies in their industry and how is that reflected in their work?
- SQ3: How do different podcasters (hobbyist, indie, actors from podcasting labels or public broadcasting) perceive the podcasting ecosystem?

The first sub question explores the podcaster's stance towards different distribution channels and their motivation to (not) use them. It is partly inspired by Sullivan (2018, p. 53), who asked "how the shifting dynamics of the medium are shaping individual producers' creative decision making".

The second sub question helps to ground my project. It checks whether the criticism towards platformization prevalent in academia and laid out in the State of the Art is deemed relevant by the podcasters that are (directly) affected by its effects. It also provides tangible insights on the influence of platformization tendencies on their day-to-day-work.

The third sub question aims at the relations between the type of podcasters and their perception of the podcasting ecosystem, basically whether there is a correlation between being a hobbyist or professional podcaster and one's attitude regarding platformization tendencies.

Taken together, these sub questions allow me to answer the main research question, which contributes the first in-depth analysis of the Austrian podcasting scene and their perception of the ecosystem.

5. Theoretical Perspectives

With purely descriptive research questions, I had a very hard time in deciding for theoretical perspectives for this thesis. After nearly a full year of consideration, I went along with those frameworks and concepts that resonated with me the most the first time I encountered them. They embed my research subject in larger developments in the media and technology industries.

To help me make sense of my empirical material, I borrow the concept of contingent cultural commodities in platformization (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) and the six-dimension framework for systematizing the entanglements of platforms and cultural producers – including markets, infrastructure, governance, labor, creativity and democracy (Poell et al., 2022a), as well as the formalization of podcasting (Sullivan, 2021), which I elaborate on in the following.

5.1. Platformization and Contingent Cultural Commodities

Drawing from business studies, political economy and software studies, Nieborg and Poell (2018) understand platformization

“as the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4276).

They argue that the production and circulation of cultural goods is significantly altered through platformization which leads to the “contingent cultural commodity”:

“As cultural producers are transformed into platform complementors, they are incentivized to change a predominantly linear production process into one in which content is contingent, modularized, constantly altered, and optimized for platform monetization. This results in the rise of the contingent cultural commodity, which further destabilizes the neat separation between the modalities of production, circulation, and monetization” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4282).

Roughly summarized, at some point cultural producers align with platforms and rely on platform-native strategies in order to reach their audiences, which goes along with deprioritizing the direct connection to their audiences. The problem is that at the same time, in a platform configuration, certain sides of the market, generally those producing the contents, are put in a precarious position, and made potentially dispensable. After having lost the direct connection to their audiences (to some degree), this is a very threatening prospect for cultural producers.

I want to accept Nieborg and Poell's (2018, p. 4288) invitation to approach the platformization – of, in my case, the podcasting ecosystem – in a systematized manner, following their framework, which they expanded on in their book, *Platforms and Cultural Production*, together with Duffy:

Poell et al. (2022a, p. 17) argue that “transformations in one dimension of platformization cannot be properly understood without examining related shifts in other dimensions” and that the specific configuration has significant influence on cultural producers and cultural commodities. They further argue that power is distributed asymmetrically, but warn of platform essentialism, as power is relational and inherently dynamic, and “circulating” in the interactions of the relevant actors. This means that power is also productive in the sense that it “produces particular worker subjectivities and responsibilities, forms of inequality, regimes of visibility, types of logics, and modes of meaning-making” (Poell et al., 2022a, p. 187). Specifically, the

authors list four different consequences, namely individualization, commercialization, heightened structural inequalities and a metric logic for the evaluation of cultural goods.

To systematize the exploration of platforms and cultural producers, which are intricately entangled, they suggest a two-part framework with three dimensions each. The first part on institutions concerns markets, infrastructure and governance (they first suggested the three aspects in the above cited earlier paper (Nieborg & Poell, 2018)), the second part on cultural practices concerns labor, creativity and democracy. They aim at providing a holistic approach in which cultural producers and their practices are in focus. They define them as

“the broad range of actors and organizations engaged in the creation, distribution, marketing, and monetization of symbolic artefacts” (Poell et al., 2022a, p. 9),

a definition which comprises the key actors of my thesis – podcasters of all types.

In the following, I briefly sketch the six dimensions the authors suggest in their framework, which – among others – inform my analysis in chapter 8.

Markets

The first dimension in their framework concerns markets, which in the case of platforms tend to be very volatile as well as multisided. This means they are matchmakers between two or more groups, for example users, cultural producers and advertisers. Due to direct and indirect network effects, there are strong tendencies towards market concentration and winner-takes-all-effects. New actors have a hard time entering the market, because the more users a platform has the more useful/valuable it becomes. Another result of these network effects is the potential of platforms to “lock in” users and complementors, both economically and technologically. Even if they wanted to get away from the platform, they cannot do so because there is either no alternative or switching costs are too high.

But despite this asymmetry, complementors are drawn to platforms, because in the early stages of platformization there is great potential for economic growth both for individual and larger cultural producers. Additionally, costs for creation and distribution on platforms tend to be lower than elsewhere – for example, running one’s own website infrastructure comes with a price tag way higher than using the services of a platform that tries to lure new producers and users. To sum up with Poell et al.’s (2022a) words,

“platformization involves a simultaneous decentralization and centralization of economic power [...] this concentration of power is particularly problematic for cultural producers, as it exacerbates the uneven distribution of resources and other forms of economic inequality” (Poell et al., 2022a, p. 50).

Infrastructure

The second dimension in their framework is infrastructure, which they understand as relational and embedded in other structures. A platform's infrastructure has implications for the distribution of power and is key to its economic operations. The main means for a platform to deploy their infrastructure in its favor are what the authors call "boundary resources" (Poell et al., 2022a, p. 66) which codify and standardize access and integration of complementors. They can be technological – like APIs or programming languages – or cultural – like terms of service.

The authors note that it is important to differentiate the phases in which complementors, including cultural producers, infrastructurally integrate themselves into platforms: first creation (which is a rather fluid process), second distribution (which is combined with aggregation) or third, marketing and monetization (which centralizes and solidifies platforms' positioning). To illustrate the stage of distribution, they use the example of the "infrastructural trajectory of podcasting toward platform dependence" (Poell et al., 2022a, p. 72), from RSS to Apple Podcasts, Spotify and the likes, already drawing a connection to my research subject. The main tensions they observe regarding the platformization of infrastructure (that formerly might have been public or commons-based) concern "openness versus closedness, control versus autonomy, centralization versus decentralization, visibility versus invisibility, and stability versus flexibility" (Poell et al., 2022a, p. 76).

Governance

The third dimension of Poell et al.'s (2022a) framework focuses on governance, which they differentiate in the categories (1) regulation, (2) curation and (3) moderation. The first concerns the already mentioned boundary resources, which can be codified in written form or realized through technical affordances. They argue that these standards not only shape cultural products, but the formation of the whole creator industry (concerning for example YouTube, Twitch, or TikTok). The second category refers both to algorithmic and editorial curation. According to the authors, it is a continuation of past editorial practices (by legacy media gatekeepers), but the curatorial power is increasingly consolidated with a few (opaque) platform companies who tend to talk down their editorial responsibility. The third governance strategy in their framework refers to moderation. It can happen *ex ante* (before the content is published) or *post hoc* (through filters that remove or demonetize) and exists along the spectrum of necessary prevention of i. e. violent content to inadequate censorship.

Cultural producers need to adapt to these governance strategies, some have the possibility to negotiate, others try to "game the system". Substantial changes in platform governance can have severe impacts on the autonomy of those complementors that are rather platform-dependent.

Labor

The fourth dimension, which belongs to the second part of Poell et al.'s (2022a) framework, namely shifting cultural practices, looks at labor. The authors point out that working in cultural

industries has long been rather unstable and precarious. The arrival of platforms has allowed a few cultural producers to prosper (which is linked to the winner-takes-all-effect), but intensified the problematic aspects for many, especially regarding visibility, individualization, competition, job insecurity and inequality. The authors acknowledge counter movements in which platform-dependent cultural producers collectively challenge platform's hegemony, for example the so called "Adpocalypse" on YouTube (see Caplan and Gillespie (2020), which I summarized in section 3.3). Crucially, they argue that the essentialist narratives of platforms either democratizing media or monopolizing it are both misrepresenting reality.

Creativity

According to Poell et al. (2022a), creativity is also influenced by platformization, which makes it the fifth dimension in their framework. Like before, they observe a concurrence of opposite phenomena: Content on platforms both becomes more diverse and more homogenized. They argue that platformization intensifies developments that have structured the media industries for much longer, namely nichification, growing importance of metric logics, branded content and the ideal of authenticity. I would claim that these four aspects are very relevant in the contemporary podcasting scene.

Democracy

The last dimension in Poell et al.'s (2022a) framework is democracy – an aspect that is also widely discussed in podcasting. The authors note that the arrival of platforms had been accompanied by expectations of democratization of cultural production which did not materialize as assumed. In a historical continuity, larger legacy media organizations often have privileged access to platforms, leaving out traditionally marginalized individuals. More so, hate speech, harassment and disinformation proliferate on platforms which feel that they have no editorial responsibility.

Summary

All in all, Poell et al. (2022a, p. 194) emphasize that platformization and its consequences for cultural producers are highly context-dependent. In my analysis, I use the six aspects of their framework as a guide help me characterize the platformization of the podcasting ecosystem as seen by podcasters in Austria. The notions of markets, infrastructure, governance, labor, creativity and democracy sensitize me to identify tangible phenomena in the discourse – changes in podcasters' practices and podcasts themselves – that go along with the process of platformization:

Specifically, relating to markets, I look for signs of market concentration and lock-in, and try to identify the boundary resources of platforms relevant to the interviewees' production practices, relating to infrastructure. Sensitized by Poell et al.'s (2022a) aspect of governance, I pay attention to editorial practices of platforms and podcaster's adaption to those, as well as the larger formation of the industry connected to this. In my analysis, I also take into account the aspects of labor, namely winner-takes-all-effects, heightened competition and inequalities. The

dichotomy between diversification and homogenization of podcast content, as well as nichification and the importance of metric logics are further important sensitizing concepts. Lastly, I also keep issues of democracy, like the tension between broad general participation in podcasting and the continued popularity of established media industry actors in mind.

By examining the modalities of production and their (non-)separation from circulation and monetization, the framework enables me to spot instances of podcasts as contingent cultural commodities. According to the authors, this is a sign of advanced platformization.

5.2. Formalization of Podcasting

In my interpretation, the second part of Poell et al.'s (2022a) framework described above, the shifting cultural practices of cultural producers, speak well to the formalization of podcasting that Sullivan (2021) maps out in his paper *Uber for radio*:

Against the backdrop of platformization and corporate players entering the podcasting space, he argues that rapid top-down formalization is underway. In his opinion, the same holds true for bottom-up formalization which manifests itself in podcasters considering their activity less like a hobby and more like a (potential) career within the gig economy. It leads to emerging institutions like podcast networks and professional norms around podcasts, which originally were user-generated content outside of legacy media industries. Consequently, new gatekeepers arise and resources are concentrated (Sullivan, 2018).

Heeremans (2018) takes a closer look at podcasting networks and argues that they are

“mostly a deployment of social and aesthetic configurations. Not only are members selected on the type of content they produce in terms of creativity, quality, and approach to niche audiences; their status as individual producers and the opportunities for improving their podcasts also play a role”
(Heeremans, 2018, p. 73).

The networks divide labor between its members, which, according to the author, points to the maturation of the medium itself.

More generally, Sullivan (2021) characterizes formalization as progressive rationalization, consolidation and increased financial transparency of a medium. In the formalization process, the distinction between producers – or as Sullivan calls them, laborers – and consumers is vanishing. He emphasizes that this entails a democratization of cultural production, but at the same time commodifies podcasters' uncompensated and/or precarious labor. The self-actualization and self-fulfillment of freelance podcast work help individuals to put up with these negative aspects. Drawing from Duffy (2016), the author describes this labor as “aspirational”, because financial rewards usually have not (yet) materialized and remain promissory.

He observes that

“At the heart of this discourse of professionalism is a powerful and seductive message of meritocracy: that amateur podcasters can successfully compete with established industry players thanks to the absence of industry gatekeepers, if they have the will to learn the skills and make shrewd choices about forms of production and distribution” (Sullivan, 2021, p. 105).

Within this discourse, the second requirement for a professional podcast is what Sullivan calls “affective labor”. It concerns unique and authentic self-branding as well as largely invisible, “constant maintenance of the podcaster-audience relationship” (Sullivan, 2021, p. 106).

The attitudes Sullivan (2021) describes as the formalization of podcasting is reminiscent of the Californian Ideology (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996) in which high-skilled work in the technological sector is seen as a means of self-fulfillment despite precarious employment conditions. Proponents of the Californian Ideology advocate for digital libertarianism and the furthering of technological progress which should result in a “Jeffersonian democracy”. However, Barbrook and Cameron (1996) show that these politics actually rather resemble conservative economics and are repressive as well as deeply exclusionary.

To sum up again, Sullivan's (2021) top-down and bottom-up podcast formalization are concepts which I look for in my empirical data, to see whether these US-American developments are relevant for podcasting in Austria as well. More precisely, his ideas of professionalism, precarity and democratic participation contrasted with consolidation help me characterize local production cultures and pinpoint possible new gatekeepers.

6. Materials and Methods

In this chapter, I go into the details of data collection – how I put together my sample and got access to the field of podcasters, how I conducted seven semi-structured interviews and how I transcribed them. Next, I elaborate on the analysis of that data with a qualitative coding approach. Lastly, I explain the limitations of my research.

6.1. Data Collection

Because my research question points to *perceptions* of the podcasting ecosystem, it was obvious for me to employ qualitative methods. Given my interest in podcasting, which actually often equals interviewing, conducting interviews became my method of choice for collecting data.

6.1.1. Sampling and Field Access

Initially, I had planned to talk to at least two podcasters from each of the groups I identified within the Austrian podcasting landscape – hobbyist podcasters, indie podcasters, podcast labels and public broadcasting (see section 2.1 on Types of Podcasters)– that amounts to a minimum of eight interviewees. However, it turned out differently, and when sticking to my

original plan, I probably would have ended up with too much material for a master's thesis anyway. Including the explorative interview, I conducted seven interviews in total.

I only talked to one *ORF* representative because there simply was only one responsible person within the corporation. And I interviewed only one hobbyist podcaster with the explicit focus of him being a hobbyist podcaster. The market researcher I talked to in my explorative interview used to be a hobbyist podcaster himself though.

I sampled the interviewees based on my (tacit) knowledge of the Austrian podcasting landscape. I knew five of them personally before, and the other two by name. I tried to get relatively diverse views on my topic by choosing people who started their podcasts at different times (the earliest in 2014), stemming from different backgrounds. Sadly, my total sample is not very balanced in gender, six of my informants are male, one is female. I had planned to talk to one additional female podcaster, but we could not find a date for an interview.

Starting in November 2022, I approached all informants via e-mail, in which I informed them on the goals of my research and on their right as interviewees to pseudonymization and withdrawal. Some of them were already aware of my general research interest in the platformization of the podcasting ecosystem due to personal communication in months prior. I was surprised that all of them agreed to an interview immediately, without hesitation.

6.1.2. Conducting Semi-structured Interviews

Including the explorative interview, I conducted seven interviews between November 2022 and February 2023, some via videocall, some in person in Vienna. Funnily, for the in person interviews, I never used my own recording devices, because all of my interviewees were equipped with better recording technology than me and were happy to show it to me and make use of it.

One of the interviewees preferred to be pseudonymized in this thesis, and after some deliberation, I decided to pseudonymize all names for the sake of clarity/readability in the body of this thesis. However, the participants who did not mind having their name published here, are listed in the acknowledgements.

- (1) November 25, 2022: *ORF* representative (public broadcasting), conducted in person at *ORF-Zentrum*, 49 minutes
- (2) November 29, 2022: Market Researcher (explorative interview), conducted in person at *META* communication offices, 119 minutes³⁶
- (3) January 1, 2023: Podcast Label Owner 1, conducted in person in his studio, 31 minutes
- (4) February 2, 2023: Hobbyist Podcaster, conducted in person in his home, 59 minutes
- (5) February 8, 2023: Indie Podcaster 1, conducted online, 40 minutes

³⁶ Because of scheduling difficulties, the explorative interview unexpectedly was pushed to a date after the first "main" interview.

(6) February 10, 2023: Podcast Label Owner 2, conducted in person at her studio, 49 minutes

(7) February 13, 2023: Indie Podcaster 2, conducted online, 41 minutes

I followed the guidelines (see Appendix) in all interviews in so far that I asked everyone all the questions listed, which sometimes were slightly adapted to fit the situation of the interviewee. For example, I had the representatives of the podcast labels who work on several productions simultaneously pick one or two specific podcasts in their answers, as there was simply not enough time to go through all of them. With podcasters producing a single podcast this was obviously not necessary.

The guideline for the explorative interview differs quite a lot from the guideline for the main interviews, because it was aimed at getting a very broad overview on the aspects that might be relevant for my research interest. For example, it includes several questions on the interviewee's market research, and on the patterns he might have observed in Austrian podcast publishing over the years. The questions I prepared for the *ORF* representative also deviate from the other guideline, because it is a large corporation and not a small business or individual like in the other cases, and has a very specific legal frame in which it must operate.

I posed follow-up questions spontaneously, sometimes in relation to utterances in previous interviews. Because of my training and job as a journalist, asking questions spontaneously felt a lot easier to me than adhering to the accurately prepared questions of the guideline.

6.1.3. Transcription

Using the browser-based, but locally-functioning and thus privacy-friendly program *otranscribe*, I manually transcribed the recordings of the interviews, including timestamps for turn-taking. I did this verbatim (Paulus et al., 2014) which means that I also tried to represent dialect. One of the participants asked for pseudonymization, so I removed any personal information or facts that could easily reveal their identity in the transcript. Being unsure whether they were violating a NDA, the same participant asked to withdraw one answer they gave, I omitted it in the transcript.

I translated all utterances I used for illustration in this thesis to English, the original German versions of them can be found in the Appendix.

6.2. Data Analysis

Following Svabo & Bønnelycke (2020, p. 9) who argue that “research not only describes what it studies, it also makes it, performs it”, I treat interview data as constructed: without my research interest, the encounters with the seven podcasters never would have happened how they did. Only through the process of writing this thesis and reading about my topic, continuously thinking about my position within my field of research, I could make sense of the data, which emerged as new knowledge in the process of analysis. While the background chapter is as true to “hard facts” as possible, in the interviews and their analysis, I do not try to uncover a single

“truth” about the platformization of the podcasting ecosystem, but am interested in the discourse around it.

Furthermore, some of the interviewees were aware of my interest in platformization and my critical stance towards Spotify, which they had learned about in informal discussions years prior. So it is safe to say that my presence probably influenced their answers in that regard. For analyzing the transcripts, I adopted a qualitative approach following (Rivas, 2018), using the software MAXQDA. I came up with 34 deductive and inductive categories (in decreasing order of appearance):

Spotify, commercialization/commodification, Apple Podcasts, RSS, platform dependency / skepticism, advertising, platform advantages, indie podcaster, infrastructure, YouTube, platform influence, ORF Sound, crowdfunding, hobby, exclusives, user behavior, Google Podcasts, no platform influence, platform indifference, democratic medium, Podimo, digital literacy, podcast definition, podcast recommendation, lobbying and cooperation, Amazon, path dependency, platform disadvantages, streaming vs. downloading, privacy / data protection, platform power, Netflix, FYEO, Austria.

Some of them are based on the questions in my interview guideline (e.g. podcast definition), some based on aspects from literature (e.g. podcasting as a democratic medium), some emerged in the process (e.g. user behavior). I wrote memos for each of these categories in which I also listed how often I had applied them and which interviewees agreed or disagreed on them. In this process, I developed a sense for which topics were most discussed to what extent in which category of podcasters.

Next, I wrote a full and unstructured overview of the categories, already incorporating a few quotes, to outline the narratives present in my interview data. Lastly, I clustered these text fragments on categories into the eight larger themes in section 7.1, tried to unpack them and enriched them with relevant contextual information.

To answer the research questions per se, I relied on these eight themes, but also zig-zagged, that is, went back to my original material and the codes again. For the discussion section, I systematically combined the theoretical framework (see chapter 5) with my key themes, in order to build a convincing argument that contributes to the literatures I've presented in the State of the Art.

6.3. Limitations

I did my best during the research process to produce the most robust results as possible, this also means that I need to acknowledge the limitations:

Duffy et al. (2019, p. 2) point out that platforms are „far from stable entities“ and rather “dynamic infrastructures that continuously change their user (front-end) and application

programming (back-end) interfaces, algorithms, terms and conditions, developer resources, and business models, all of which impact how cultural production unfolds”. My subject, the Austrian podcasting ecosystem, is comprised of several platforms, and many more other actors, which during the period of my research and writing (late November 2022 until early January 2024) constantly changed, never to be fully grasped at a single moment in time. Simultaneously, De Reuver et al. (2018) note that the dynamic evolution of platforms and ecosystems can only be grasped in the long run – for which the roughly thirteen months of my work are too short of a period.

Another relevant development intersected with the time of my research: In summer 2023, a new public broadcasting law was passed in the Austrian parliament, fundamentally changing some conditions of podcast production for *ORF* – none of which could be exactly foreseen by the *ORF* representative I have interviewed in late 2022.

Furthermore, even though I tried to represent the diversity of podcasters in Austria as much as possible in my sample, this obviously could never succeed with just seven interviews. I believe that I have a good enough selection regarding the different types, but of course there are still podcasters out there that do not fully fit the categories I have come up with in section 2.1. This includes for example social media creators, e. g. Instagrammers or YouTubers which are “branching out” into podcasting. Coming from a largely platform-dependent background, they would probably have very different feelings towards platformization than say, a hobbyist podcaster stemming from the open source community.

And coming back to Poell et al.'s (2022a) dimension of democracy (see section 5.1), podcasting as a part of cultural production is not immune to historical inequalities. My sample predominantly includes white men between 30 and 50, and while I have not checked with them specifically I would estimate that they are all highly educated and part of the middle class. This means that marginalized perspectives are not part of my sample, which might have distorted my results.

Despite these limitations, I believe that my research can add value to the fields of podcasting and platform research, and I now continue with the results of my analysis.

7. Results

In this chapter, I present the results of my analysis of the interview data. Using quotes to illustrate, I show the key themes that emerged, namely (1) podcasting as an elusive practice, (2) nostalgia for RSS, (3) platformization as a threat, (4) platformization as an opportunity, (5) platform indifference, (6) perceived (non-)influence of platforms, (7) formalization and (8) democratic ideals and collaboration. Based on this, I answer my research questions.

7.1. Key Themes

7.1.1. Podcasting as an Elusive Practice

Before I dive into the details of platformization, it seems reasonable to establish what the interviewees meant when talking about podcasting. None of their definitions were alike, and they differed greatly in strictness. Criteria ranged from technical (e.g. availability of a RSS feed, possibility to subscribe) to a combination of technical, format related (e.g. duration) and stylistic (e.g. laid-back).

It was interesting to see that – similar to the situation in academic literature, see section 3.1 – there is no agreement whether and on which grounds a podcast should be defined as such stylistically. The differentiation between radio (perceived as somehow stricter and more polished in format and style) and podcast was mentioned several times, but stays extremely blurry. At the same time, the *ORF* representative considered *Ö1* (*ORF*'s cultural and educational radio channel) “a radio channel that plays one podcast after another” (Appendix, interview-orf-representative: 48), because it is not adhering to some principles of commercial radio like short speech parts around mostly music.

Two interviewed podcasters expressed regret that podcasts are often defined merely technically (judged by the availability of a RSS feed) which for example excludes stylistically “podcast-y” productions on YouTube:

“For me, podcasting is a question of style, if I compare it with how radio journalism works, which is very different, much more on point, a bit more rigid, more correct, and podcasts have this possibility somehow, to be more human³⁷ [...] that is my romantic understanding of what podcasting is [...] I would find it sad if one says a podcast is only audio that is distributed via RSS” (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster2: 21).

YouTube was a highly debated topic in the interviews. For once, video podcasting was perceived as a rising trend, and it predominately happens on YouTube. This seems to be especially true for the English speaking world where it has become one of the main podcast listening apps (see section 2.3.4). Hour long conversational podcasts were also said to have found a new home on YouTube (or Twitch). This is thought to be caused by the implicit rules, or rather style conventions, of certain distribution platforms, which these formats do not align with. Subsequently, audience reach diminishes, accompanied by financial losses:

“There are analyses of every Lord of the Rings episodes where seven dudes speak with each other for three hours, that would have been a podcast in the past, but now [...] many of these longform-bro-podcasts [...] turned away

³⁷ In the original quote, he says “da kanns mehr menschn“, which is very hard to translate to English.

from podcasts [...] because they can't reach anybody anymore because this Instagram, TikTok, Spotify is much shorter [...] with much more concrete storytelling. And those who still wanted to monetize this went to Twitch and YouTube.” (Appendix, interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 78).

In general, I observed two larger approaches among the interviewees: Either they saw RSS as essential, or they perceived the nature of podcasting as shifting, making it hard to come up with a clear definition. The loosest definition saw podcasts merely as audio and/or video files on demand, thus including distribution through walled-garden platforms. The strictest and seemingly most thought-through is applied by the market researcher in his media monitoring. According to him, a podcast is an audio – but not video – format that is published periodically, is produced independently from a radio station or similar and is distributed via RSS or similar technology in an open manner, which means that the file must be available for full download (Appendix, interview-market-researcher: 16).

Several interviewees alluded to podcasting as a practice, one explicitly pointed out the fact that an audio file needs to be *made* into a podcast, for example by giving it a title (distinct from the file name) and applying a category.

Summing up, the interviewees portray podcasting as an elusive practice, with sometimes contradictory qualities. The technical mode of distribution is a reoccurring characteristic, and so is style, which however never is clearly defined.

7.1.2. Nostalgia for RSS

Regardless of their podcast definition, all interviewees perceived podcasting technologically and/or historically connected to RSS. It is seen as a fully developed technology quietly and reliably providing the backbone of podcasting (and blogging for that matter), or as the market researcher put it,

“it's simple, free and flexible [...] and for free [...] and if someone comes to reinvent RSS, they might as well continue with the wheel” (Appendix, interview-market-researcher: 112).

Interviewees pointed out RSS vital role in a decentralized podcasting ecosystem and its possible looming renaissance with the current boom of newsletters³⁸. The arrival of services for podcast hosting and distribution that lowered the technical hurdles was largely considered a positive development:

³⁸ Substack, one of the platforms at the forefront of the current newsletter trend presented their “Reader” for web and as an app a few weeks before my interviews took place. The service allows users to subscribe to newsletters hosted on Substack as well as any other RSS feed from the web (“Announcing the All-New Substack Reader for Web,” 2022).

“Do I wish back the times where I was about to need to code everything by myself? No!” (Appendix, interview-market-researcher: 116).

“The beautiful thing is that the podcast developed beyond this technical fuss³⁹ and there are people coming to podcasts from the storytelling perspective” (Appendix, interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 48).

However, this was still strongly connected to the continued availability of a RSS feed. One indie podcaster described RSS distribution as one of the principles of indie podcasting, a principle he sees as a condition for the lasting success of a podcast.

Talking about other podcasters in Austria, several interviewees noted that a growing share is not aware of RSS as distribution technology. This development is perceived as clearly negative, for listeners who then cannot choose freely in which podcatcher to listen –

“I’m still annoyed when I go to a Anchor⁴⁰ page and I don’t see an Apple Podcast or iTunes thing, then I know, they haven’t checked a box in the background and there is no reason to not check that box, still the same with Soundcloud, some have a podcast on Soundcloud and don’t enable the feed” (Appendix, interview-market-researcher: 47).

– but also for podcasting as a medium in general:

“When for example the Viennale, Austria’s largest film festival, hosts a podcast and you contact them to ask ‘can you send me the RSS feed, the RSS link or the podcast link’ and you get a link to Spotify back, then even in the culture scene this transition happened that you don’t even have the understanding of podcast... that you realize that it does not need to be Spotify” (Appendix, Interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 46).

As these quotes show, there is a nostalgic sentiment for “the real thing” in the ever evolving podcasting landscape, which means RSS-powered distribution and listening. In many of the accounts, the idea that podcasts should be distributed in this decentralized manner is connected to being free of costs for the listener. This is likely also an instance of nostalgia, because early podcasting in Austria was clearly set in a DIY-/hobbyist context and rarely considered as a potential way to make a living. Pushing this thought further, these utterances could also be seen as an expression of fear to lose what podcasting meant in the past and/or to not belong anymore – I come back to similar ideas in section 7.1.7, where I talk about formalization.

³⁹ The original Austrian term used here, “gschistigschasti”, feels impossible to translate, it refers to something unnecessarily complicated or time-consuming.

⁴⁰ Anchor.FM is currently called Spotify for Podcasters.

Not all hosting platforms (notably Soundcloud) automatically generate a RSS feed, which means that podcasters unaware of this technology – which tend to have come to podcasting rather recently – might overlook it. At the same time, interviewees did not doubt RSS continued existence: Its simpleness would be the assurance that it will remain, albeit with less importance in the larger ecosystem.

7.1.3. Platformization as a Threat

Walled garden podcasting platforms, especially Spotify, are perceived as a threat to RSS and the decentral nature of the podcasting ecosystem, which is crucial to the nostalgia described above. Possible monopolization is a looming risk, albeit one that is not necessarily immediate:

“From this internet-everything-should-be-open-perspective, RSS must stay and will hopefully stay. This hopefully works out as long as Spotify doesn’t belong to Apple or Google, as long as this merger does not happen, Google and Apple will refuse to have everything on one platform. [...] If one player swallows all others it will become dangerous” (Appendix, Interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 83).

Specifically, interviewees pointed at platforms that try to get podcasters and listeners alike to only use their own services. This starts with small things like the fact that according to one interviewee, it is harder to insert functioning hyperlinks to show notes on Spotify than elsewhere. If such a hyperlink is not clickable for a user/listener, it is unlikely that they leave the platform to follow it (for example towards a podcaster’s website or advertising partner) as they would need to type it into a search or address bar of their preferred browser. The platform then has maximized the time spent there, which has direct positive influence on their advertising income and potentially causes a loss in podcaster’s advertising income because the user might never reach their site.

As already mentioned, sometimes platforms are actively discouraging the use of RSS, which means that they ultimately can take over full control on distribution. If the platform then ceded to exist, both podcasters and listeners would be left with nothing. To avoid this scenario, one interviewee made the case for a fully decentralized ecosystem – similar to how podcasting had been in its early days:

“The final, steady platform [for a podcast] must be private, a privately owned site that is not dependent on any platform in any way, like Spotify, because it would simply shut down the medium, and who knows whether Spotify still exists in 10 years. But self-hosted mp3 files on privately owned servers will still exist. This is actually my biggest fear” (Appendix, Interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 37).

Platforms can act to their own liking in any way, without consideration for podcasters' or listeners' concerns. For example, they could easily change the rules (concerning political content or the possibility to include ads in an episode) to the disadvantage of podcasters, as two interviewees said. The ORF representative suggested that in such a case it might be necessary to abandon the distribution platform or only submit excerpts of the full content then to be found elsewhere.

Interviewees were convinced that Spotify (and other platforms) curate their recommendations unfairly. One interviewee summarized these issues with an apt analogy:

“I like to compare this with supermarkets [...] if you go to Billa, they collect a lot of data on you and they know very well how trends develop, which products work where, with which product one earns how much money and this is what has happened for decades in food retail, that the large retailers produce the products that work and have good profit margins themselves [...] They can also influence where this [...] is placed in the supermarket [...] and that is highly problematic because they are not only a retailer selling things from different producers, but also becoming a producer themselves [...] and when food retailers don't want [a product] to succeed, it does not succeed.”
(Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster2: 31).

Platforms might privilege their own productions or those they commissioned (e.g. “Exclusives” and “Originals”) over all others, distorting competition. They also could use the detailed statistics they have on podcasters and listeners to replace popular podcasts with platform-associated productions:

“It is not yet that bad with Spotify yet, but at Spotify they also see which things work and then they either contact the podcasters to sign them exclusively, and then there's the problem that only people using Spotify can listen to these podcasts [...], or, on the other hand, Spotify does not only acquire podcasts but produces some themselves [...] and I am pretty sure that Spotify is not neutral with recommending and placing episodes” (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster2: 31).

Interviewees perceived the curation and recommendation practices of platforms as especially negative for hobbyist and indie podcasters, because usually only larger podcast producers (labels, networks or media organizations) have the opportunity to get into direct contact with the platform to lobby for their own productions.

“Süddeutsche Zeitung that produces podcasts won't have a problem, because they will somehow have a channel to be in contact with Spotify to make sure

they do not get off so badly, but indie podcasters in particular totally lose out”
(Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster2: 31).

This could lead to a “two-class-system” in podcasting with very high entry barriers and structural disadvantages for all projects outside legacy production/media companies.

Paid platform exclusivity was considered rather irrelevant for Austria as a whole and the interviewees themselves specifically. Austria simply is such a small market that exclusivity on a specific platform – even Spotify with its large market share – cannot be financially viable. None of the interviewees could imagine leaving a percentage of their listenership behind⁴¹ by moving their podcast into a walled garden.

Some interviewees found it unfair that Spotify does not pay (non-exclusive) podcasters for their work, but (indirectly) profits from their content anyway through monthly fees from listeners:

“I think we should at least get some of the money back [...], but that doesn’t work, they [the platforms] have so much power, they don’t do that”
(Appendix, interview-orf-representative: 78).

Several interviewees pointed out that the podcasting ecosystem as a whole would get significantly worse as soon as a platform oligopoly or monopoly was realized. Again, Spotify was the most mentioned actor, already having disproportionate power on for-profit podcasters. Both indie podcasters told me explicitly that they cannot afford to leave Spotify. They would lose so many listeners that their remaining ad revenues could not support them anymore.

Spotify was perceived as different from other platforms, regarding its technical functioning as walled garden platform but also as a large “cultural” actor with influence on formats and contents. Consequently, the interviewees expected a decreasing diversity of podcasts.

Spotify pushed Apple Podcasts – which on the contrary is “basically just a data base with an attached app” (Appendix, interview-market-researcher: 74) – from its historical quasi-monopolistic position and in many interviewees perception became hegemonic, even in formerly critical circles:

“Now, the Spotify versus non-Spotify discussion is a purely academic discussion. It is in the background, it’s not what people talk about anymore”
(Appendix, Interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 48).

⁴¹ For reference, as there are few numbers publicly available, in an union statement on Twitter that followed layoffs in Spotify’s podcasting department in October 2022, it is said that making “Gimlet’s and Parcast’s shows Spotify exclusive caused a steep drop in listeners – as high as three quarters of the audience for some shows” (Gimlet Union [@GimletUnion], 2022).

Using the term “Youtubization”, one interviewee (unprompted) pointed to the phenomenon that has been called “spotification” (Andersson Schwarz, 2014) or “Netflix-ization” (Sullivan, 2019) in the literature. He expects that Spotify becomes to audio-on-the-internet what YouTube already is for video-on-the-internet:

“Platformization [as a term] is not really right because this is too general, I think there’s going to be a Youtubization, sooner or later podcasts will be synonymous with Spotify. When somebody talks about online video today they talk about YouTube, who still knows about Daily Motion or Vimeo today or such things that exist on their own but public perception is only about YouTube [...] I think that’s the direction Spotify is heading because I don’t see a chance to stop this” (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster1: 74).

This quote shows that generally a lot of power is attributed to distribution platforms, with an expectation of monopolization and a winner-takes-all-scenario.

7.1.4. Platformization as an Opportunity

Despite all negative aspects and fears of oligopolization or monopolization, the interviewees also found many positive sides of distribution platforms. Often enough, these aspects were mentioned as side notes of negative aspects. And, like before, Spotify was the main issue.

Perceived advantages for podcasters include: detailed demographic data on listeners, detailed data on listening (for example at what point people stop listening) and consequently better monetization opportunities. For podcast labels it is helpful (and economically smart) to have a potential contact person at a platform company, which would not be possible in a fully decentralized ecosystem.

“What I would like to have: a connection, for example to Spotify, to get our podcasts into a recommendation or so. Or at Apple Podcast there are recommendations as well and there you need to have connections too, [...] these are opportunities that we do not yet have, but are building slowly” (Appendix, interview-podcast-label-owner-2: 44).

This quote directly acknowledges the editorial function that platforms adopt, both through human and algorithmic recommendation. Besides getting their own productions into platform recommendations, a contact person could also lead to direct collaboration, for example through the joint production of a “Spotify Exclusive”.

The hobbyist podcaster (whose podcast was not yet available on Spotify at the time of the interview, but now is) brought up another very interesting function of distribution platforms: they lend podcasts legitimacy. While iTunes has been the legitimizing actor of early podcasting, this has now shifted to Spotify:

“I think it is good form⁴², there are certain places where you need to be, and without Spotify it is somehow not legit, this is because you limit your visibility [...] when you didn’t manage to host a podcast and link it to iTunes, it wasn’t trustworthy, you needed access to iTunes to perceive your podcast as a podcast. And I believe that there are now people who only consume on platforms and do not know that there is another way” (Interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 35).

As this quote shows, platforms are considered the new gatekeepers, culturally as well as infrastructurally.

Referring to their listeners or their own listening experiences, interviewees also mentioned podcasting distribution platforms’ advantages for consumers: On the one hand, they are relatively user friendly (no need to copy and paste an RSS-feed link into a podcatcher anymore, thanks to search bars). On the other hand, they help discover new podcasts.

Looking at the bigger picture, several interviewees acknowledged Spotify’s importance in making the German-speaking mainstream audience familiar with podcasts in the first place, see e.g. Schroeder (2020) in section 3.4.

„You have to give credit to Spotify, [...] because when they started to push towards podcasts many people already had Spotify installed on their phones and knew how it worked and then got into podcasts. So you have to say that successful podcasters’ success is connected to this platform existing that makes it easy for people to listen to podcasts” (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster1: 74).

So again, platforms are perceived as relatively influential towards other actors in the ecosystem, especially listeners.

7.1.5. Platform Indifference

In addition to advantages and disadvantages, I sensed something that might best be described as platform indifference. It surfaced in two different forms: First, to put it informally, “convenience rules”. Even if people were aware of potential negative consequences of using certain platforms, they choose the most comfortable way to publish/distribute or listen to podcasts:

“My experience shows that regardless of these efforts, of this activism, it will be impossible to stop this wave [of platformization] and we will sooner or

⁴² The original quote says „Es gehört zum guten Ton“.

The platformization of the podcasting ecosystem through the lens of podcasters in Austria

later have a very dominant player in podcasting, namely Spotify” (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster1: 76).

This quote acknowledges the power of podcasters’ practices towards platforms to some degree, but “capitulates” on the grounds of network effects.

There was another instance of this “convenience rules”-argument, but contrary to the example above, it did not consider negative consequences of platformization at all:

“People are used to chat on Facebook and find it totally natural, that we [Ö3] are there, because you also have to see, the postal service, or when you called us, Telekom Austria, were third party service providers, too, so if it is totally self-evident that I text somebody I know via WhatsApp [...], why would I not send a WhatsApp to Ö3? That’s why I made an early effort that Ö3 is reachable via WhatsApp. We even have made an effort to centrally send something to everyone that ever texted us, but WhatsApp’s terms of service did not allow for that” (Appendix, interview-orf-representative: 82).

To treat Facebook, WhatsApp (and Spotify etc.) exactly like the Austrian Postal Service or telecommunications provider is myopic if one considers that the former also underly strong regulation as utilities, and are based in Austria. In fact, they are fundamentally different third party services, with their own terms of service that might run against the public broadcaster’s intent (and/or public service mandate), as the latter part of the quote above shows.

The second form of platform indifference can be subsumed as: It makes no sense to *not* put your podcast everywhere. The interviewees agreed that it was not wise to limit their possible audience by purposefully avoiding specific distribution channels, including “walled garden”-platforms.

“When it is about reach, podcasts should be available on every platform. Also from a digital point of view – long enough people were forced to certain forms of consumption, and I think digital media are characterized by consumers choosing when and where they want to consume. And if you prefer to listen to podcasts on Spotify, this is okay for me like when someone says rather Apple or when somebody says ‘no, I prefer the Google app’. I don’t care, as long as they listen” (Appendix, interview-podcast-label-owner-1: 35).

Here, boundary making is at work: The interviewee distinguishes podcasts – as part of digital media which allow listeners larger freedoms in consumption circumstances – from “older” media.

Interviewees perceived the majority of listeners (that do not podcast themselves) as especially indifferent towards platforms and platformization, always taking the easiest option, and/or sticking with the first podcatcher they find – thanks to its (near-)dominant market share, often Spotify.

7.1.6. Perceived (Non-)Influence of Platforms

Asked whether they or their podcasts are influenced by platforms and their affordances, all interviewees unanimously and immediately disagreed. This perceived impartiality of the interviewees themselves was contrasted by boundary-making towards other podcast producers who were thought to be under platform's influence. In the beforementioned larger nostalgia narrative of the "good old platform-independent podcasting times" this is a logical positioning. It distances "old school" podcasters that came "before the hype" (and platformization) from other, newer podcasters.

One partial exception of this was one of the podcast label owners who said that they differentiate between in-house productions (which are not influenced by platforms and their affordances) and those intended for sale to a platform. The latter obviously needed to adhere to certain quality standards and rules the platforms set, otherwise they would not commission them, and the podcast label misses its business goals.

The interviewees stated that they do not keep track of changing platform demands and even if aware, did not adhere – this stands in stark contrast to existing research of media production during platformization processes, see section 3.3.

"I have to say that I do not care enough about Spotify's specifics, what works best and how, because we won't change it anyway. [...] How we've been making our podcast hasn't changed very much in [...] years and we most probably will never adapt to specifics a platform demands or suggests. For example we've been ignoring for years that Apple Podcasts says that one should not add the episode number in the title, but we're still doing it anyway, because we started it like this and it makes sense" (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster1: 72).

Available resources also factor in: if there's no large team behind a podcast (and this rarely is the case in Austria), there is simply not enough time to optimize content for every platform:

"We enter the show notes once on Simplecast, in such a manner that they work on as many platforms as possible... and that does work pretty well by now. But I think they look better on certain platforms than on others, that's how it is. But we can't, we don't have the resources to optimally adapt for each platform" (Appendix, interview-podcast-label-owner-1: 44).

Both indie podcasters argued that their "luxury of a big audience" was a strong advantage. They could reach their listeners despite not playing according to all of the platforms' rules.

The reactions I got after asking interviewees whether *other* podcasters in Austria are influenced by platform affordances told a very different story compared to their self-perception.

Indirect, but potent influence on podcasters and listeners alike was attributed to trends set by podcasting awards or charts that for example Apple Podcasts⁴³ and Spotify⁴⁴ provide:

“They have a big influence, because whenever there’s something like “what are the most popular podcasts of the year” they [these podcasts] end up somewhere and there is a lot of attention in the media, outside of this podcasting ecosystem and that’s where they have a lot of influence”
(Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster1: 72).

Arguably, journalists who report on these charts (however difficult it might be to trace how they came to be), feed the winner-takes-all and celebrity logic of traditional mass media. They shape how podcasting is perceived by those who do not necessarily listen to or make podcasts themselves.

Platforms’ affordances were also said to have an impact on Austrian podcasters. One example is Spotify with its automated weekly playlists which require a regular (weekly) publishing frequency for podcasters to reach their audience:

“Many people listen in a weekly playlist that is curated for them, one example the Ö1 Morgen-Journale are streamed there and you listen to them and when you don’t listen to them in this week you’ll never. So it is assumed that the feed is generated daily and suggests to you what you want. If a podcast is not back every week, this reduces the probability that people acquire a regular habit with the podcast. [...] But for something like this you couldn’t do [the interviewee’s podcast], because it doesn’t have a high enough frequency or hot topics” (Appendix, Interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 57).

Spotify being the platform actor that is providing the most detailed insights on listeners and their listening practices was also said to influence podcasters. They produce more of the content that is popular with their audience and might get rid of parts which do not get as much attention.

⁴³ Apple Podcasts describes their charts as “a dynamic view of the most popular and trending content” on their platform: “Organized by market, Top Shows and Top Episodes can be filtered by category and are regularly refreshed throughout the day. By default, each chart displays the top 200 free and subscription results per market across all categories. Listeners can filter charts to a particular category by tapping All Categories from the top right and then selecting a specific category, such as News or Comedy. For example, a U.S. listener can view the Top Shows in Sports in the U.S as of that moment.” (*Apple Podcasts Charts - Top Shows - Apple Podcasts for Creators*, 2023)

⁴⁴ Spotify provides the following details on their charts: “Top Podcasts: The top 200 podcasts in each country, determined by recent unique listeners and overall follower counts. Top Episodes: The top 200 episodes gaining popularity in each country, determined by recent listening changes (such as growth and audience size). Top podcasts by category: The top 50 podcasts filtered by podcast category. [...] Charts update daily. They reflect podcast listeners and engagement, so remind your fans to follow and listen to you on Spotify.” (*Podcast-Charts*, n.d.)

It was believed that podcasters' own listening habits influence their distribution preferences. This means that people who discovered podcasting relatively recently – after Spotify has become the (quasi) market-leading distribution platform – might likely flock to Spotify to distribute their own production in a self-reinforcing cycle:

“If a host uses Spotify themselves and has a great affinity towards it, they will pay attention that everything looks good there [on Spotify] [...] but I think this should not play a role because when it is about reach it is important that the podcast is listened to, not where. [...] But if you have a high percentage of Spotify [listeners] it makes sense to optimize show notes for Spotify”
(Appendix, interview-podcast-label-owner-1: 46).

In several interviews, I picked up hunches concerning indirect platform influence, connected to the formalization of the medium (see below). One example mentioned in this context was the introduction of podcast seasons (in contrast to simply continuing with episode after episode), like it is common with TV series. Or, another example, podcasts getting shorter on average, with hour long conversations not being published in whole but split up in 15-minute episodes.

“I'd say Spotify with the shortness of episodes... so Spotify effectively relegated the banter podcast⁴⁵ to the niche” (Appendix, Interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 78).

“I think that generally – because of professionalization, because of competition but also because of Spotify – the way podcasts are made is changing. There are ever shorter podcasts [...] and I believe that somebody that listens on Spotify – that's my hypothesis – has a shorter attention span that somebody that listens on Overcast and I believe this does have influence on podcasts” (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster2: 49).

Like this quote indicates, there is a perceived connection between platforms and their target audiences, namely certain genres being more successful on some platforms than others.

The hobbyist podcaster warned that platforms and the requirements they seemingly establish for a podcast to be successful should not be taken so seriously by all kinds of podcasters. This was true not only for podcast distribution platforms in a stricter sense, but also social media platforms more generally, for example Instagram:

⁴⁵ The original term used here was “Laberpodcast” (two or more people having a conversation that can go on for hours), which used to be a highly polarizing notion in the German speaking (hobbyist/indie) podcasting scene (around 2015-2019) with listeners either loving or hating them, including sticker campaigns and hashtags.

“This chasing, it is crazy, it is idiotic, you really have to pay attention what you set yourself as a benchmark [...] what is important for a small podcast. I think the worth of old school media and reporting is extremely underestimated, because one only tries to be like dariadaria⁴⁶” (Appendix, Interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 66).

Here, the hobbyist podcaster reminds us that cultural producers do indeed have agency facing platformization, and through their collective practice can potentially steer the process of platformization in a direction that is more favorable for them.

7.1.7. Formalization: Podcasting as “Just another Media Channel”

One of the most prominent recurring topics in the interviews – possibly valued more importantly than platformization per se – was the ongoing formalization and commercialization of podcasting, which Sullivan (2021) conceptualized with the US market in mind.

What used to be a hobbyist and indie *scene* has turned into a veritable *market*, as several interviewees noted. This fairly new market includes financially strong actors – from legacy media organizations to streaming corporations – and ever stricter conventions. One indie podcaster for example likens podcasting to blogging and positions its roots decidedly outside the legacy media market:

“If you look at the charts there are only a few podcasts left that don’t have a large company or media company or partly also capital from investors in the background [...] there’s nothing bad with that if people like listening to that [...] but generally podcasts offer the chance like – I started in journalism as a blogger, I blogged for years before I joined a newspaper [...] and what I loved on the internet is that there’s not only the Financial Times and the Wall Street Journal, but many interested people just writing on the internet, and if somebody is interested you can make something for smaller audiences and have a nice exchange and podcasts come from the same corner” (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster2: 16).

The podcasting market in Austria was either seen as not yet fully mainstream – that is still growing and diversifying – or already at a point of consolidation. The podcast label owners both saw growing business opportunities, but the ORF representative, for example, strongly expected an economical downturn of podcasting (totally ignoring the hobbyist scene that has little interest in monetization in the first place):

⁴⁶ Madeleine Alizadeh, better known under her Instagram account @dariadaria is a famous Austrian influencer and fashion entrepreneur.

“There will be a market shake-out. I mean many won’t power through, will do something else and what remains is a bunch of podcasts, not only the best, but those who found the biggest audience and can make a living from it. So this euphoria – because today every Instagrammer must have a podcast and everybody has their podcast – this euphoria that one has to make a podcast on everything, will vanish I think” (Appendix, interview-orf-representative: 55).

Distribution platforms themselves encourage the monetization of podcasts, Spotify for example is starting to reach out to some podcasters to make them part of their audience network which means implementing advertisements into episodes. One of the interviewees, doing podcast marketing himself, naturally disapproved of this practice, but was not yet worried, due to his own established standing in the Austrian podcast market.

The domestic podcasting ad market was expected to grow significantly in volume and available technologies. Dynamic ad insertion (see section 2.5.1 for details) was mentioned several times as the most likely and most promising technology for monetizing podcasts.

According to the interviewees, monetizing a podcast could drastically change the relationship between podcaster and listeners, especially in the case of crowdfunding. Here, podcasters become service providers, and if they fail to deliver, they break a contract. The dynamic between podcaster and listener thus is less equal, and more akin to traditional media.

One (surprising to me) side effect of podcasting becoming more of a business is the possible step from a personal podcast to a professional career in legacy media, or getting famous more generally:

“Podcasting is something that you then can put on your CV, I can do that too, like soft skills [...] but I do believe that many people in the media industry do not see the podcast as ultima ratio but as just another thing, and what’s good here is that people can use their podcast to build a profile [...] it doesn’t need to be negative to use a podcast to build a career spring board [...] and I would say most people use it, it is an opportunity to search for fame” (Appendix, interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 72).

Formalization was believed to accelerate negative phenomena already mentioned in other parts of this thesis. Firstly, content and format is increasingly homogenized, niche topics and the overall diversity were expected to be suffering. The media monitoring expert observed that media companies and public broadcasting are dominating mainstream podcasting, leading to a certain blandness and interchangeability. Some guests are “travelling” through many podcasts, homogenizing the voices that are heard.

“The podcast scene isn’t as colorful and diverse as it used to be, but professional. And with professionalization the colorful experiment inevitably dies [...] I am very skeptical and critical towards media companies [in the podcasting scene]” (Appendix, interview-market-researcher: 116)

In his opinion, audiences will perceive podcasting as just another media channel, like TV, not as the disruptive and democratic medium it presumably started out as. However, there also were contrary opinions among the interviewees: One of the podcast label owners argued that podcasting will remain playful and malleable and the diversity of topics will still grow until podcasting is fully mainstream.

In the material, I observed two types of talking about the people listening: the hobbyist podcaster explicitly referred to them as “listeners” and as people he would personally want to connect with, while for example the podcast label owners consequently were talking about “target audiences” with specific demographic characteristics like gender and age. The latter indicates a clear market logic of distinct segments.

Several interviewees feared that podcasting will lose what they see as its initial essence. One indie podcaster referred to the “noble objectives” of “sharing things, giving people access without a paywall or platform” (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster-1: 46), which used to be the main motivation to start podcasting. Because of professionalization, these are not necessarily the main motives behind a new podcast anymore – instead, for some, podcasting is predominantly a business opportunity.

“In general, I believe that these big media houses and agencies that produce podcasts don’t care about distribution and whether there is platformization or something, because many of these are born in some board room where somebody says ‘we need a podcast about this or that too, now. Because we don’t have anything like this in our portfolio’ and then people are hired that do this for some time, but that fine goal many indie podcasters are pursuing is not there” (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster1: 44).

Second, under these circumstances, entry barriers are getting higher, for instance because of expensive and resource intensive marketing campaigns for new podcasts. Several interviewees noted that media companies’ relatively big impact with podcasts is connected to their historically large reach and not necessarily based on their outstanding quality.

“Those media organizations doing podcasts now, too, much later than others – I feel like they are those powerful giants – I do see it so figuratively – who partly dominate the scene or try to dominate” (Appendix, interview-podcast-label-owner-2: 42)

This interviewee observed that the historical power relations in the mass media market are continued in the podcasting space. This concerns audience size, and in the background, better or direct connections to gatekeepers.

According to its representative, in the current market situation it makes sense for Ö3 (ORF's most commercial music radio channel) to connect podcasting to their brand through an award. Traditional radio gives podcasters exposure to a large audience and Ö3 appears open to new media.

“You won't believe how interested podcasters are to submit [their podcasts], because then [...] radio is not seen as competition, but Ö3 as a super weapon to make a podcast more popular, which turned out to be true” (Appendix, interview-orf-representative: 28)

Contrary to this quote, none of the other interviewees mentioned linear radio as (direct) competition for podcasters. Given the imbalance in marketing budgets of media organizations and hobbyist or indie podcasters, it is totally logical for the latter to take every available chance for possible popularity – including associating themselves with an award founded by a radio channel.

Large scale marketing is easily possible for corporate actors but totally out of reach for small hobbyist or indie projects. A well-funded (corporate) podcast project can also endure periods of little listener numbers for longer than an indie podcaster personally dependent on ad revenues. The indie podcasters I talked to are making their living with advertising, which enables them to produce their podcasts in their current form – with high research effort, high sound quality and high publishing frequency. But one of them admitted that through this he is contributing to a supposed ideal which makes participation in the podcasting space look daunting for beginners:

“If there is so much professionally produced competition, the drive to make something small by one's self is decreasing, that's a bit like with YouTube. In the beginning, the videos filmed with some phone camera were successful, now YouTube is highly professional, every YouTuber has three cameras, pro lighting, a cutter and so on” (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster2: 35)

This quote indicates that the whole ecosystem is becoming less favorable for hobbyist and indie podcasters because of its formalization.

On the other hand, the audience can expect a better listening experience: Several interviewees mentioned the “professionalization” of podcasting in Austria, which is audible in the quality of new podcasts.

7.1.8. Democratic Ideals and Collaboration

Interestingly (and somehow contradictory), despite all these perceived threats, the Austrian hobbyist and indie podcasting scene still was seen as thriving and upholding its democratic and participatory values. The largest part of podcasts in Austria is still run as a hobby or not for profit. This interviewee considered this section of podcasts as essential for the medium:

“These podcasts that are not very visible because they rank somewhere after spot 200 in podcast charts are indeed the base of this whole podcasting culture and if they disappeared, I believe podcasting – I wouldn’t say as a movement, but podcasting as something that is not only a straw fire – would probably not exist anymore” (Appendix, interview-indie-podcaster1: 44).

The community aspect of podcasting – from listeners to other podcasters – was seen as very rewarding, and potentially more important than hard metrics that count so much in the professionalized segment:

“If somebody tells you at the podcasting meetup⁴⁷ they have a railway podcast – I have never heard about it – but they have a regular listenership, then this simply is awesome and it doesn’t matter at all if it is the new number one Spotify podcast, if this small group connects and talks with each other” (Appendix, interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 76).

The hobbyist podcaster emphasized that there could be a deliberate choice against monetization, for reasons of feasibility (a professional podcast is hard to maintain with a full-time job on the side) and in memory of podcasting’s roots:

“I think that the role of independent podcasters often can be [...] leading by example, because there will be enough people that want to professionalize [...] and to simply exist as an example that it can be different, I find it very important that this is a medium that you can produce without commercial interest, it is just a hobby, like any other blog [...] what’s nice with the internet is that you can share interests and you don’t need to have this commercial interest” (Appendix, Interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 41).

In the interviews, podcasting and especially its early times were set in relation to democratizing powers, which ties back to the narrative of nostalgia (see section 7.1.2). The opportunities for democratization were seen in several aspects: First, podcasts are (were) distributed in an open and free manner, without costs for listeners. Second, podcasts provide a space for niche interests

⁴⁷ I have been the organizer of the Austrian Podcasting Meetup – to which this quote is referring to – since late 2019, see section 1.2.

and community. And third, podcasts can be empowering for the people making them, because on the one hand, they can climb from listener to producer, on the other hand they can attain technological ownership to some degree.

Additionally, several podcasters mentioned that they wished for more cooperation to tackle common difficulties, especially regarding big platform actors. One podcast label owner gave the example of France where there is an association that politically lobbies in favor of podcasters and organizes events and awards, which, however, is also another sign for the ongoing formalization.

In this section I have introduced the key themes that I encountered in the analysis of my interview data: podcasting as an elusive practice, nostalgia for RSS, platformization as a threat and opportunity, platform indifference, the perceived (non-)influence of platforms, formalization and lastly, democratic ideals and collaboration in the podcasting community.

7.2. Answering the Sub Questions

After establishing the themes that emerged in my research, I can now specifically answer my sub questions, which then leads me to answering my overall research question “How do German-speaking podcasters in Austria frame the current podcasting ecosystem?” in the discussion (chapter 8) following below.

Sub Question 1: How do they engage with different ways of distribution and what are their reasons?

All interviewees use RSS to distribute their podcasts⁴⁸, which is unsurprising considering the importance they attribute to the technology in podcasting generally (see section 7.1.2). They all try to maximize their reach by submitting their RSS feed to as many repositories and platforms as possible. Most mentioned were Apple Podcasts and Spotify, followed by Google Podcasts or YouTube, with other actors mostly subsumed as “the rest”. Several interviewees pointed out that it should be the listener’s decision *where* to access their podcast, like they decide *when* to listen (unlike linear radio).

In contrast to this, one of the indie podcasters wanted listeners to access his podcast anywhere *but* Spotify (where his podcast nonetheless is available because of the pressure to monetize). The main reason for this is that he does not want the platform to become the single most important and leading actor in the podcast market – a goal he however sees as extremely unlikely to happen. Only the hobbyist podcaster used to avoid Spotify, and did not make his podcast available there. He did this because he deemed Spotify unnecessary for podcasting, as there are so many other free/open and well-functioning alternatives, and because he sees a risk of Spotify becoming a monopolist capturing the whole ecosystem. However, shortly after my

⁴⁸ Given my definition of a podcast requiring a RSS feed to count as such for the purposes of this thesis, this was clear even before my interviews.

interview with him, and after long deliberations in his team and with their audience, he made their podcast available on Spotify.

In addition to the common distribution platforms which are acknowledged as being monopolistic or oligopolistic, *ORF* also publishes their content on their own platform *ORF Sound*. In the public broadcaster's strategy, their own platform is clearly prioritized and intended to become the most used audio-visual media platform in the domestic market. There seems to be no specific strategy in how to engage with third party platforms for distribution (see section 2.3.5 for an in-depth discussion of the leaked strategy paper I am drawing from and section 9.1 for implications in practice).

Going one step back in the distribution process, the hosting practices of the interviewed podcasters differed quite a bit. The hobbyist podcaster hosts his podcast himself, because he sees it as the best solution for his project. He also deems it important for the ecosystem as a whole, because in his opinion, only through self-hosting it truly can stay decentralized. The two indie podcasters as well as the two representatives of podcast labels rely on commercial hosting services (namely Acast, Simplecast, and Podigee), in part because they use dynamic ad insertion which is only possible with certain hosting companies. One of them pointed out that they need a service that works well and has good customer support, to reduce their time spent on technical/distribution issues. *ORF* as public broadcaster has its own technical solution for hosting, unfortunately I did not learn any details on it in my interview.

Sub Question 2: What relevance do they attribute to platformization tendencies in their industry and how is that reflected in their work?

More than platformization per se they see formalization as defining the current moment in Austrian podcasting. Due to financially strong actors entering the field, the former amateur *scene* has transformed into a *market*, which also shifted its logic from community values and democratic participation towards hard metrics and profit. Podcasting is thus gradually becoming “just another media channel”, comparable to TV or radio.

Generally, platforms are experienced as very powerful and legitimizing to some degree: A podcast might be taken less seriously if it is not available on certain platforms, notably Spotify. Platformization is perceived as an accelerating, likely irreversible, albeit ambiguous development. On the one hand it is seen as clearly threatening, because platforms are feared to take control over the podcaster-listener relationship. Platforms might change their governance to the disadvantage of podcasters and are believed to favor their own productions over all others, for example in curation and recommendation. Furthermore, platforms are seen as opaque and distant – only larger (legacy) production companies can get direct access to actual employees instead of anonymous online forms.

The interviewed podcasters also see opportunities in platformization, namely better listener/listening data. For one podcast label owner, having a centralized platform with a clear contact person is an opportunity to advance their business in cooperation with the relevant

platform. Some credit Spotify for making podcasts significantly more popular in the German speaking area in the first place.

In interviewees' self-perception, platformization is reflected in their work largely indirectly: for example it partly has led to services for podcasters (e.g. hosting) being easier use. But speaking about other podcasters – and thus the larger podcasting culture in Austria – they locate quite some power in the realm of platforms. The perceived effects of platformization on podcasters in Austria include a change in publishing frequency and length (more, but shorter episodes), the introduction of seasons, and more attention towards defining target audiences.

Sub Question 3: How do different podcasters (hobbyist, indie, actors from podcasting labels or public broadcasting) perceive the podcasting ecosystem?

The perception of the podcasting ecosystem in Austria differs quite a lot in between the different groups of podcasters that were part of the interview sample. What all of them shared is the perception of podcasting as an elusive, changing practice and medium. Among the reasons cited are the beforementioned formalization, and marketization/commodification, as well as the ongoing platformization.

The hobbyist podcaster felt a pressure to join Spotify, which as already mentioned, he initially wanted to avoid. Him, the market researcher/ex-hobbyist podcaster and both indie podcasters saw Spotify's current stance and expansion drive as very problematic for the decentral nature of the podcasting ecosystem and RSS, and to some degree to the nature of podcasting itself.

The representatives of podcast labels, for whom podcasting is a business, approved of the increasing marketization of the podcasting scene. One of them explicitly saw platformization as a chance, because they could use it for their own (monetary) interests, but at the same time warned of full dependency. Both pointed out that thanks to their size, they have a better bargaining position towards platforms and other actors in the ecosystem, compared to individual podcasters.

All interviewees shared the view that total monopolization of podcasting distribution would be detrimental for podcasters, and possibly listeners. At the same time, especially the (ex-) hobbyist podcasters, pointed out that democratic and participatory values as well as community orientation are still well and alive in the Austrian podcasting scene.

8. Discussion

In this chapter, I bring together the results of my empirical research (chapter 7) and the background knowledge I gathered (chapter 2) with the theoretical perspectives (chapter 5). With this, I address my main research question, "How do German-speaking podcasters in Austria frame the current podcasting ecosystem?". Ultimately, I argue that podcasting in Austria is currently undergoing platformization (Poell et al., 2022a) and show that podcasters I have interviewed perceive it as increasingly commodified (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) and formalized

(Sullivan, 2021). I also point out my contributions to the existing literatures as presented in the State of the Art (chapter 3).

8.1. Looking at my empirical findings with the theoretical perspectives

In this section, I examine the podcasting ecosystem as perceived by the interviewed podcasters in a systematized manner. I use Poell et al.'s (2022a) six dimensions of markets, infrastructure, governance, labor, creativity and democracy, expanded through the notion of formalization (Sullivan, 2021), as a lens to make sense of my empirical findings.

As a quick reminder, Nieborg and Poell (2018) define platformization

“as the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4276).

They emphasize that platformization and its consequences are highly entangled and context-dependent. In an attempt to untangle this for my case of podcasting, while not overlooking the particularities of each dimension of Poell et al.'s (2022a) framework, I look at them one by one below. I include aspects of formalization (Sullivan, 2018) where applicable. As a quick reminder, he distinguishes between top-down and bottom-up formalization. The former concerns corporate actors entering the field, the latter refers to the career orientation and professionalized practices of podcasters.

Markets

Poell et al. (2022a) describe platformized markets as volatile and multisided, generally leaning towards market concentration. In my case, there are clear signs of market concentration regarding distribution platforms – measurable in market shares, but of course also reflected in podcaster's experiences: Many spoke of Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts/YouTube specifically, and subsumed all others as “the rest”.

Referring to Spotify, interviewees mentioned a winner-takes-all and a lock-in-effect: The platform has become so popular with listeners (and some podcasters) that it seems to have entered a self-reinforcing path towards monopolization. But it was also pointed out that there are several hurdles (notably the existence of Apple Podcasts) for Spotify to actually reach that state, so monopolization is not imminent. Looking at this monopoly scenario with Nieborg and Poell (2018, p. 4283), the biggest threat for podcast producers is that Spotify is a multisided market, connecting podcasters, listeners, advertisers, data brokers, record labels etc. The content producing side, in this case the podcast producers, are in the precarious position of being potentially dispensable – if they were to vanish from the platform, the platform itself would not necessarily lose its primary source of income. Because Spotify is privately owned and underlies no obligation to consult with complementors or users, it might “simply shut down the medium”

(Interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 37) podcast or discontinue its whole platform from one moment to the next, leaving podcasters and listeners with nothing.

But especially those podcasters who make their living with podcasting – in my case the indie podcasters and the podcast label owners – are already economically locked-in: They cannot afford to leave Spotify, because they would also lose nearly half of their listenership and consequently a large portion of their income. Individual listeners might be technically locked-in, because they often rely on recommendation algorithms as one interviewee observed. At the moment, Spotify does not offer an interoperable export function to transfer podcast subscriptions elsewhere (as is possible through the OPML format⁴⁹ that is used by many open discovery platforms or podcatchers).

More generally, monetary incentives often were a backdrop in podcasters' evaluation of platforms, indicating a financialization of the field as well as the prevalence of managerial strategies, which Poell et al. (2022a) also list as a symptom of platformization.

In terms of economic power, most platform actors in the landscape, especially Apple Podcasts, Audible, Google Podcasts/YouTube and Spotify are by far stronger than individual podcasters and all legacy media organizations in Austria, therefore there is a steep imbalance. An imbalance that even *ORF* with its particular position in the Austrian market and its legally regulated public service mandate cannot really counter, even though it is trying to do so with its own platform *ORF Sound*. I come back to this aspect when elaborating on practical implications in section 9.1.

Infrastructure

The infrastructure of a platform defines its technical affordances through “boundary resources” or access points for complementors (Poell et al., 2022a). This can entail how a podcast can be technically added to a platform's catalogue, but also which rules the podcaster needs to follow in the process, for example terms of service or copyright ownership. All distribution platforms discussed in this thesis demand a RSS feed to integrate a podcast, some also provide hosting options themselves. While the RSS feed is inherently open, the platform might be a walled garden, which means that it is necessary to log in for listening. Some platforms already tie podcasters to themselves in the stage of creation by offering recording and editing tools. Examples here are Spotify and Substack, although none of the podcast producers I spoke to makes use of such a feature.

Apple Podcasts, Podimo, Spotify and crowdfunding/membership platforms offer monetization options for podcasters. According to Poell et al. (2022a), a platform's positioning is solidified and centralized as soon as its complementors use it for monetization. The indie

⁴⁹ Like RSS, OPML (Outline Processor Markup Language) was (co-)developed by Dave Winer. It was first specified in 2000, is an open format and mostly used to exchange subscription lists of RSS feeds (UserLand Software, Inc., 2006).

podcasters in my interview sample both use a crowdfunding/membership platform, but do not generate a relevant share of their income with it (relying on advertising). This is why contrary to the framework, I would not ascribe this aspect much importance. However, in the current Austrian podcasting ecosystem, it is still possible that production, circulation and monetization are fully merged, rendering the relevant podcast a “contingent cultural commodity” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). In this case, the podcast is probably fully aligned with the platform, which likely also affects the nature of its content, and the practices of its producer.

What should not be omitted in the context of “boundary resources” (Poell et al., 2022a) is the data flowing back from platforms to podcast producers. This data, more specifically detailed demographic information on listeners and their listening habits (for example at what point people stop listening), was seen as very valuable by some of the interviewees, a finding closely connected to the next dimension.

Governance and formalization

Aspects of governance appeared especially frequently in my empirical findings. Poell et al. (2022a) divide it into regulation, curation and moderation. Regarding regulation, several interviewees feared that platforms might change their terms of service to their disadvantage, for example by banning certain political contents or the possibility to include ads autonomously. The *ORF* representative suggested that in such a case it might be necessary to abandon the distribution platform or only submit excerpts of the full content which then is to be found elsewhere. If a podcast producer were to distribute excerpts only, the platform would ultimately also be shaping the contents, albeit indirectly.

One indie podcaster likened Spotify’s curatorial practices with a supermarket collecting data, adapting its offers based on this and subsequently underpricing other actors, while at the same time placing its own products in such a way that they are easier found and bought by customers (see section 7.1.3 for the full quote of the analogy). Because the relevant podcast platforms are all privately owned, and are not accountable to podcasters or listeners, they do not (need to) disclose how their (algorithmic or editorial) recommendations are formed. This means that they can evade their editorial responsibility under the guise of neutrality.

One podcast label owner suggested to transform this potential disadvantage into an advantage by establishing a direct contact to platform companies and get them to promote their podcasts in the recommendations. However, as several interviewees pointed out, this option is presumably only for larger organizations, not for individual podcasters. This could lead to a “two-class-system” in podcasting with very high entry barriers and structural disadvantages for all projects outside legacy production/media companies – clearly making top-down formalization as Sullivan (2018) conceptualizes it a condition for success.

Moderation practices, both *ex ante* and *post hoc* (Poell et al., 2022a, p. 96) have not been explicitly discussed in my interviews. Nevertheless, platforms are unequivocally perceived as (powerful) gatekeepers among Austrian podcasters, and on a discursive level can definitely be

ascribed influence on the formation of the larger industry (see the dimension of creativity below).

Labor and formalization

Five of the seven people I talked to earn their living in connection to podcasting, which makes labor a significant dimension. The two indie podcasters (whose podcasts regularly appear in the upper levels of the Austrian podcasting charts) acknowledged that they enjoy the “luxury of a big audience” and thus do not need to do everything a platform might demand. The ORF representative mentioned the example of *Frühstück bei mir*, a radio show that has been on the air for 27 years (*25 Jahre Ö3- "Frühstück bei mir" - Ö3 Sendungen*, 2019), and according to him, is the most popular podcast among the whole ORF offer. He pointed out that this success is likely not directly related to the podcast's objective quality, and that its concept is neither particularly special nor adapted to possible platform demands or trends. Instead, he suggested that its popularity was on the one hand caused by its persistent weekly publication, and on the other hand self-reinforcing under the current conditions of the ecosystem. These two examples show the winner-takes-all-effect on the level of the podcasters, which has existed in the cultural industries before, but has been intensified by the platformized ecosystem as Poell et al. (2022a) emphasize.

Stiff competition from legacy media companies or otherwise well financed actors – top-down formalization in the words of Sullivan (2021) – is making podcasting more difficult for hobbyist and indie podcasters. But also podcasters themselves are engaging in the formalization of their industry, by treating podcasting as a potential job (in the gig economy): One interviewee described podcasts as a “career spring board [...] an opportunity to search for fame” (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 72) which directly speaks to the aspects of visibility and individualization in podcasting and in the larger media industry (Poell et al., 2022a). It also is connected to the phenomenon of “entrepreneurial journalism” and what Sullivan (2021) called “aspirational labor” – podcasters working (nearly) for free, in the hopes of landing a big hit on a platform (see winner-takes-all-effect) or getting employed.

Somehow contrary, the same interviewee also hinted at the collective power of hobbyist podcasters who can show that podcasting does not need to be monetized in order to be valuable (see the dimension of democracy below).

Creativity

According to Poell et al. (2022a), content on platforms both becomes more diverse and more homogenized at the same time, clearly influencing the creativity at display. My findings exactly mirror this dichotomy: On the one hand, one of the podcast label owners argued that contents will remain playful and malleable and the diversity of topics will still grow until podcasting is fully mainstream. On the other hand, professionalization and financial imperatives are narrowing the potential for out-of-the-ordinary shows, as one interviewee observed.

Interviewees also attributed general subtle cultural influence on formats and contents to distribution platforms, notably Spotify. Interestingly, they saw themselves as unaffected by these cultural influences (see section 7.1.6). This platform influence is mostly realized by metric logics which structure podcast production for many podcasters, even those that do not monetize. In practice, this might mean producing more of the content that – measured in platforms’ metrics – is more popular with their audience (or the segment of their audience they are eager to reach) and getting rid of parts which do not get as much attention. If a podcast was conceptualized for a certain target audience – as is usually the case in a formalized for-profit production environment – its DIY character, the podcaster’s inherent enthusiasm for their topic as well as their authenticity might be lost or non-existent in the first place, like one indie podcaster emphasized. Here, it is important to note that “authenticity” is an ideal that itself only gained its exceptional significance in a platformized media production environment (Poell et al., 2022a, p. 151).

Additionally, there is a perceived connection between platforms and their target audiences, namely certain genres being more successful on some platforms than others. Arguably, in this case, a podcast has become a “contingent cultural commodity” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), because on the one hand it is clearly dependent on the platform, and on the other hand is directly informed by the platform’s affordances.

Democracy and formalization

Early in this thesis I pointed to the alleged democratizing power of podcasting which stems from its participatory values and opportunities, so naturally the dimension of democracy is interesting to discuss. Poell et al. (2022a) show that legacy media companies tend to defend their leading position in the new market of podcasting, and this is exactly how my sample of interviewees sees the situation in Austria. The starting conditions for individual podcasters and media organizations (who already have an audience, and also marketing budgets) are highly uneven. This makes it hard to believe that podcasting is so democratizing that everybody can make themselves heard. For the American scene, this imbalance is backed by Sterne et al. (2008) who had early doubts in the story of podcasting being an especially democratizing everybody-can-do-it practice.

In relation to legacy media, I picked up a “we-vs.-them” sentiment: One podcast label owner for example explicitly referred to podcasts as part of “new digital media” which allow listeners larger freedoms in consumption circumstances, positioning himself within the narrative of podcasting’s “openness”. On a first glance, this seems odd given that his profit interests as a label owner stand in contrast to the supposed original values of podcasting (DIY, participation, etc.). However, thinking of Sterne et al. (2008) and Barbrook and Cameron’s “Californian Ideology” (1996), this seeming incompatibility is actually nonexistent: the authors prove that commercialization had been a possible (and/or desirable) trajectory for podcasting from its start.

It is important to note that monetizing a podcast nevertheless can drastically change the relationship between podcaster and listeners, especially in the case of crowdfunding, as one interviewee pointed out. Podcasters become service providers, and if they fail to deliver, they break a contract. The consequences of such a breach of contract depend on the specific context but in any case the relationship is clearly formalized, in Sullivan's (2021) framing from the bottom up. The dynamic between podcaster and listener is less equal, and more akin to traditional media, with a one-to-many-relationship between sender and receiver. This observation again echoes Sterne et al.'s (2008) criticisms of podcasting not being as democratizing/participatory or anti-corporate as often implied.

After tying together these different aspects in my discussion, I would argue that podcasting in Austria is currently in the process of platformization (Poell et al., 2022a). Podcasters perceive it as increasingly commodified (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) and formalized (Sullivan, 2021). I elaborate on this in the following section.

8.2. Answering my main research question: How do German-speaking podcasters in Austria frame the current podcasting ecosystem?

In this section, I address my main research question of how German-speaking podcasters in Austria frame the current podcasting ecosystem and simultaneously present my main three findings:

First, as the vignettes along Poell et al.'s (2022a) dimensions above show, the Austrian podcasting ecosystem is currently undergoing platformization. The issue of platformization is mirrored as a salient framing by the interviewees. In some – but not all – cases, the production of podcasts is altered by the explicit affordances, or as Poell et al. (2022a, p. 66) call them, “boundary resources”, and implicit demands of podcast distribution platforms. This means that there are podcasts within the Austrian ecosystem which are “contingent, modularized, constantly altered, and optimized for platform monetization” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4282) instead of being produced linearly as it is common outside of platforms.

Some of these distribution platforms also include tools and services for recording and monetization, dissolving “the neat separation between the modalities of production, circulation, and monetization” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4282). This means, second, that podcasts in Austria currently can become “contingent cultural commodities”, rendering their producers into platform-dependent complementors. None of my interviewees produces their podcast in such a centralized manner (yet), and all of them decidedly stick to the “Anti-Platform” (Sullivan, 2019, p. 2) RSS for distribution. This means that podcasting has not been fully captured by platformization, but podcasters are at least partly aligning themselves with platforms, so the ecosystem is clearly being commodified.

And third, connected to the commodification, podcasting is perceived as increasingly formalized (Sullivan, 2021). The hobbyist and indie *scene* has turned into a veritable *market*,

making formalization (and less so platformization) the defining phenomenon in the current podcasting ecosystem as seen by the podcast producers I talked to. Podcasts are on their way to being “just another media channel”: Bottom-up formalization is happening in the form of podcasters turning their hobby into a job (or trying to do so), raising professional standards along the way. This is the case with the two indie podcasters I talked to, but also with the podcast label owners, and incidentally myself.

Top-down formalization can be observed in the motivations of podcast producers: Passionate hobbyists, some of which have been podcasting for a decade, are joined by (and might potentially be replaced/endangered by) businesses focused on (short-term) profits. Sullivan (2018) lists the emergence of new gatekeepers, notably podcast and advertising networks, as another sign of formalization. For podcasting in Austria, I would argue that distribution platforms have become these institutionalized gatekeepers because they have influence on a podcast’s success through their recommendation and curation practices. In the case of commissioned podcasts, they have a position similar to e.g. a traditional TV network that either accepts – and funds – or rejects a pitch for a new show. To a certain degree, podcast labels and media organizations are gatekeepers in the Austrian podcasting landscape as well. Thanks to their financial resources they can host large events aimed at podcasters or listeners, as well as awards (see section 7.1.7 for a brief discussion of the Ö3 podcast award) that shape the evolution of the larger industry.

8.3. New findings and contributions to the literature

While I have continuously alluded to the connections between my findings and existing literatures, I want to use this section to make my contributions explicit. The most surprising-to-me finding of this research project concerns formalization. As already mentioned, the podcasters I talked to judged it as a phenomenon more relevant to their identities and practices than platformization itself, which I had initially set out to characterize.

Their understanding of podcasting – as an elusive, sometimes contradictory practice whose definition is constantly up for debate and makes use of many different technologies – corresponds directly with what I have established in the State of the Art (chapter 3): according to Bonini (2022), podcasting is a “complex hybrid cultural form” and “emerging network” which includes human as well as non-human actors.

The dangers of platformization portrayed in the literature (see section 3.2) are mirrored in my findings on the Austrian podcasting landscape, notably uneven or monopolized market configurations, and some private profit-oriented platforms taking on infrastructural functions. I discuss the implications below in section 9.1.

The vastly different scopes of action of indie and legacy media creators facing demonetization on YouTube which Caplan and Gillespie (2020) observed (see section 3.3), have an equivalent in the Austrian podcasting ecosystem, as my research shows: Interviewees pointed

out that there is a “two-class-system” in so far that only larger – formalized – podcast producers, like labels, networks or media organizations have the opportunity to get into direct contact with a platform. This is desirable to influence recommendation and curation in one’s favor, and might be necessary if one is dealing with alleged violations of terms of service or similar (leading to demonetization or banning).

In section 3.4 I presented literatures which demonstrate that the platformization of podcasting goes along with a heightened importance of profits. As I argued in detail above, commodification and formalization are indeed defining phenomena for the Austrian podcasting landscape. What Andersson Schwarz (2014) called “spotification”, namely the appearance of platforms that make cultural producers very much dependent on them, emerged in my interviews as “YouTubization” (see section 7.1.3).

9. Conclusion

In this last chapter, I first give four practical implications for podcasting in Austria in the current moment of platformization and formalization. They follow from my findings and point back to my situatedness which I laid out in the Introduction. Second, I summarize the main points of this thesis and make some suggestions for possible future research.

9.1. Implications for podcasting in practice

I started working on this thesis project with the motivation to improve the understanding of the current podcasting ecosystem and podcasters’ stance towards it. My aim was to provide a nuanced counterpoint to the hype-driven industry enthusiasm that uncritically celebrates platformization. When starting, I had strong sympathies for web 2.0 “culture” and its openness, I still do so now.

Podcasting is a business, deal with it

When starting, I also was convinced that the roots of podcasting lie in the community around the open, free and decentralized web, where profit interests were not the leading paradigm. I was convinced that the financialization/formalization of the landscape, and the increasing distancing from the “noble objectives” of podcasting (that’s how one of the interviewees described the intrinsic motivation to share one’s passion for a topic, and to democratically participate in public discourse outside established media) only had begun in the late 2010s. In Austria, legacy media companies, for example national newspapers, entered the scene as producers and tech firms, like Spotify, Podimo and others, started to see podcast distribution as a business opportunity around this time.

My initial assumptions of the democratic DIY roots and late(r) financialization of podcasting in Austria were based on the technical functioning of RSS and my personal

experience with the local podcasting scene, which I had first gotten to know in 2015, through meetups⁵⁰ that tellingly were held at Vienna hackspace Metalab.

Only in reading early scholarly literature on podcasting, a more nuanced version of this narrative started to emerge – although the domestic podcasting scene has never been subject to academic research before, so my initial assumptions could technically still hold true for Austria. In reference to the “Californian Ideology” (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996), Sterne et al. (2008) show that podcasting as it first emerged in the early 2000s USA never was a particularly democratic, democratizing or anti-corporate medium. Instead, commercial opportunities were considered as a desirable path from the beginning. Bottomley (2016) argues convincingly that RSS was mainly a technical solution for the historically low bandwidths, and the cultural opposition between downloading (associated with RSS) and streaming (associated with platforms) appeared fairly recently. Both Sterne et al. (2008) and Bottomley (2020) indicate that podcasting might follow a trajectory similar to radio broadcasting, which in its beginnings used to be a participatory practice and now has long been an industry in itself.

All of this is to say that the story the Austrian hobbyist and indie podcasting scene tells about itself, (participatory community values, not “selling out” etc), should be taken with a grain of salt. The historical trench between the DIY-podcasters and those with profit orientation might not be as big as it seems on a first glance – the best rebuttal being podcasters that bridge these two “sides” in their practice. This question of DIY-vs.-commercial also concerns the tools of podcasting. Following the words of the ex-hobbyist-podcaster, “Do I wish back the times where I was about to need to code everything by myself? No!” (interview-market-researcher: 116), I would argue it is a good thing that today (commercial) services that lower the technical hurdles of podcasting exist, because they can make it more accessible (possibly leading to broader participation!).

The title of this subsection – *podcasting is a business, deal with it* – is also a reminder to myself. After all, bottom-up formalization as Sullivan (2021) describes it, affects me directly – I am currently employed as a podcast producer, despite (or rather because?) of my origins in the hobbyist podcasting *community*.

In the following sub sections, I explain why this decidedly is neither a call for the sell-out of hobbyist and indie podcasting scene nor an attempt to downplay the still very real dangers of platformization for the podcasting ecosystem.

Not-for-profit, hobbyist DIY podcasting is still possible and worthwhile

Several podcasters pointed to what could be subsumed as the beforementioned “noble objectives” of podcasting: sharing thoughts, participating, finding community and exchange in thematic niches. This sentiment might be tainted by nostalgia for a time in which RSS ruled, a

⁵⁰ As mentioned before, I have been the organizer of the Austrian Podcasting Meetup since late 2019, see section 1.2.

time that might have never exactly existed (see section 7.1.2). But regardless, I believe that approaching podcasting as a not-for-profit, hobbyist DIY endeavor is still very much possible despite the pressure to align to the ideals of a platformized ecosystem. This entails, among other things, simply ignoring incentives from hosting services to participate in monetization programs (e.g. Spotify's Audience Network or Dynamic Ads on Acast) or resisting the urge to use podcasting mainly to enhance your CV.

I further believe that it is worthwhile to do so, and among my sample of interviewees I am not alone in this. Sticking to the community orientation and continuing to experiment (beyond the formats that have proven to be successful on platforms) means that the landscape evades total homogenization. Through this, podcasting also does not readily become “just another media channel”, as the market researcher feared in the interview. The hobbyist podcaster put it positively:

“what’s nice with the internet is that you can share interests and you don’t need to have this commercial interest” (Interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 41)

As established in the State of the Art and confirmed in my findings (see section 7.1.1) podcasting is a practice, which means that it is what you make it. And with this I want to make the case that it can continue to simply be a community-oriented hobby, actively ignorant of platformization and formalization processes with their focus on metrics and monetization.

This connects back to the performativity of platformization processes, which I will talk about in the next section.

Platformization is performative, keep distributing via RSS

Despite the apparently irrefutable dominance of platforms, all actors, including the seemingly powerless individual podcasters have agency in the platformization process (Poell et al., 2022b; Van Dijck, 2018). Facing the threats of platformization, which I have laid out in detail in section 3.2, I would emphasize that it is essential to keep on distributing podcasts in a decentralized manner via RSS. Most importantly, this means avoiding lock-in (Poell et al. 2022a), and ensuring a direct, lasting connection between podcasters and listeners. Additionally, if the decentralized infrastructure keeps on existing in the background, the winner-takes-all-effect of platformization is softened a little.

One indie podcaster mentioned Twitter (X) as a cautionary tale. The platform recently deteriorated in a pace unimaginable only a few years earlier. Thanks to the network effect, it became less useful/valuable the more users left the platform, likely having entered into an irreversible spiral (see e. g. Patel, 2023). Several new platforms tried to take Twitter's spot in the social media landscape, but none really succeeded so far, with Twitter having enjoyed the winner-takes-all-effect for so very long. Unfortunately, unlike it is the case with RSS and podcasting, there is no decentralized infrastructure to fall back to, and users are losing out.

Seemann (2021) argues that platforms cannot “build higher fences” forever to ensure the scarcity of their digital offer – at some point a new platform (maybe even one coming from the bottom-up, like Napster in the early 2000s) could take over, or political regulation might take effect.

Poell et al. (2022b) point out that a platform can never gain full control over the platformization process, and emphasize that the latter is always performative. At Spotify, they seem to be well aware of their performative power. Its founder Daniel Ek strategically addressed the US congress in an open letter, in an attempt to influence regulation in his favor. In the letter, he attacked Apple for applying “gatekeeping” practices in their App Store, harming consumer rights and fair competition – while at the same time engaging in what I would describe as gatekeeping actions with his own platform (Ek, 2023). Another example of Spotify trying to performatively shape the ecosystem according to their ideas was their 2023 podcast conference *All Ears*. Their cheekily titled opening key note “10 things I hate about podcasts” started with “First: The obsession with RSS” (Sandro Schroeder [@SaSchroeder], 2023, my translation)⁵¹. One could read this as a direct discursive attack on the decentral nature of podcasting. So far, a RSS feed is still necessary to distribute a podcast on the platform, but there is a chance that Spotify is actually trying to “phase out” RSS in its own products. Because Spotify has such a large market share in German-speaking podcasting, this could have a ripple effect on the whole ecosystem.

Despite the steep imbalance, there is a mutual dependence between platforms and podcast producers. The latter, too, can discursively shape the evolution of the podcasting ecosystem and some of the people I interviewed try to do so: For example, one of the indie podcasters pointed out that he preferred that his podcasts be listened to anywhere *but* Spotify. Educating his listeners on this attitude might lead some of them to switch to a open discovery platform or podcatcher. The hobbyist podcaster had refused to distribute his podcast on Spotify until recently, and now does not stop talking about the advantages of a decentralized podcasting ecosystem and having full control over his contents.

This leads me to my last suggestion, which is loosely connected to performativity, and mostly to discursive power:

ORF as a role model?

Departing from the first three suggestions in this section, which were aimed at podcasters in general, I now want to focus my attention on *ORF*. It is both podcast producer and – thanks to ORF Sound (see section 2.3.5 for its peculiarities) – platform holder. Furthermore, it occupies a unique position in the domestic media market. It is the largest media corporation and national

⁵¹ After lamenting the decay of twitter only a few paragraphs above, I better include the full original tweet by Sandro Schroeder here, just in case the platform completely ceases to exist: “Spotify eröffnet die #spotifyallears mit der Rede „10 Sachen, die ich an Podcasts hasse. Punkt 1: Die RSS-Obsession“. Oh boy...” (April 20, 2023, 10:21 am).

public broadcaster with a legally enshrined public service mandate. Earlier, I argued – partly based on Van Dijck (2018)⁵² – that *ORF*'s stance towards the platformization of the podcasting ecosystem is especially relevant, because it might have an influence on the Austrian media ecosystem as a whole.

In times of platformization, public broadcasters find themselves in a dilemma. Analyzing the first podcast cooperation between German public media and Spotify, Schroeder (2020) phrased this nicely:

“Publicly funded content in exchange for audience and reach on a commercial platform. The risk of supporting a potential competitor against the opportunity to benefit from a current ally. Some loss of control in exchange for a slice of the cake” (Schroeder, 2020, my translation).

To cite a contrasting example of a foreign public broadcasting company, the *BBC* decided to forego further (indirect) support of potential competitive third party platforms with its content. According to Morris (2021b, p. 218), the British broadcaster removed many of its productions from Google Podcasts (and associated apps) in 2019, in favor of its own platform *BBC Sounds*.

Unfortunately, the interview with its representative gave me the impression that so far *ORF* has spent less thought on a strategy for the changing podcasting ecosystem than the other podcasters I have talked to. This impression is supported by the leaked *ORF-Strategie 2025* (n.d.), which is the only, and most recent document of its kind that I am aware of. It engages a lot with the *ORF Sound* platform and very little with podcasting and platforms outside of it (see Dobusch (2021) for an in-depth analysis of the strategy paper). Podcasts and questions of third party podcasting platforms seem to be of low priority for the public broadcaster: According to the strategy memo, *ORF* “sticks with VHF as the most important way of distribution way beyond 2025” for audio (*ORF-Strategie 2025*, n.d., p. 12, my translation).

Nevertheless, many *ORF* productions are available as podcasts via RSS, as well as on Spotify, among other distribution platforms. Exactly like their counterparts on *ORF Sound*, these podcasts underly the depublication rules and several other regulations of the *ORF* law (*Bundesgesetz Über Den Österreichischen Rundfunk (ORF-Gesetz, ORF-G)*, 2024). This entails three problems I want to elaborate on:

First, *ORF* and its (podcast) contents are publicly funded. By making the latter (fully) available on Spotify, the platform indirectly profits from the contents because users pay monthly fees and/or are exposed to advertising. But like with all other non-exclusive podcast producers,

⁵² As a quick reminder, he notes that “governments and public institutions need to understand not just the dynamics of platforms and how they work but the ideological premises on which they function as well as the social implications of their operation. Addressing those larger questions of responsibility and accountability requires a fundamental understanding of how the platform ecosystem works” (Van Dijck, 2018, p. 30).

Spotify does not share its revenues with *ORF*. Sure, in this context, the tradeoff between reaching certain audience segments on third party platforms or likely not reaching them at all needs to be considered. Overall, *ORF* frames its presence on such platforms as an “effective contribution to the fulfillment of the core public service mandate” (Österreichischer Rundfunk, 2023, p. 1, my translation). However, this approach does not correspond with the declared goal of *ORF* Sound becoming the most used audio-visual media platform in Austria (*ORF-Strategie 2025*, n.d.). Additionally, *ORF* is asserting that “an on-demand service of (entire) shows that aired on *ORF* channels on social media is not planned” (Österreichischer Rundfunk, 2023, p. 2, my translation). In contradiction to this claim it already is making its podcasts – sometimes entire shows (see section 2.1.4) – fully available for on-demand streaming on Spotify.

Second, in my opinion, contrary to what the *ORF* representative suggested in the interview (see section 7.1.5 on platform indifference), third party platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Spotify cannot be treated exactly like the Austrian Postal Service or telecommunications provider. Both underly specific national regulation which takes into account their infrastructural character. The most important platform companies of our times operate internationally, usually with a legal and cultural base in the US and little consideration for the interests of individual complementors and their national or local circumstances (Jin, 2019). By uncritically relying on such a platform, *ORF* risks making itself dependent on an actor that is outside the sphere of influence of Austria’s legal regulation, which might lead to limited agency in case of conflict. Apparently, there already was a (minor) incident of limited agency: the *ORF* representative mentioned that they once even “have made an effort to centrally send something to everyone that ever texted us, but WhatsApp’s terms of service did not allow for that” (interview-orf-representative: 82). According to this anecdote, *ORF* effectively lost a means of contact to its audience because the terms of service of Meta, a US-based profit-driven private platform firm, trump the public broadcaster’s attempt to fulfill part of its public service mandate.

And third, connected to my argument above: using a third party distribution platform often goes along with aligning oneself⁵³ to its specific technical and cultural affordances. Those generally aim at maximizing profit for the platform itself, which makes it likely that they are at odds with public service values like universality, cultural diversity and identity (Donders, 2019).

ORF itself acknowledges that its financial, technological and human resources are far from those of international platform actors (*ORF-Strategie 2025*, n.d., p. 5). Facing such powerful opponents, it is difficult to proactively tackle these three problems. Yet I think that *ORF* as the largest media company in Austria has the best chances to get in contact with platform

⁵³ As a reminder: This is hypothetical, focusing on perceptions in this research project, I have not investigated this for *ORF* contents, or any other podcasts. It might however be a fruitful starting point for future research.

companies⁵⁴. And, as it is underlying laws to ensure its public service mandate, I expect it to at least develop a clear and uncontradictory argumentative standpoint towards these questions of (podcasting) platformization.

9.2. Summary

Here, at the very end, I summarize my thesis as briefly as possible and suggest starting points for future research on the nexus between podcasting and platformization.

I engaged in this case study on the Austrian podcasting ecosystem to draw a portrait of podcasters and their perceptions of platformization. This is intended to provide a nuanced counterpoint to the hype-driven and uncritical industry enthusiasm around platformization.

I first developed a categorization of podcasters whose perceptions are at the center of my work. I differentiate between (1) hobbyist podcasters, (2) indie podcasters, (3) actors from podcast labels/networks and (4) public broadcasting. I further presented a classification of distribution platforms: (1) open discovery platforms and podcatcher apps like AntennaPod, (2) walled garden platforms, like Spotify or Podimo, (3) crowdfunding/membership platforms like Patreon, Steady and Substack, (4) mixed platforms, like Apple Podcasts and YouTube, and (5) ORF Sound. I also gave an overview on hosting and monetization models common in Austria.

In the State of the Art, I collected prior research on podcasting, establishing that it is a hard-to-define and constantly evolving practice. My compilation of platform-critical literature made clear that digital platforms tend to be infrastructural, volatile, multisided (mediating between e.g. podcasters, advertisers and listeners), interrelated, proprietary, programmable (offering third party actors the possibility to build upon them) and defined by network effects as well as monopoly tendencies (Andersson Schwarz, 2017; Helmond, 2015; Plantin et al., 2018; Poell et al., 2022b; Srnicek, 2017; Van Dijck et al., 2019). Many platforms already are disproportionately powerful, but as e.g. Poell et al. (2022b) and Seemann (2021) emphasize, can never reach total dominance over the full ecosystem because other actors still can exert influence. In some instances, platforms can exercise considerable control on cultural producers and products, sometimes also vice versa. If platforms gain the upper hand, producers need to align themselves with the platform's affordances which reduces them to mere "platform complementors" (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) and makes them dependent, less autonomous and less economically sustainable. Their podcasts become "contingent cultural commodities" that are "malleable, modular in design, and informed by datafied user feedback open to constant revision and circulation" (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4283). Traditional indicators of quality are likely to be

⁵⁴ Again, in the most recent concept paper on their offers on social media, *ORF* specifies to not make special agreements to make use of (otherwise unavailable) additional functions of platforms (Österreichischer Rundfunk, 2023, p. 1). In my interpretation, this declared intention does not necessarily hinder more general talks between platform companies and the public broadcaster concerning its public service mandate.

replaced by markers of popularity set by the platform, ignorant of local cultural and legal standards. In podcasting, platformization started early but is progressing slower than elsewhere because of the “Anti-Platform” RSS and its decentral functioning (Sullivan, 2019, p. 2). It is reflected in the heightened importance of profits, in a shifting of the logic from downloading to streaming, and in new cultures and practices (Adler Berg, 2021b; Morris, 2021a, 2021b).

I conducted seven semi-structured interviews (one explorative, one hobbyist, two indie, two label owners and one with an *ORF* representative) and analyzed them following Rivas (2018). Eight key themes emerged: (1) Podcasting was defined as an elusive practice with sometimes contradictory qualities. (2) While RSS was perceived as the lasting backbone of podcasting, I sensed a nostalgia for times where RSS position as main means of distribution was not endangered by platforms. (3) Facing platformization, podcasters fear monopolization and dependence, unfair editorial/curatorial practices and ultimately a “YouTubization” of the landscape: namely Spotify becoming to podcasts what YouTube is to video. (4) Among the opportunities of platformization, interviewees listed the greater popularity for podcasts in general and a legitimizing function. (5) Platform indifference refers to the attitude that podcasts should be made available everywhere, no matter the consequences. (6) Through technical affordances and charts, platforms were ascribed cultural influence on podcasts and their producers. (7) The formalization of the landscape – top-down through an increasing number of podcast businesses, and bottom-up through increasing monetization and professionalization – was thought to render podcasts into “just another media channel”, leading away from its participatory roots. And (8) despite all this, most interviewees saw the Austrian hobbyist and indie podcasting scene as still thriving and upholding its participatory values.

I borrowed the concept of “contingent cultural commodities” in platformization (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) and the six-dimension framework for systematizing the entanglements of platforms and cultural producers – including markets, infrastructure, governance, labor, creativity and democracy (Poell et al., 2022a), as well as the formalization of podcasting (Sullivan, 2021). I argued that podcasting in Austria is currently in the process of platformization and some podcasts could be described as “contingent cultural commodities” (Poell et al., 2022a). My results further show, that the phenomenon currently defining the podcasting ecosystem is formalization (Sullivan, 2021), which is mainly expressed through a sentiment of inevitable commercialization and professionalization.

Following from this, I suggested four implications for podcasting in practice: (1) *Podcasting is a business, deal with it*, acknowledging its formalization (2) *Not-for-profit, hobbyist DIY podcasting is still possible and worthwhile*, arguing to uphold its participatory values, (3) *Platformization is performative, keep distributing via RSS*, making a case for continued participation in a decentral podcasting infrastructure, and (4) *ORF as a role model?* in which I urge the public broadcaster to develop a clear and uncontradictory standpoint towards third-party platforms and platformization more generally.

Finally, I want to make a few suggestions for further research. To complete the image of the platformization discourse, it would be very interesting to explore it through the lens of platform actors themselves. Second, instead of focusing on the people – cultural producers/podcasters – it could also be worthwhile to examine their podcasts for inscriptions of platformization. Another starting point that only appeared peripherally in my project could be the listener side and their experiences with platformized media ecosystems. And lastly, deviating a little from the focus on podcasts, I think the dilemma of public broadcasters in times of platformization, including their own attempts at platform building, deserve more attention.

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10.2. Podcasts mentioned

Here, I list all podcasts I mentioned throughout this thesis, in alphabetical order:

- *Agamemnon reist durchs All* by Paul Agamemnon Sihorsch (Ö1), <https://sound.orf.at/podcast/oe1/agamemnon-reist-durchs-all>
- *A mindful mess* by Madeleine Alizadeh, discontinued and offline
- *Aua-uff-code!* by Stefan Haslinger and others, discontinued, <https://aua-uff-co.de/>
- *Der Sandra Maischberger Podcast* (WDR, Spotify Exclusive), discontinued and offline
- *Die physikalische Soiree* by Lothar Bodingbauer, <https://www.physikalischesoiree.at/>
- *Donau Tech Radio* by Thomas Einwaller and André Steingreß, <https://dtr.fm/>
- *Erinnerungslücken* by Michael Fälbl and Ruth Eckrieder, <https://erinnerungsluecken.at/>
- *Erklär mir die Welt* by Andreas Sator, <https://erklärmir.at/>
- *Falter Radio* by Falter, <https://www.falter.at/falter/radio>
- *Fest & Flauschig* (formerly *Sanft & Sorgfältig*) by Jan Böhmermann and Olli Schultz, <https://open.spotify.com/show/1OLcQdw2PFDPG1jo3s0wbp>
- *Flip the Truck* by Wolfgang Steiger, Anne-Marie Darok, Patrick Krammer and Michael Leitner, <https://www.flipthetruck.com/>
- *FM4 Podcast* by FM4, discontinued and offline
- *Frühstück bei mir* by Claudia Stöckl (Ö3), <https://sound.orf.at/podcast/oe3/fruehstueck-bei-mir>
- *Ganz Offen Gesagt* by Stefan Lassnig and others (Missing Link), <http://ganzoffengesagt.at/>
- *Geschichten aus der Geschichte* (formerly Zeitsprung.FM) by Daniel Meßner and Richard Hemmer, <http://geschichte.fm/>
- *Große Töchter* by Beatrice Frasl, <https://www.grossetoechter-podcast.at/>
- *Home Fries* by Joy Wilson and Tracy Benjamin, discontinued and offline
- *Jeannes Welt* by Jeanne Drach (OH WOW), <https://www.ohwow.eu/jeannes-welt>
- *Keine Hand Frei* by Ana Wetherall-Grujić (Podcastwerkstatt), <https://keine-hand-frei.simplecast.com/>
- *Lieblings-Plätzchen* by myself, Jana Wiese, discontinued, <https://www.lieblings-plaetzchen.com/>

- *Mund:Art* by Lisa Krammer, <http://mundartpodcast.at/>
- *Ö1 Journale* by Ö1, <https://sound.orf.at/podcast/oe1/oe1-journale>
- *Ö1 Sprechstunde* by Melisa Erkurt (Ö1), discontinued and offline
- *Serial* by Chicago Public Radio (now New York Times), <https://serialpodcast.org/>
- *Thema des Tages* by Der Standard, <https://www.derstandard.at/podcast>
- *Was wichtig wird* (formerly *18'48*) by Die Presse, <https://diepresse1848.podigee.io/>
- *Zeit für Wissenschaft* by Melanie Bartos for Universität Innsbruck, <https://www.uibk.ac.at/podcast/zeit/>
- *99 % invisible* by Roman Mars (Stitcher/Sirius XM), <https://99percentinvisible.org/>

11. Appendix

- a) Abstract in English
- b) Abstract auf Deutsch
- c) Interview Guideline Explorative Interview
- d) Interview Guideline for Hobbyist Podcasters, Indie Podcasters and Podcast Label Owners
- e) Interview Guideline for ORF representative
- f) Original German Verbatim Transcription of Interview Quotes

a) Abstract in English

In the last twenty years, podcasting has been hyped as “the next big thing” several times, most recently in relation to platform actors like Spotify, Audible, YouTube or Podimo. However, enclosing podcasts in such a “walled garden” platform goes against the decentralized architecture of their original distribution mechanism RSS. This has considerable cultural implications and can affect the nature of podcasts themselves. Platformization further poses significant risks to the ecosystem, including uneven or monopolized market structures leading to a disproportionate concentration of power, and a loss of autonomy for podcasters and listeners. In this case study, I explore how podcasters in Austria frame the current podcasting ecosystem through qualitative semi-structured interviews, and develop a categorization of podcasters – hobbyist podcasters, indie podcasters, actors from podcast labels/networks and public broadcasting – as well as distribution platforms. I sketch different forms of hosting and monetization models and give an overview on the history of podcasting and platformization. I argue that podcasting in Austria is currently in the process of platformization (Poell et al., 2022a), and show that the interviewees perceive it as increasingly commodified (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) and, above all, formalized (Sullivan, 2021). Based on my findings, I lastly present four implications for podcasting in practice. With this research project, I want to improve the understanding of the current podcasting ecosystem and podcasters’ stance towards it, in order to provide a nuanced counterpoint to the hype-driven industry enthusiasm that uncritically celebrates platformization.

A German-language, adapted audio version of this Master’s thesis will be published end of March 2024 and can be found on www.zuckerbaeckerei.com/podcast-plattformisierung.

b) Abstract auf Deutsch

In den letzten zwanzig Jahren wurde Podcasting mehrfach als "das nächste große Ding" gehypt, zuletzt im Zusammenhang mit Plattform-Akteuren wie Spotify, Audible, YouTube oder Podimo. Die „Einzäunung“ von Podcasts in eine solche "Walled Garden"-Plattform widerspricht jedoch der dezentralen Architektur ihres ursprünglichen Verbreitungsmechanismus RSS, was erhebliche kulturelle Auswirkungen hat und das Wesen von Podcasts selbst beeinflussen kann. Die Plattformisierung birgt darüber hinaus erhebliche Risiken für das Ökosystem, darunter ungleiche oder monopolisierte Marktstrukturen, die zu einer unverhältnismäßigen Machtkonzentration und einem Verlust an Autonomie für Podcaster*innen und Hörer*innen führen. In dieser Fallstudie untersuche ich anhand von qualitativen, semi-strukturierten Interviews, wie Podcaster*innen in Österreich das gegenwärtige Podcasting-Ökosystem wahrnehmen. Ich entwickle eine Kategorisierung von Podcaster*innen – Hobby-Podcaster*innen, Indie-Podcaster*innen, Akteur*innen von Podcast-Labels/Netzwerken und vom öffentlich-rechtlichem Rundfunk – sowie von Distributionsplattformen. Ich skizziere verschiedene Formen von Hosting- und Monetarisierungsmodellen und gebe einen Überblick über die Geschichte von Podcasting und Plattformisierung. Ich argumentiere, dass sich Podcasting in Österreich derzeit im Prozess der Plattformisierung befindet (Poell et al., 2022a), und zeige, dass es von den Interviewten als zunehmend kommodifiziert (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) und vor allem formalisiert (Sullivan, 2021) wahrgenommen wird. Basierend auf meinen Erkenntnissen stelle ich abschließend vier Implikationen für die Podcast-Praxis vor. Mit diesem Forschungsprojekt will ich einen nuancierten Gegenpol zum hype-getriebenen Branchen-Enthusiasmus, der Plattformisierung unkritisch gegenübersteht, bieten.

Ende März 2024 wird eine deutschsprachige Audioadaption dieser Masterarbeit veröffentlicht werden, sie ist ab dann auf www.zuckerbaeckerei.com/podcast-plattformisierung zu finden.

c) Interview Guideline Explorative Interview

Vorstellung/Positionierung

- Kannst du dich bitte vorstellen.
- Was ist deine Verbindung zu Podcasts/Podcasting?
- Kannst du mir mehr über den Podcast erzählen, den du produziert hast?
- Ist deine Podcasttätigkeit beruflich?

Podcast-Verständnis

- Wo hörst du selbst Podcasts?
- Was ist deine persönliche Definition von einem Podcast?

Marktforschung

- Kannst du mir mehr über deine Podcast-Marktforschung erzählen?
 - Podcast-Definition
 - Wie klassifizierst du die Podcasts (als österreichisch / etc.)?
 - Woher kommen die Daten?
 - Für wen betreibst du die Marktforschung?
- Wie viele aktive Podcasts gibt es derzeit in Österreich? Veränderung über die letzten Jahre?
- Wie viele Podcastende gibt es derzeit in Österreich? Veränderung über die letzten Jahre?
- Inwiefern hat sich die Podcastlandschaft inhaltlich/qualitativ verändert?
- Wo werden die Podcasts gehostet? Veränderung über die letzten Jahre?
- Was sind die wichtigsten Hosting-Services für Podcastende in Österreich? Veränderungen über die letzten Jahre?
- Gründe?

Ökosystem/Distribution

- Wie würdest du das Podcasting-Ökosystem in Österreich beschreiben?
- Was sind die wichtigsten Ausspiel-/Distributionswege? Gründe?
- Wie schätzt du die Rolle von Plattformen darin ein?
- Welche Rolle spielt [RSS, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Podimo, Patreon, Steady, ORF Sound, etc] am österreichischen Podcastmarkt?
- Gibt es Muster in der Verteilung von Podcasts über diese Ausspielwege?
 - Abhängig vom Podcastenden (Hobby/Beruf, Background, etc)
 - Welche / warum werden Plattformen nicht genutzt?

Einfluss

- Inwiefern beeinflussen diese Ausspielwege bzw. Distributionsplattformen und deren spezifische Möglichkeiten die Podcastenden? Beispiele?
- Inwiefern beeinflussen diese Ausspielwege bzw. Distributionsplattformen und deren spezifische Möglichkeiten die Podcastenden? Beispiele?

Zukunft

- Wie wird sich das Podcast-Ökosystem deiner Meinung nach verändern?
 - Was bedeutet das für dich in der Marktforschung?
 - Was bedeutet das für die Podcastenden?
- Wie schätzt du die Plattformisierung des österreichischen Podcasting-Ökosystems ein?
- Habe ich etwas vergessen? Gibt es noch etwas, das du im Zusammenhang von Podcasting/Ökosystem/Österreich erwähnen willst?

d) Interview Guideline for Hobbyist Podcasters, Indie Podcasters and Podcast Label Owners

Vorstellung/Positionierung

- Könnten Sie sich bitte vorstellen.
- Was ist Ihre Verbindung zu Podcasts/Podcasting?
- Können Sie mir mehr über den Podcast erzählen, den sie produzieren / für den Sie verantwortlich sind?
- Ist ihre Podcasttätigkeit beruflich / Verdienen Sie Geld mit ihrer Podcasting-Aktivität/ wollen Sie Geld verdienen?
- Können Sie mir etwas über Ihr Publikum erzählen?

Podcast-Verständnis

- Was ist Ihre Definition von einem Podcast?
- Wo hören Sie selbst Podcasts?

Ökosystem

- Wie würden Sie das Podcasting-Ökosystem in Österreich beschreiben?
- (Wie schätzen Sie die Rolle von Plattformen darin ein?)
- Wie positionieren Sie sich/ Ihren Podcast darin?
- Welche Rolle spielen Hobby-Podcaster/Indie-Podcaster/Podcast-Labels in diesem Ökosystem (z.B. im Vergleich den jeweils anderen)?

Hosting/Distribution

- Wo wird ihr Podcast gehostet?
- Was sind die wichtigsten Ausspiel-/Distributionswege für Ihren Podcast?
- Wo ist Ihr Podcast verfügbar? Wo nicht? Warum?

Einfluss/Wahrnehmung

- Inwiefern beeinflussen diese Ausspielwege bzw. Distributionsplattformen und deren spezifische Möglichkeiten Ihre Arbeit und/oder den Podcast? Beispiele?
- Inwiefern beeinflussen diese Ausspielwege bzw. Distributionsplattformen und deren spezifische Möglichkeiten andere Podcaster_innen in Österreich?

Zukunft

- Wie wird sich das Podcast-Ökosystem ihrer Meinung nach **verändern**? Was bedeutet das für Sie/ andere Podcaster?
- Habe ich etwas vergessen? Gibt es noch etwas, das Sie in diesem Zusammenhang erwähnen wollen?

e) Interview Guideline for ORF representative

Vorstellung/Positionierung

- Könnten Sie sich bitte vorstellen.
- Was ist Ihre Verbindung zu Podcasts/Podcasting?
- Können Sie mir mehr über den Podcast erzählen, den sie produzieren / für den Sie verantwortlich sind?
- Ist ihre Podcasttätigkeit beruflich / Verdienen Sie Geld mit ihrer Podcasting-Aktivität/ wollen Sie Geld verdienen?
- Können Sie mir etwas über Ihr Publikum erzählen?

Podcast-Verständnis

- Was ist Ihre Definition von einem Podcast?
- Wo hören Sie selbst Podcasts?

Ökosystem

- Wie würden Sie das Podcasting-Ökosystem in Österreich beschreiben?
- (Wie schätzen Sie die Rolle von Plattformen darin ein?)
- Wie positionieren Sie sich/ Ihren Podcast darin?
- Welche Rolle spielen Hobby-Podcaster/Indie-Podcaster/Podcast-Labels in diesem Ökosystem (z.B. im Vergleich den jeweils anderen)?

Hosting/Distribution

- Wo wird ihr Podcast gehostet?
- Was sind die wichtigsten Ausspiel-/Distributionswege für Ihren Podcast?
- Wo ist Ihr Podcast verfügbar? Wo nicht? Warum?

Einfluss/Wahrnehmung

- Inwiefern beeinflussen diese Ausspielwege bzw. Distributionsplattformen und deren spezifische Möglichkeiten Ihre Arbeit und/oder den Podcast? Beispiele?
- Inwiefern beeinflussen diese Ausspielwege bzw. Distributionsplattformen und deren spezifische Möglichkeiten andere Podcaster_innen in Österreich?

Zukunft

- Wie wird sich das Podcast-Ökosystem ihrer Meinung nach **verändern**? Was bedeutet das für Sie/ andere Podcaster?
- Habe ich etwas vergessen? Gibt es noch etwas, das Sie in diesem Zusammenhang erwähnen wollen?

ORF Sound

- Was ist ORF Sound?
- Wie würden Sie ORF Sound im Podcasting-Ökosystem positionieren?
- Was denken Sie zur Konkurrenzfähigkeit von ORF Sound ggü. anderen Plattformen?

ORF Sound/Zukunft

- Wie wird sich ORF Sound in Zukunft entwickeln?
- Podcast-first content / RSS-Feeds
- Best case / worst case (Gesetzesnovelle)

Drittplattformen

- Was denken Sie über die Zusammenarbeit zwischen öffentlich-rechtlichen Sendern und Drittplattformen?
- Wie stehen Sie dazu, dass gebührenfinanzierter Content des ORF auf profitorientierten Drittplattformen wie Spotify zur Verfügung steht?

f) Original German Verbatim Transcription of Interview Quotes

In order of appearance in chapter 7, added punctuation for better readability.

7.1.1 Podcasting as an Elusive Practice

“man könnte auch sagen Ö1 ist nix anderes als ein Radiosender der einen Podcast nach dem andern abspielt“ (interview-orf-representative: 48)

„für mich ist Podcasting eher so eine Stilfrage, wenn ichs vergleich mit zum Beispiel wie Radiojournalismus funktioniert, dann ist der ganz anders viel mehr on point auch ein bisschen steifer und korrekter und Podcasts haben halt die Möglichkeit irgendwie auch, da kanns mehr menschn [...] das ist so meine romantische Vorstellung was Podcasting ist, [...] aber ich fänds fast schade wenn man sagt, ein Podcast ist alles was man- Audio, das man mit RSS-Feeds ausspielt, hm“ (interview-indie-podcaster2: 21)

“es gibt Analysen zu jeder Herr Der Ringe Folge, wo drei Stunden sieben Dudes miteinander reden, des wär früher ein Podcast eigentlich gewesen, [...] viele von diesen Langform-Haberer-Podcasts, [...] die haben sich von den Podcasts weg, weil [...] sie einfach gar niemanden mehr erreichen weil eben die Instagram Tiktok Spotifys deutlich kurzlebiger und schneller [...] viel konkreteres Storytelling, und diejenigen, dies weiterhin monetarisieren wollten sind auf Twitch und YouTube gegangen“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 78)

“Podcast is ein ähm Audioformat, das in einer gewissen Regelmäßigkeit erscheint, unabhängig von einem Radiosender produziert wird und per RSS-Feed oder etwas sehr, sehr ähnlichem frei zur Verfügung gestellt wird, wobei das natürlich auch, eine Paywall ist nicht ein Ausschlussgrund etwas einen Podcast zu machen wenn man den Zugriff auf den RSS-Feed hat, dann is man frei und kann mit dem RSS-Feed machen was man will. Darum gehts in der Definition von ‚frei‘, es geht nicht um gratis sondern es geht darum, dass ich die, ich hab den Zugriff auf das ganze File, weil ich das Runterladen kann und ich hab die, es ist Audio, sobald es Video ist, ist es ausgeschlossen, oder eine Videokomponente hat schließt jetzt nicht aus dass man auf YouTube mit einem Standbild einem Audiogramm oder so hochlädt aber prinzipiell solls als Hör-Sendung konzipiert sein und mir ist ganz, ganz wichtig, dass man das vom Radio abgrenzt, also dass man sagt, sobald das ganze in einem Radiokontext entstanden ist das heißt für freies Radio oder für ein öffentlich rechtliches Radio oder für privates Radio, sobald eine Sendung gestaltet wurde mit dem Sinne, sie linear auszuspielen, gelten gilt die

*Definition von Podcast nicht mehr das ist meine absolut harte Grenze, ja“
(interview-market-researcher: 16)*

7.1.2 Nostalgia for RSS

„es ist einfach, frei und flexibel [...] und gratis [...] wenn jemand daherkommt und RSS neuerfindet, ja dann kümmer dich als nächstes ums Rad“ (interview-market-researcher: 112)

„wünsch ich mir die Zeit zurück, wo ich kurz davor war, alles mir selber zu programmieren müssen, nein“ (interview-market-researcher: 116)

„des Schöne is, dass der Podcast über dieses technische Gschistigschasti sich entwickelt hat und jetzt auch Personen rein aus Sorytellingperspektive zu Podcasts kommen“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 48)

„mich ärgerts immer noch, wenn ich auf eine Anchor-Seite geh und ich seh kein Apple Podcast oder iTunes Ding, dann weiß ich, der hat im Hintergrund einen Haken nicht gesetzt und es gibt keinen Grund, diesen Haken nicht zu setzen, also du hast immer noch diese das Gleiche was Soundcloud, manche haben einen Podcast auf Soundcloud haben aber den Feed nicht freigeschalten“ (interview-market-researcher: 47)

„wenn beispielsweise die Viennale, das größte Filmfestival Österreichs einen Podcast hostet und man schreibt sie an und sagt ‚hey cool könntts ihr mir den RSS-Feed, den RSS-Link schicken oder den Podcastlink‘ und man kriegt den Spotifylink zurück, dann is quasi auch schon in der Kulturszene dieser diese transit- dieser Übergang passiert dass man nichtmal mehr das Verständnis von Podcast hat, dass man realisiert, dass das nicht Spotify sein muss“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 46)

7.1.3 Platformization as a Threat

“rein aus dieser Internet-alles-soll-offen-sein-Perspektive muss RSS bleiben und wird hoffentlich bleiben und des geht hoffentlich gut solange Spotify nicht Apple oder Google gehört, also solange dieser Merger nicht passiert werden sich quasi Google und Apple mal a bissl weigern dieses alles auf eine Plattform zu geben [...] gefährlich wirts halt wenn ein Player alle andern frisst“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 83)

„die Plattform für'n Podcast, die finale beständige Plattform muss eine privat besetzte, eine Seite im Privatbesitz sein, die nicht von einer in irgendeiner in

irgendeiner Weise einer Plattform abhängig ist wie Spotify weil es einfach das Medium dann zumacht und wer weiß ob in 10 Jahren noch Spotify gibt, aber selbstgehostete mp3 Files auf Privatservern gibts noch immer und das ist eigentlich meine größte Angst“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 37)

„also ich vergleiche das gerne mit Supermärkten [...] wenn du jetzt zum Billa gehst, dann sammeln die ganz viele Daten über dich und die wissen dann sehr gut bescheid, wie sich Trends entwickeln, welche Produkte funktionieren wo gut auf welche Produkte, mit welchen verdient man wie viel Geld, und das passiert ja seit Jahrzehnten im Lebensmitteleinzelhandel, dass äh die großen Einzelhändler einfach die Produkte die gut funktionieren und die gute Margen haben selber produzieren [...] und sie können auch Einfluss darauf nehmen [...] wo das im Supermarkt dann steht, [...] und das ist irgendwie hochproblematisch weil die halt einfach dann nicht nur ein Handel ist der Dinge verkauft von verschiedenen Produzenten, sondern weil sie selber zum Produzenten [...] und wenn der Lebensmitteleinzelhandel nicht will, dass du damit Erfolg hast, dann hast du damit keinen Erfolg“ (interview-indie-podcaster2: 31)

„und jetzt ist es noch nicht ganz so arg bei Spotify, aber auch bei Spotify ist es so, dass die sehen welche Dinge funktionieren und dann schreiben sie entweder den Podcaster_innen und nehmen die exklusiv unter Vertrag da ist halt dann das Problem, dass nur mehr Leute die ein Spotify nutzen diese Podcasts hören können, [...] andererseits ist ja halt auch so dass Spotify ja nicht nur Podcasts erwirbt sondern auch selber welche produzieren lässt und [...] ich bin mir ziemlich sicher, dass Spotify nicht neutral ist beim Empfehlen und Platzieren von Episoden“ (interview-indie-podcaster2: 31)

„die Süddeutsche Zeitung, die Podcasts produziert, die wird da kein Problem haben, weil die wird irgendwie einen Kanal haben um mit Spotify in Kontakt zu sein und zu schauen, dass sie da nicht so schlecht wegkommen, aber gerade Indiepodcaster_innen kommen da total unter die Räder“ (interview-indie-podcaster2: 31)

„ich finde, wir sollten zumindest von dem Geld auch was kriegen wieder [...] das geht oft nicht, die [Plattformen] haben so eine Macht, die machen das nicht“ (interview-orf-representative: 78)

„also Spotify ist ja die einzige wirkliche Plattform, wo du nicht rauskriegst, alle andern sind ja quasi nur Datenbanken mit einer App dran“ (interview-market-researcher: 74)

„mittlerweile is auch die Spotify vs. non-Spotify-Diskussion eine rein akademische Diskussion. Es is im Hintergrund, es is nicht mehr das, worüber die Leute reden“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 48)

„Plattformisierung ist fast schon wieder falsch, weil das ist zu allgemein gsagt, i glaub es wird a Youtubeisierung geben, sodass früher oder später Podcasts synonym mit Spotify, so wie heute wenn jemand von am Online Video redet, dann redet er von es ist auf YouTube, wer kennt heutzutage noch daily motion oder vimeo oder solche Dinge, die zwar auch für sich existieren aber in der öffentlichen Wahrnehmung ist das YouTube aber ich glaub so in die Richtung wirts leider mit Spotify gehen weil i ka Möglichkeit seh wie das ganze aufgehoben werden [kann]“ (interview-indie-podcaster1: 74)

7.1.4 Platformization as an Opportunity

„was ich gerne hätte, Connection zu beispielsweise Spotify, um zu um unsere Podcasts in eine Empfehlung reinzubringen oder so. oder bei Apple Podcasts gibts ja auch immer Empfehlungen und da muss man schon auch immer Connections haben [...] aber das sind Möglichkeiten, die wir natürlich noch nicht haben aber halt uns langsam auch aufbauen“ (interview-podcast-label-owner-2: 44)

“i glaub, es is, gehört zum guten Ton, es is so ein, es gibt quasi gewisse Dinge, wo man is und ohne Spotify quasi isses irgendwie nicht legit, des is halt schon so weil man damit sich einfach beschneidet in der Visibilität [...] es war ja auch so wenn du ned gschafft host früher einen Podcast zu hosten und auf iTunes zu verlinken, dann war er auch nicht glaubwürdig, also du brauchtest einen iTunes Zugang, um deinen Podcast irgendwie als Podcast wahrnehmen zu können ah. Und i glaub schon, dasses mittlerweile Personen gibt, die nur, nur plattformbezogen konsumieren, die auch nicht wissen dass es anders geht“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 35)

“das muss man natürlich Spotify zugute halten [...] weil eben als sie anfangen haben so richtig in Richtung Podcasts zu pushen, haben schon so viele Leute Spotify auf ihrem Telefon installiert ghabt und gwusst wies funktioniert und sind dann mehr oder weniger da auch reingrutscht in die, ins Podcasting. Also muss man natürlich auch dazusagen dass da Erfolg von erfolgreichen Podcastern schon auch damit zusammenhängt dass hier a Plattform existiert, dies Leuten einfach macht Podcasts zu hören“ (interview-indie-podcaster1: 74)

7.1.5 Platform Indifference

“meine Erfahrungswerte zeigen aber halt dass es ungeachtet dieser Anstrengungen, dieses Aktivismus, unmöglich sein wird, diese Welle irgendwie zu stoppen und wir früher oder später auch irgendwie bei den Podcasts ziemlich dominanten Spieler in form von Spotify haben werden“ (interview-indie-podcaster1: 76)

„die Menschen haben sich dran gewöhnt einfach bei Facebook was zurückzuschreiben und und und findens völlig selbstverständlich, dass wir [Ö3] dort wieder erreichbar sind weil so muss man auch sagen, die Post, wenn du mit uns telefoniert hast, oder die Telekom Austria war ja auch ein Drittanbieter, also äh wenn es völlig selbstverständlich ist dass ich heute jemand eine WhatsApp schreibe [...] jemand den ich besser kenn [...], na warum soll ich nicht Ö3 ne WhatsApp schreiben können? [...] drum hab ich mich zum beispiel sehr früh darum bemüht dass ö3 über whatsapp erreichbar is. wir haben uns dann sogar bemüht, allen die uns jemals geschrieben hat gleich zentral was auszuschieken, das ham dann die Nutzungsbedingungen von WhatsApp nicht mehr erlaubt“ (interview-orf-representative: 82)

“wenns um Reichweite geht, dann sollten die Podcasts auf jeder Plattform verfügbar sein. Weil i finds ah vom digitalen Gedanken her, es war lang genug so, dass ma die Menschen zu gewissen Konsumformen gezwungen hat, i find digitale Medien zeichnen sich eben a dadurch aus, dass eben auch die Konsumentinnen und Konsumenten entscheiden, wann wo und wie sies konsumieren wollen. Und wenn du lieber auf Spotify die Podcasts hörst, is das für mi genauso okay wie wenn jemand sagt lieber auf Apple oder wenn jemand sagt na i mog eigentlich die Google App am liebsten. Es is ma eigentlich wurscht, hauptsach sie hören sie“ (interview-podcast-label-owner-1: 35)

7.1.6 Perceived (Non-)Influence of Platforms

“da musse auch sagen dass i mi zu wenig scher um die Spezifika bei Spotify, was jetzt am besten wie funktioniert weil wir weil wirs ohnehin ned ändern werden [...] wie wir unsern Podcast machen, seit 7 Jahren hat sich sehr wenig geändert und wir würden uns da höchstwahrscheinlich auch nie irgendwie anpassen an irgendwelche Spezifika die von einer Plattform vorgeschrieben werden oder von na Plattform auch empfohlen werden damits besser läuft. Also wir ignorieren ja zum Beispiel schon seit Jahr und Tag, dass Apple Podcasts schreibt ma darf im Titel net die die folgenzahl oder Folgennummer reingeben, machma trotzdem noch

immer (lacht) weilmas so anfangen haben und es is auch sinnvoller, weil mas einfach schneller findet“ (interview-indie-podcaster1: 72)

“ wir geben die Shownotes einmal bei Simplecast ein, schon so dass sie auf möglichst vielen Plattformen funktionieren und des geht ja inzwischen eh ganz guad, oba i find sie schau auf manchen Plattformen besser aus und auf manchen schlechter, es is leider so. Aber wir können ned, tatsächlich ned, die Ressourcen hamma ned, jede Plattform einzeln optimal zu bespielen“ (interview-podcast-label-owner-1: 44)

“die [Charts haben] natürlich schon immer einen großen Einfluss drauf, weil das sind dann die, wenn wieder mal ‚was sind die beliebtesten Podcasts des Jahres‘ und sonst wie die landen dann halt irgendwo und es gibt natürlich eine große Aufmerksamkeit in den Medien abseits dieses Podcastökosystems und da haben sie natürlich schon an großen Einfluss“ (interview-indie-podcaster1: 72)

“viele Personen hören das halt in na wöchentlichen Playlist, die ihnen zusammengestellt wird, also Beispiel wären ja die Morgen-Journale von Ö1, die dort auch gestreamt werden und man hört halt und wenn mans die Woche nicht hört, dann hört mas eh nimmer. Also man geht davon aus, dass da Feed sich generiert täglich, und dir das vorschlägt was du willst. Und wenn ein podcast dann nicht wöchentlich immer wieder da ist, reduzierst du die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass Leute sich in ihrem Tagesalltag eine Regelmäßigkeit mitm Podcast antrainieren, [...] aber für sowos könntest du den [Podcast des Hobbyist Podcaster] nicht machen, weil dafür is er nicht hochfrequent genug und nicht hot topic genug“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 57)

“wenn jetzt a host Spotify selbst nutzt und a große Affinität dazu hat, sehr stark drauf schaut, dass dort ois guad ausschaut [...] i find sie [die Affinität] sollt kane spielen weil wie gsagt, wenns um Reichweite geht, sollten alle- is es wichtig dass der Podcast gehört wird und ned wo er gehört wird, [...] wenn ma sagt, ma hat an hohen Spotify-Anteil, na optimiert ma seine Shownotes auf Spotify hin, ja das finde prinzipiell schon sinnvoll“ (interview-podcast-label-owner-1: 46)

“i würd schon sagen ahm Spotify mit der Kürze der Folgen... also Spotify hat den Laberpodcast de facto in die Nische verbannt (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 78)

“ich glaub, dass generell durch die Professionalisierung, durch den Wettbewerb, aber auch durch Spotify sich die Art und Weise, wie Podcasts gemacht werden auch verändert, also es gibt immer mehr kürzere Podcasts [...] und also ich

denke schon auch dass jemand der auf Spotify, also das wär meine These, dass jemand der auf Spotify hört, eine kürzere Aufmerksamkeitsspanne hat wie jemand, der auf Overcast hört und ich glaub das hat schon Einfluss auf Podcasts“ (interview-indie-podcaster2: 49)

“es is einfach ein absurdes chasing, es is irre, es is einfach idiotisch, [...] da muas ma auch wirklich aufpassen, was man sich selbst als Benchmark setzt [...] bei so einem kleinen Podcast, [...] i glaub die Wertigkeit von von oldschool Medien und Berichterstattung wird total unterschätzt weil man nur versucht an die [...] dariadaria [ranzukommen]“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster, 66)

7.1.7 Formalization: Podcasting as “Just another Media Channel”

“wenn man sich die Charts anschaut weil dann gibts ja leider nur mehr ganz wenige Podcasts, die nicht im Hintergrund eine große Firma haben, ein großes Medium oder teilweise auch Kapital von Investorinnen, [...] ist jetzt nix Schlechtes dran, wenns die Leute gerne hören [...] grundsätzlich bieten Podcasts ja die Chance so a bissl wie- also ich hab angefangen im Journalismus als Blogger, ich hab jahrelang gebloggt bevor ich irgendwo zu ner Zeitung gegangen bin, [...] und hab das sehr geliebt am Internet, dass es zum Beispiel nicht mehr nur die Financial Times gibt und das Wall Street Journal sondern dass ganz viele interessierte Leute einfach ins Internet reinschreiben können und wenns wen anderen interessiert, dann kann man auch für kleinere Zielgruppen was machen und an netten Austasuch haben und Podcasts kommen ja aus der selben Ecke“ (interview-indie-podcaster2: 16)

“[es] wird eine Marktberreinigung geben. Also es werden viele nicht durchhalten, werden sich was anderes suchen und überbleiben werden auch ein paar Podcasts, nicht nur die besten, sondern die die das meiste Publikum gefunden haben, und die, die davon leben können. also es wird - und diese Euphorie übrigens - weil heute muss ja jeder Instagrammer auch Podcast, und jeder hat sein Podcast - diese Euphorie, dass man auch unbedingt zu allem einen Podcast machen muss, wird glaub ich auch wieder verschwinden“ (interview-orf-representative: 55)

“Podcasting is eher die- ja des im Lebenslauf, was man reinschreiben kann als das kann ich auch, also wie Softskills [...] oba i glaub scho, dass viele in der Medienindustrie den Podcast nicht als das ultima ratio sehen, sondern halt einfach ein weiteres Ding, und was gut is, diese Leute können den Podcast auch verwenden, um sich mal ein Profil zu machen, [...] es muss nicht negativ sein, dass man einen Podcast verwendet, um sich ein Karrieresprungbrett zu machen,

[...] und des wird ,von würde song dem Großteil der Leute auch verwendet, also es is eine Möglichkeit Fame zu suchen“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 72)

“die Podcastszene nicht mehr so bunt und vielfältig is sondern professionell is. Und mit Professionalisierung stirbt halt fast notwendigerweise das bunte das Experiment [...] ich bin schon sehr sehr skeptisch und kritisch gegenüber Medienhäusern [im Podcastbereich]“ (interview-market-researcher: 116)

„[eines] dieser hehren Ziele, dass man Dinge verbreitet, dass man Leuten Zugang zu was gibt, ohne es an a Bezahlschranke zu binden oder an a Plattform“ (interview-indie-podcaster1: 46)

“grundsätzlich glaub i so, dass diese ganzen großen Medienhäuser und Agenturen, die Podcasts produzieren, denen ist das recht wurscht wies ausschaut mit der Verteilung und obs Plattformisierung oder so gibt, weil viele von diesen Dingen werden geboren in irgendeinem Boardroom, wo jemand sagt ,wir brauchen jetzt ah an podcast über so und so, weil wir haben sowas ned im Portfolio‘ und dann werden Leute dafür engagiert, die das eine Zeit machen aber bei vielen dieser Podcasts, die ausm Boden gestampft werden, ist dieses hehre Ziel ah des viele Indiepodcaster verfolgen, eigentlich ned da“ (interview-indie-podcaster1: 44)

“diese Medienorganisationen, die Podcasts jetzt auch machen, viel später als die anderen und die hab ich auch das Gefühl sind so so mächtige Giants – ich sehs so bildlich – die ein bisschen, teilweise die Szene dominieren oder versuchen zu dominieren“ (interview-podcast-label-owner-2: 42)

„das glaubt man gar nicht, wie interessiert die Podcaster da sind, da einzureichen, weil dann zählt dann- ist das plötzlich ganz wurscht- da sieht man Radio überhaupt nicht als Konkurrenz, sondern Ö3 ist super eine Wunderwaffe, um einen Podcast bekannter zu machen. Das hat auch gestimmt“ (interview-orf-representative: 28)

“wenns einfach so ne große professionell produzierte Konkurrenz gibt, dann wird irgendwie- dann sinkt die Lust da was Kleines zu machen, das ist ein bissl wie bei YouTube da war auch zu Beginn- zu Beginn waren vor allem Videos erfolgreich, die irgendjemand mit dem Handy gefilmt hat, und mittlerweile ist YouTube hochprofessionell, jeder YouTuber hat drei Kameras, Profilight, einen Cutter und so weiter“ (interview-indie-podcaster2: 35)

7.1.8 Democratic Ideals and Collaboration

“a Großteil dieser Podcasts, die ned wahnsinnig sichtbar sind, weil sie halt in den Podcastcharts irgendwo ab Platz 200 rangieren sind aber quasi tatsächlich die Basis dieser ganzen Podcastkultur und wenn die wegfallen würden, glaub i dann würd Podcasting als – würd jetzt ned sagen als Bewegung, aber Podcasting als als was ned einfach nur ned soa Strohfeuer ist – würd wahrscheinlich nimmer existieren“ (interview-indie-podcaster1: 44)

“beim Podcasting Meetup, wann da jemand dazöht ja die ham an Eisenbahnpodcast – i hob no nie von dem ghört – oba die haben eine regelmäßige Hörerschaft, dann isses einfach saucool und es is doch so egal ob das der neue number one Spotify Podcast is, wenn diese kleine Gruppe sich vernetzt und miteinander redet“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 76)

“i glaub zum Beispiel, dass die Rolle von den unabhängigen Podcastenden einfach oftmals sein [...] leading by example, weil es wird genug Leute geben, die das professionalisieren [...] und einfach nur als Beispiel zu existieren, dass es anders geht und i find halt auch, was ganz wichtig is zu sagen des is ein medium was man machen kann ohne kommerzielles Interesse, es is einfach ein Hobby, es is wie jeder andere Blog [...] was schön ist am Internet, dass man Interessen teilen kann und oftmals nicht das kommerzielle Interesse haben muss“ (interview-hobbyist-podcaster: 41)