

# THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO RADIO AND PODCAST STUDIES

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## FROM NICHE TO MAINSTREAM

The emergence of a podcasting culture and  
market in the Italian radio context

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# FROM NICHE TO MAINSTREAM

## The emergence of a podcasting culture and market in the Italian radio context

*Marta Perrotta*

### Introduction

Listening to the radio is a deeply rooted habit in Italy, where the advent of podcasting dates back to 2005,<sup>1</sup> slightly after the USA. At first, broadcasters saw podcasting as a catch-up radio service rather than as an ‘alternative distribution route for serially produced programming’ (Hilmes, 2013, p. 49). It represented ‘an opportunity to consolidate both the brand and its extensions’ (Perrotta, 2017, p. 129), so as to fully exploit the added value of quality spoken content: morning shows, comedy, talk shows, storytelling, shows on musical cultures, educational programming – the most expensive parts of the production.

Given these features, podcasting spread quite rapidly in Italy, growing year-on-year. Many broadcasters strategically believed in this service as a way of building listener loyalty that could boost non-linear consumption of particularly valuable portions of their programming. iTunes charts provided an additional tool to weigh ratings, especially between 2011 and 2017, a period of uncertainty in audience measurement (Bonini, 2013).

In recent years, however, things have changed for podcasting, thanks to the development of both Italian and international audio platforms. The charts have seen the rise of content linked to publishers with interests in the digital audio world, disconnected from the programming of broadcasters.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the awakening of the Italian fascination with podcasting, through the analysis of main trends of this (r)evolution and a focus on three innovative shows. I carried out in-depth interviews with writers, producers, and publishing executives in the world of Italian podcasting, using a qualitative approach (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), which can, despite the limited number of participants, gather crucial data to contribute new knowledge to the field. The selected podcast makers represent different production cultures, both intersecting and overlapping, business models, aesthetics, and genres.

### Listening in Italy: radio vs. podcast

Every week, 43.3 million people in Italy turn on the radio (TER, 2020): 81.8 per cent of the population above 14 years of age. On an average day, listeners are nearly 33.6 million, which is 63.5 per cent of the population. The average quarter-hour persons (AQH) between 6 a.m.

and 12 a.m. is slightly below 6.3 million people and, on average, radio is listened to for 3 hours and 27 minutes per day.

The five most listened to national stations are privately-owned commercial radios focused on young adults, with musical programming inspired by formats such as Contemporary Hit Radio, Adult Contemporary, Urban, and Italian Country. In mid-table we find two public broadcasting service stations: Rai Radio 1, a talk format station, and Rai Radio 2, which combines mainstream and indie music with a diverse range of genres – comedy, light entertainment, cultural infotainment. At the bottom of the rankings, there are radios that choose more specific formats (Classic Rock and Talk & News), and we also find the cultural channel of the public service (Rai Radio 3), home of classical music and discussion, readings, arts, documentaries, and science. These stations prove to be more focused on the distribution of catch-up content: small numbers, but a great variety of programs suitable for secondary fruition.

Despite investigating which device was used by the surveyed listener, the TER research doesn't consider the consumption of the same stations' content in podcast format, denoting nearsightedness regarding the sector's potential. Overall, the magnitude of podcast listening in Italy is not comparable to radio, but it demonstrates a growing interest in this phenomenon. The people who have listened to at least one podcast in 2020 are 13.9 million (Nielsen Ratings, 2020), 15 per cent more than in 2019, which reveals that listening frequency has increased, particularly on a weekly basis.<sup>2</sup> Besides, the duration of the average podcast listening session has also increased: from 19 minutes in 2018 to almost 23 minutes in 2019.

This research, commissioned by Audible for Nielsen, also points out that the most popular contents are musical shows, current events and entertainment, language courses, and investigative reports. More than 25 per cent of listeners (especially the younger ones) listen to content in English. The tastes of podcast listeners surveyed by this research seem to match those of radio listeners. Furthermore, the research highlights the preference for original content, unrelated to radio, which seems to be the most attractive, particularly for the youth. Many podcast listeners also cite radio stations and hosts, although in a generic way, without recalling the titles of shows. Another remarkable piece of data, especially considering how the market developed elsewhere, is that 37 per cent of the surveyed sample is still unfamiliar with podcasting. One Italian out of two is therefore a user to be gained, an exciting perspective which makes this a competitive sector for those who are entering it professionally.

### **The Italian road to podcast: milestones and the *Veleno (Poison)* case**

As is well-known, 75 per cent of the American population is now familiar with podcasting, and over one American out of two has listened to at least one podcast (Edison Research, 2020). For some time, when looking at international trends from Italy, publishers, artists and celebrities, brands, and investors, along with audio editors and platforms, have wondered whether this phenomenon would take hold also in Italy.

Many have studied listeners' habits and evaluated the opportunities afforded by audio media. Interest in podcasts spread, bringing along professional standards and financial strategies. Platforms were born, specializing in the creation, distribution, and monetization of podcasts, such as Spreaker, launched in 2010 by Francesco Baschieri (today CEO of Voxnest),<sup>3</sup> which has become an aggregator of – not just Italian – podcasts. Consulting firms for brands and editors were created<sup>4</sup> with the goal to define strategies for digital audio and to produce podcasts and content that can be activated via voice command.

In 2016, the project of Italian author Jonathan Zenti was among four finalists in *Podquest*, a contest for new radio ideas that could enter the Radiotopia network in 2017, and finished

second to *Ear Hustle*, the award-winning podcast which offers stories of life inside prisons. *Meat* is the only example of an international podcast produced in Italy: Radiotopia financed it, while *The Heart* (Zenti, 2017a) published its first episode in 2017.

The year 2016 also marks the arrival in Italy of Amazon's subscription platform, Audible, with its vast audio library and the first original series in Italian entitled *Lovers Hotel*.<sup>5</sup> Rival Storytel, the main audiobook streaming service in Northern Europe, started the platform's Italian section in 2018, providing original content in podcast format, from news to fiction. Professional broadcasters joined both platforms, proposing quality productions hosted by well-known radio voices, similarly to what happened in USA, where this kind of evolution marked 'the second phase of podcasting – the format's boom' (Lupo, 2019, p. 56). Audible welcomed, among others, a famous speaker such as Matteo Caccia, author of *La Piena (The Flood)*, while Storytel hired Carlo Annese, a journalist who created the free podcast platform PianoP. Meanwhile, in 2018 the producer Rossana De Michele founded Storielibere.fm, assembling a quality catalog of carefully packaged shows on a free-access website.

Thanks to another free program, distributed in 2017 by the publishing group GEDI,<sup>6</sup> podcasting began to be popularized in Italy. *Veleno*, created by TV journalist Pablo Trincia along with Alessia Rafanelli,<sup>7</sup> has been called 'the Italian counterpart to *Serial*' (De Maio, 2017). *Veleno* is a brave investigative report that reconstructs the story of 16 children who, between 1997 and 1998, were taken from their families in the province of Modena (Emilia Romagna) upon suspicion that they were victims of satanic paedophilia. This case, which flew under the radar for 20 years, despite being investigated in five different trials, was unearthed again by Trincia whose research caused it to be re-opened. It was also in part thanks to new witnesses attesting to this incredible story. The trials had established that there had been no satanic rituals, abuse, or murder. At the same time, it was speculated that the questioning techniques employed on the children had led them to fabricate false memories, which was proved and told in the podcast with the support of touching audio testimony of the protagonists, some of whom are still awaiting justice.

*Veleno*'s uniqueness relies on the fact that, besides being a podcast – a new format for the Italian context – it is 'a kind of report which doesn't exist in Italy, one based on the investigative journalism model, with rigorous fact-checking and an accurate reconstruction relying on direct testimonies.'<sup>8</sup> To the same effect, Mancini also remarks (2000, p. 273) that, on top of a juxtaposition between European and Anglo-American models,<sup>9</sup> the Italian practice is oriented towards interpretation rather than factual reporting. *Veleno* proved to be a tool for the 'transmedia revitalization of investigative journalism' (Porlezza et al., 2018), partially echoing Spinelli and Dann's argument (2019) in which, referring to *Serial*, the focus is on the journalist conducting the investigation in an 'impartially human' way (p. 198), rather than on the murder case at hand, exposing 'the advent of a new set of ethical criteria for podcast journalism' (p. 184).

Like *Serial*, *Veleno* is studded with its authors' reflections about the power of investigative journalism in shaking the sense of the profession and presenting ethical and emotional challenges to those practicing it.

We tried to talk about our own dilemmas, not out of narcissism, but in order to make listeners understand what it feels like to deal with such a traumatic story. There is nothing more human than this, and people appreciated it. In *Veleno*, you can feel our worries about playing with the lives of others, but we still believe we managed to stay balanced and tell the story with a delicate touch. Audio leads you to a more reflective kind of writing, one with long digressions and great power – greater than TV, for instance – in presenting simply the most complex things in life.

Trincia, 2020

It is interesting that the podcast flag in Italy was planted by Trincia, who was a TV journalist:<sup>10</sup> the discovery of *Serial* made him think about ‘how many possibilities to narrate there are when you’re not a slave to images, and I said to myself “I want to be the first to do it in Italy.” But *Veleno* is “American”, the result of “American” listening experiences without which it would never have come into existence’ (ibid.). After *Veleno*, the word podcast was on everyone’s lips. Aided by the emotional involvement generated by the story, leveraging the true-crime genre and a narrative format that, despite strictly sticking to facts, enhances the dramatic impact of the case, *Veleno* brought the public closer to podcasting,<sup>11</sup> highlighting the format’s power. Nonetheless, this was a self-produced project, following ‘the dominant narrative... of the plucky independent podcast, recorded as a passion project in a home studio, going “viral” and gaining huge audiences’ (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 200). Trincia pitched this product to all Italian radio stations, to publishers, production companies, but only got rejections: ‘I was expecting radios to show some interest, but no one came forward. Only GEDI said yes, and I basically gave it to them for free. I made an investment because I was obsessed with that story’ (Trincia, 2020).

Certainly the ‘freemium’ model, typical of podcasts, is strengthened also by the Italian cases: ‘there is no charge for the core product and income is earned through a variety of secondary means’ (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 8), such as the rights for books or TV series. ‘After becoming a book (Trincia, 2019),<sup>12</sup> *Veleno* will be an Amazon Prime docu-series,’ following a common path in contemporary storytelling, which draws from carefully made and extensively researched products such as podcasts, and moves towards data driven creativity, where contents are molded upon the consumers’ preferences and their consumption models.

Years 2016 and 2017 were therefore crucial for podcasts in Italy. An equally interesting 2018 followed, with the release of *La Piena*, produced for Audible Studio and distributed on its for-pay platform, and the launch of *Morgana*, by Michela Murgia and Chiara Tagliaferri, produced by Storielibere.fm and available for free. In the meantime, *Meat* had reached its third episode, which was published in April 2019.

With these examples (*La Piena*, *Morgana*, *Meat*), I am attempting to draw a map of the Italian ‘podcast ecosphere’ (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 3), while still being aware that this limited selection leaves out a host of other works, some of which are definitely noteworthy. At the same time, I believe in the value of an in-depth analysis of these cases, whose cultural impact and audience engagement, not to mention the calibre of the professionals involved, have been an inspiration for many others, and can encourage a wider reflection on the future of podcast in Italy and beyond.

### ***La Piena***

*La Piena*<sup>13</sup> (Caccia & Pescio, 2018) is the story of Gianfranco Franciosi, an Italian naval mechanic who infiltrated a drug ring for seven years. The subject brings us back to the true-crime genre experimented by *Veleno*, because it works with the same ingredients: this podcast ‘adheres to a documentary style that bridges dissemination, investigative journalism, and autobiographical narration, showcases the voices of TV news, Caccia’s personal reflections of the imagery connected to drug trafficking’ (Lupo, 2019, p. 84) and, naturally, the audio testimonies of Franciosi, his ex-partner, the police, and other witnesses.<sup>14</sup>

The author of the story is not a journalist, but a narrator who, on the radio, was the proponent of a specific storytelling format – tightly related to *This American Life*<sup>15</sup> – well suited to commercial radio and with a strong interaction with the audience, both live and via social networks. His professional debut was with *Amnesia* (2008) on Rai Radio 2, a mockumentary where he pretends to suffer from retrograde amnesia and, throughout the season, tells the daily

story of his rehabilitation process live. Since then, he was constantly on air – either on public or private radio – with other programs (*Voi siete qui, Pascal*) featuring personal stories, keeping on with this ‘skillful mixing of fictional elements and reality taken from his listeners’ autobiographies’ (Perrotta, 2015, p. 101), who were invited to write him letters and to read extracts from their diaries in conversation with the host.

Then Caccia moved on to longer narratives, producing his first audio series in 10 episodes starting from a ‘highly human’ story (Gozzoli, 2018) with many twists and turns: Franciosi was first an infiltrator close to European drug lord Elias Piñeiro, then he spent seven months in international jail to keep up his cover, and finally he led the police to a major drug bust off the Azores. After, he entered a cooperating witness protection program, and lastly, after repeated contrasts with the authorities that should have protected him, he decided to forego his cover and risk retaliation. The thriller aspects were not the authors’ main interests: rather, it was the emotional charge of Franciosi’s eventful life, the bitterness of the ending, the sense of powerlessness ingrained in his self-defined role as ‘a walking dead’ (Castaldo, 2015).

Caccia can be regarded as a storyteller who can narrate other people’s emotions by experiencing them before a microphone. But, on top of this – to which his kind of radio has accustomed his listeners – there is a sound construction work which stimulates imagination. ‘Any audio content is first form and then substance,’ Caccia maintains when explaining the editing of *La Piena* during an episode of the podcast ‘Come fare un podcast di successo’ (2018): the glue that holds the words together is the original music composed by Luca Micheli by sampling sounds in Franciosi’s boat storage in Bocca di Magra<sup>16</sup> – old boat carcasses, abandoned oars, tanks of gas.

Water plays a crucial role in this story, together with the protagonist’s voice, recorded both at work on boats and while sailing at sea. For Caccia, *La Piena* works because the driving force, which takes the listeners until the end is the desire to live a unique sound experience, thanks to a soundscape which is accessed every time they hit play on their smartphones. The narrator’s voice guides them through this sound, not interpreting words but rather letting the content rise to the top with its emotional shade: already on the radio, his style was essential and respectful for the story.

It is unquestionable that the success of *La Piena* is due, as with *Serial’s*, to what Berry (2015) calls the ‘*TAL (This American Life)* effect,’ the benefit of being connected to a ‘well-known, much loved, and highly respected brand’ (p. 174), which in this case is, however, attributable exclusively to the host, rather than to a specific show or broadcaster. Caccia is a full-fledged ‘radio personality’ (Stiernstedt, 2014, p. 293) like few others in Italy, the only one to have covered a specific segment in mainstream radio for years, and this aspect is far from secondary for Audible.<sup>17</sup> *La Piena* is the second most listened to podcast on the platform (Crognali, 2020); the first one, an English course, *Listen and learn*, by the English-born comedian John Peter Sloan.

## Morgana

According to the Macchianera Internet Awards,<sup>18</sup> the 2019 podcast of the year was *Morgana, la casa delle donne fuori dagli schemi (Morgan, the House of Women Outside the Box)* (Murgia & Tagliaferri, 2018–present), a project that focuses on stories of unconventional women: ‘weird, over-the-top, bitchy, and, in their own ways, hard to label,’ as the podcast synopsis reads. Morgan was King Arthur’s powerful, dangerous half-sister, picked as the ideal godmother to the women showcased in this series<sup>19</sup> created by writer and literary critic Michela Murgia and radio author Chiara Tagliaferri. From Madonna to former figure skater Tonya Harding, from the Brontë sisters to Shirley Temple, from porn star Moana Pozzi to Saint Catherine of Siena,

these women fought the stereotype of the gentle, sacrificial female identity through paths of personal redemption or revenge, with no intention of being an example to anyone.

The narrative voice is Murgia's who, in a fast monologue interspersed with gothic sound effects – crows cawing, creaking doors, chilling screams, breaking mirrors – songs, and movie excerpts, reconstructs the life of the episode's protagonist, delves into her extraordinary qualities, and generates a very powerful immersive effect with her words. Within each story there are references to the life of the narrator (or her co-author), to her relationship with the woman depicted and the uniqueness of her talent: 'for each Morgan on our path there are life moments that we tell through them' (Tagliaferri, 2020), but Murgia's and Tagliaferri's reflections become universal thanks to the power of writing and to the dialogue, each time with a different guest, that closes the episode.

It is not this podcast's sound design – refined but quite descriptive – that most strikes the listener. Rather, it is the quality of the words – caustic and heavy – that catches attention, the need to tell which feeds upon the cultural tensions that this podcast embraces.

We described women who would appear to be insane, but their insanity is often a response to the insanity that the world inflicted on them. Every Morgan is a blow to the patriarchy and the social discrimination that women have experienced for centuries on the basis of biological difference.

*ibid.*

Over the course of two years and 24 episodes, *Morgana* established an active fan base,<sup>20</sup> who feverishly awaited the 17th day of the month for a new episode. Undoubtedly, the publication of a book by Mondadori (Murgia & Tagliaferri, 2019) and its presentation tour have been instrumental in broadening the podcast's reach and in

getting to know first-hand a community of women (but also men) who want to thank us for finding the strength, through *Morgana*, to face change, break up with a partner, come out with their family. And they come to the book signing saying: 'sign this for me because I'm one of you. I am a Morgan'

*ibid.*

Like Radiotopia, which offers free quality content, *Morgana*, too, benefited from the 'association with a tightly curated brand' (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 218) such as Storielibere.fm, which hosts podcasts by radical narrators. Following this success, the podcast was sponsored by an important bank, a testament to the fact that monetization is not immediate but is possible where there is a community of users joined by an extreme, divisive, deeply motivational content, which can then take the form of other narratives: the book was the first step, and there is also talk of TV ideas. *Morgana* successfully proves that podcasts in Italy are also a place for 'vertical, single-themed, creative narratives' (Lupo, 2019, p. 105), where cultural investigation is the key to opening tridimensional narrative spaces.

### ***Meat***

*Meat* is a podcast about the human body, and the way it shapes our life and relations with others: weight and height as measures of our space – or, technically, the space we occupy – in the world. Starting from this assumption, the producer proposes to investigate the never-ending struggle between what we have in our minds and what the body we were given allows us to

do. In the pilot which was released by *The Heart* and won the 2018 Third Coast/Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Competition Skylarking Award, Jonathan Zenti starts with himself to gain the audience's trust.<sup>21</sup> Being included in the world of *The Heart* is understandable: Zenti deals with an intimate topic with the same mix of sensitivity and honesty for which Kaitlin Prest's podcast is famous: the synopsis points out how the author 'candidly and beautifully discusses his body and how he loves it despite the fact that not everybody else does' (*Meat*, 2017).

Zenti is an independent radio producer whose portfolio is rich, having made his debut in 2003 by working in Gaetano Cappa's team, where he began his research on sound, voice, and the potentialities of audio language.<sup>22</sup> Many of his later works, both as an independent producer and for public radio, are documentaries – in Veronese dialect,<sup>23</sup> Italian, and English – which variously deal with human relations: 'audio is a fantastic vehicle for language, and language is the tool that humankind gave itself to build relations' (Zenti, 2020). To foster an immersive perspective, he often features his own voice inside the narrative:

I like talking about how relations are built and destroyed, and in order to do that I need to begin with myself, to be the trigger of the relation. Some of the anecdotes and thoughts that I tell are mine, others come from other people and I fuse them into a single voice, a narrative 'I.' Goethe spoke about this as 'poetic truth,' Kaitlin Prest calls it 'emotional truth:' in this way the listener can understand a process through first-person narration.

*ibid.*

The thematic and aesthetic choices of *Meat* validate the thesis that podcasts are ideal to investigate delicate subjects, such as sex and psychological dynamics, by relying on a 'high level of skill in sound design, which invites and encourages repeat listening' (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 10), even more if earbuds are used: 'they invite precisely the kind of intense listening mode needed for empathy to form in the podcast space – they set a listening tone. But they do not, in and of themselves, make for empathetic experiences' (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 87).

Empathy is the result of a specific narrative design, which gives space to the representation of profound, sincere experiences between humans, as well as between protagonists and listeners. This, however, is not an unalterable state for those who listen, because they are subjected to emotional currents of varying nature, density, and temperature, depending on the twists and turns of the stories told. Above all, it's a question of trust: 'intimate podcast producers trust their audiences [...] to respect podcast content material and to process it in a "right way"' (Spinelli & Dann, 2019, p. 91). This quality is also found in *Meat*, where Zenti entrusts the audience with deep reflections about his body and the body parts of other people who have told him their secrets: he is the first one to show his vulnerability, triggering an honest dialogue with what he gets from the stories he tells. But there is no lesson to be learned at the end: 'what I say should manage to both include the listeners and exclude them, to both hate and love humankind, so that anyone can be free to go on a journey without being forced to express an opinion' (Zenti, 2020).

Sound construction is among the most surprising elements in this podcast: in each episode there is a thick web of background noise and music entirely composed by the author. The introductory episode, 'Host's Mouth,' (Zenti, 2017b) also saves room for a reflection on language, on the way in which Zenti pronounces English and on how the body itself, as an instrument, can resonate. The outcome is incredibly rich, and places *Meat* among the best made podcasts on the Italian scene. It is not surprising that some of the producer's other works in Italian were finalists in prestigious competitions such as Prix Italia and Prix Europa, and that thanks to this



exposure, he started doing work abroad.<sup>24</sup> Today, he is also the head of content for Voxnest, where he works on the development and promotion of contents created by users on Spreaker.<sup>25</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Podcasting culture in Italy has definitely changed between 2015 and 2020. Several works attracted the attention of the public and critics and boosted public awareness of podcasting. Behind these products there are authors, producers, publishers, and platform managers who have increasingly and stubbornly invested in the development of the market. At the same time, the podcasts analysed in this study – except for the forerunner *Veleno* – would not have been possible without the experiences in public and private radio.

There is a weak but somehow necessary link with the productive and creative ecosystem that starts from the radio industry. Some podcasts' authors leave radio because it does not allow for a direct, thesis-driven narrative free from scheduling obligations. Others keep working for radio also as a way of exercising their relationship with listeners and with everyday narratives connected to current events. The other way round, broadcasters seem nearsighted regarding the reasons for audio on demand; none of them, except for Rai,<sup>26</sup> which started only in 2020, produces anything specifically conceived for podcast; none of them is interested in the public of millennials, who is gradually foregoing radio but could easily come back to it through dedicated podcasts. Conversely, instead of enjoying their position revenues (Bonini, 2017), radio broadcasters – and especially the public service – should take the lead of this revolution: 'in terms of commitment and willingness to produce, Rai is such a big giant that with one move it could turn the wind in the world of independent podcasters' (Lupo, 2019, p. 57), and push the market towards a new stage, where the competition with audio platforms will be more and more heated.

Indeed, the role of for-pay and free platforms in promoting the growth of a professional community dedicated to digital audio was very important to this study. 'In Italy the sector is all to be built, professional figures are lacking, even the terms to define them in a unique way are missing.'<sup>27</sup> Besides hiring people already working in the radio or dubbing sectors, Audible, Storytel, Storielibere, Spotify, and the others<sup>28</sup> are looking for story editors or sound designers for podcasts, suggesting a promising future for those who want to enter this world.

The works studied in this chapter also show that the production of podcasts in Italy has been echoing the more consolidated formats (true crime, intimacy and pop culture) and the international stylistic and narrative trends, mixing investigation, storytelling, conversation, fostering intense engagement, and also leaving room for vertical narratives and empowering contents; they have proven to be able to generate widespread curiosity and interaction among the interested audience, regardless of charts.

The thematic and aesthetic richness achieved by the shows therefore testifies to the advancement of podcasts in Italy, from a niche to an increasingly consolidated medium, available with a variety of genres and quality contents, that are – except for *Meat* – all in Italian: this language is both a wonderfully expressive opportunity and an instrument that confines these productions to a limited audience, thus preventing them from gaining the global attention they deserve. As Spinelli and Dann argue (2019, p. 8), 'podcasts can thrive on niche global audiences: they are less rooted in material communities, regions and countries (an advantage and a disadvantage).'

It is highly desirable that someone, on the wave of the Italian pioneer of English-language podcasts Zenti, ventures into the same territory, tries to capture its enormous opportunities. I believe that podcast productions will be, in the future, increasingly in Italian, locally-bounded, influenced in formats and style by international trends, which are not accessible to listeners who

don't understand English or Spanish. Italian is less widely spoken than other languages, but there is still a lot of room for manoeuvre for those who want to produce podcasts for the Italian audience, and the next few years will be decisive in this regard.

## Notes

- 1 As a matter of fact, one of the first amateur podcasts, Antonio Pavolini's *Pendolirini* dates back to 2003. <https://archive.org/details/becerumerevealed/finecronaca.mp3>  
Radio Rai started the service in December 2005. Between 2006 and 2007 both national and local radios started making, promoting, and integrating podcasts among their websites' special contents.
- 2 Six percent of the sample listen to podcasts every day; twenty-eight percent listen weekly; seventeen percent listen monthly; and thirty-seven percent never listen to podcasts at all.
- 3 Launched in 2018, following the merger of Spreaker and BlogTalkRadio, Voxnest is an audio technology company, specializing in podcasting solutions.
- 4 The biggest example of this new trend is DigitalMDE, created in 2016 and led by Mirko Lagonegro, a consultant with a long experience in the field of private radio.
- 5 The series is authored by two famous crime writers, Massimo Carlotto and Piergiorgio Pulixi, and directed by Sergio Ferrentino. It was made in collaboration with RSI (Italian-language Swiss Radio) and the production company Fonderia Mercury.
- 6 The Gruppo GEDI is one of Italy's leading publishing groups. It operates in the press, radio, advertising, and digital sectors.
- 7 The work group is completed by Gipo Gurrado, Marco Boarino, and Debora Campanella.
- 8 Based on the author's interview with P. Trincia, May 14, 2020.
- 9 Hallin and Mancini (2004) have also identified a 'Mediterranean model,' to which Italy belongs, where the tight connection between politics and press, as well as a late development of journalism as an independent profession, have made the practice of investigative journalism rare.
- 10 Trincia worked for *Le Iene* – the Italian version of the Argentinian show *Caiga quien caiga (Whoever May Fall)* – for a long time. The show's investigative style is ironic, and its hosts are known to ask irreverent questions to famous personalities as well as reporting on controversial themes.
- 11 From October 2017 to January 2018, *Veleno* got almost 2 million page impressions and 500,000 views on its website, and over 200,000 video streams. Source: email correspondence with Valeria Teodonio, GEDI Visual, June 1, 2020.
- 12 The book contains new revelations, anticipated by a special final episode of the podcast which came out later (Trincia, 2018), by some of the story's protagonists who contacted the authors after the investigation had been published.
- 13 Written by Matteo Caccia and Mauro Pescio, music and direction by Luca Micheli, produced by Mismaonda.
- 14 In 2015, Franciosi wrote his story together with journalist Federico Ruffo in the book *Gli orologi del diavolo. Infiltrato tra i narcos, tradito dallo Stato* (Rizzoli).
- 15 Similarities with Ira Glass also include live shows and the audience involvement in events on the road throughout Italy.
- 16 Bocca di Magra is at the mouth of the Magra river, between Liguria and Tuscany. Often, here, the river floods houses and other buildings.
- 17 The importance of this podcast for the company is further evidenced by the fact that conference rooms in their Berlin headquarters 'are named after places from the great audiobooks they publish' (M. Caccia, e-mail correspondence with the author, June 15, 2020) and that one of them is named 'Bocca di Magra.'
- 18 The most important competition for Italian blogs and internet personalities.
- 19 *Morgana* is inspired by Marion Zimmer Bradley's 1983 fantasy novel *The Mists of Avalon*, which reworks the Arthurian cycle from the perspective of female characters and focuses on the figure of Morgan, giving her a more complex representation than previous rewritings.
- 20 According to Tagliaferri (2020), *Morgana's* community is the largest on the Storielibere.fm platform, with 1.6 million streams between October 2018 and April 2020. Based on the author's interview with C. Tagliaferri, 2020, April 16.
- 21 Created for Radiotopia's Podquest by PRX and made possible with funds from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Written and produced by Jonathan Zenti, story editing by Cathy Fitzgerald.

Music composed by Zenti, theme song sung by Valentina Ziliani; Of eight planned episodes, each focusing on one person's specific body part and how this influenced their life, only three have so far been distributed. The first is entitled 'Host's Fat' (Zenti, 2017c) and deals with the struggle to lose weight; the second is 'Jean's Hair,' (Zenti, 2018a) the story of a white man with dreadlocks, but also a story of mental confinement; the third is entitled 'Stella's Cut,' (Zenti, 2019) and talks about female genital mutilation and an African woman's relationship with sexuality. Soon, the remaining 5 episodes will be distributed, some of whose titles the author has anticipated: 'Marissa's Scar,' 'Hector's Heart Valve,' 'Nija's Milk,' 'Alan's Vertebra.'

- 22 See [www.jonathanzenti.it/works/](http://www.jonathanzenti.it/works/); Gaetano Cappa is a radio director and producer with an experimental approach to radio drama and variety shows who, at the time, worked for Rai Radio 3.
- 23 Zenti was born near Verona, north-eastern Italy.
- 24 One of them is 'Crickets, Night, Maasai Mara' (2018), made for BBC 4's Short Cuts (Zenti, 2018b).
- 25 Zenti is also responsible, along with other professionals such as Francesco Baschieri (CEO of Voxnest), and sound designers Valerio Maggio and Luca Micheli, for the newborn audio production company Agave Studio.
- 26 The first audio series conceived for podcast is *Labanof. Corpi senza nome dal fondo del Mediterraneo* (*Labanof. Nameless bodies from the bottom of the Mediterranean*), a documentary that tells what happens in the forensic anthropology and odontology laboratory of the University of Milan, where lifeless bodies recovered after the tragic shipwrecks of migrants in the Mediterranean are identified. This work produced by Radio Rai has recently won the 2020 Prix Italia in the category Radio Documentary.
- 27 Based on the author's interview with S. Tinelli, head of editorial content, Chora Media, November 29, 2020.
- 28 Chora Media ([www.choramedia.com](http://www.choramedia.com)) is a newborn Italian podcast company which started releasing contents in the second half of 2020.

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