Operation and social participation in a radio local model

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Abstract:

The communicative map of a territory is formed by a few diverse mass media, which can differ in supports or in territorial scope. This research studies a specific typology: the local radio channels that broadcast in Catalonia. Thus, the local communication is analysed taking into account aspects such as the media organization, the broadcasting services or the professional profiles. The researched territory has 51 towns, with more than 40 operative mass media, 11 of which are local or regional radio stations.

The object of study is the set of local radio stations that operate in this Catalan region. In a globalized world, knowing what's close to us is of a great relevancy, and that's where the local media –and, in this case, the radio– play a crucial role. The choice of radio owes to its immediate and nearby operation. We have selected the stations that spread their contents from and for their territory across the Frequency Modulation (FM).

These local radios offer to their audience a gateway to the media that it is not possible in other general companies. In all the time dedicated strictly to the own information, these radios only speak about one town or at most about the region, but never about a wider area. The most relevant conclusion is the important role played by the collaborators, people who take part in the radios in different duties without any remuneration and, in many occasions, without too many theoretical and/or practical knowledge on the radio.

Keywords: radio, local, participation, operative

Introduction

The communication map of a territory can be defined by the media which operate there, which define the information reality of the host society and are diverse.[1]

Apart from the distinction between types – press, radio, television and Internet – the media differ in their geographical scope. Thus, some are focused on a specific and limited area, such as a town or region, whereas others operate on a broader scale such as a nation or country.[2]

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[1] Keith, Michael (2001). 'La radio en el mercado global', in Martínez Costa, Pilar (Ed.), *Reinventar la Radio*. Pamplona: Eunate, pp. 105.

[2] Cebrián Herreros, Mariano (2000). 'Globalitat i proximitat (de l'aldea global a l'univers local)' in Ramon, Manel; Moles, Margarida; Font, Abel, et. al. *Les ràdios municipals en el llindar del 2000: Congrés de Ràdio Municipal: Barcelona, 4, 5 i 6 de febrer del 2000*. Barcelona: Federació d'Organismes i Entitats de Ràdio Local de Catalunya, pp. 27 – 29.

In this paper, we focus on a specific type of media, which operate in a particular area of Catalonia. We refer to the local radio stations broadcasting on FM from the Osona region. These stations generate their content from a very specific area and do so with their target audience in mind.[3]

Objectives

The objective of the research is to determine a communication model based on local and regional radio stations operating in Catalonia. It is aimed at finding out what their modus operandi is and how the roles of the people running them are organised. In this research, therefore, the current map of the local radio stations in the Osona region will be drawn, and we will identify the typologies and operation.

Methodology

To carry out the study, various research and data collection techniques were used to obtain detailed knowledge about the subject of the study.

First, a literature search was carried out on the subjects covered: radio and local media. In all cases, academic articles and publications were consulted, and, in the fields of communication and local radio, the focus was on published work referring to Catalonia rather than other work with a broader scope. In this way, we were able to delimit the study further and the research has been concentrated on a specific and local geographical area.

In the specific study of the local radio stations of Osona, various academic methods were used to obtain specific data and be able to provide relevant research results. Therefore, to gain in-depth knowledge about these specific radio stations, we decided to conduct the research based mainly on qualitative methods, such as structured interviews, while not ignoring the use of quantitative techniques, which helped in the analysis of data on local radio station programming.

The Greek media landscape in the international communication system: comparisons with east European broadcasting.

In depth interviews

Going into detail regarding the techniques used in the research, we must first address the qualitative tool of in-depth interviews. In this case, we took as a basis the work of Wimmer and Dominick,[4] which distinguishes between two types of interviews, structured and unstructured. In the first case, the questions are set in advance in a pre-established order, while in the second case, more general questions are posed in order to add new questions during the interview.

Of the two types of in-depth interviews presented by Wimmer and Dominick, we decided to carry out structured interviews because it was considered that they could provide more specific and interesting data for the study. Regarding structured interviews, Taylor and Bogdan[5] believe that all individuals should be asked identical questions so that the results can be compared. While Ander-Egg,[6] on the other hand, believes that the structured interview takes the form of an interrogation in which the questions previously set are always asked in the same order and terms.

In-depth structured interviews were carried out in the research because it was considered to be the most direct method to obtain broad knowledge about the reality of local Osona radio stations. These interviews were

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[3] The research focused on the following stations: Ràdio Vic, El 9 FM, Ràdio Taradell, Ràdio Manlleu, Ràdio Troka, Ràdio Pista, Ràdio Ona, Ràdio Roda, Ràdio Voltregà, Ràdio Montesquiu, SER Osona i Els 40 Osona. When the field work had been completed, a new radio station appeared in the Osona region, El 9 FM, and another had disappeared, Ràdio Troka.

[4] Wimmer, Roger D.; Dominick, Joseph R. (2006). *Mas Media Research: An introduction*. Belmont, CA: Thomson, Wadsworth, pp. 132.

[5] Taylor, Steven J.; Bogdan, Robert (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: a guidebook and resource*. New York: Wiley, pp. 101.

[6] Ander-Egg, Ezequiel (1989). *Técnicas de investigación social*. Buenos Aires: Humanitas, pp. 227.

designed and defined for a very specific sample, the directors and heads of news programmes of the local Osona radio stations. This limited sample was chosen because it was considered that these individuals know the inner functioning of the radio stations best.

With the questionnaires, we obtained a specific definition of radio stations operating in the region and we were able to find out how they function, especially in terms of their programming and news, the elements that most influence the audience.

Quantitative content analysis

The use of content analysis enabled us to find out more about the subject of study, as it was considered that the results that can be obtained by structured in-depth interviews are insufficient to fully define the current radio model of the area studied.

In fact, when defining the use of content analysis,[7] Sierra Bravo[8] considers that this method represents a summary of the facts observed because it allows a classification of the results by grouping them and relating them to the research objectives. From the summary of data proposed by the author, it has been possible to obtain more specific knowledge of the operation of the subject of study.

Also in defining content analysis, we can consider the definition of Maurice Duverger,[9] for whom this type of analysis has the great advantage of objectivity, because it removes the subjective side to the interpretation of texts to gain an independent interpretation. According to the author, content analysis is a very suitable technique for research on the media, especially radio, as in this case.

Another argument in favour of the use of quantitative content analysis in research is found in the work of Dorwin P. Cartwright,[10] for whom the objective of this method is to convert observable phenomena into data which can be dealt with scientifically. In fact, this was the work method in the research on local radio stations in Osona, because a reality which was not conceived in these terms was converted into analysable data.

In this case, the analysis of the data has focused on the programmes offered by the various stations, taking the programming schedules as the clearest product that a radio station offers an audience. The analysis was carried out from two perspectives, and two specific aspects were studied: Firstly, a quantitative study was made of the time each station dedicated to its own programmes, meaning the items and programmes produced and broadcast from the station itself. Secondly, based on the results from the quantitative analysis, it was possible to find out the percentages of time that the Osona local radio stations dedicate to providing their own programmes and news services for their audience.

The Osona local radios within the communication network

The Osona region is an area of just over 1,200 square kilometres, with 51 centres of population and around 40 media of different types, all dedicated to local information, which concerns both towns with a few thousand inhabitants and the entire region. The communicative situation of the territory, as Fuller described,[11] consists of media that offer an alternative to the agenda of the general media and pursue social objectives beyond individual benefits.

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[7] In our research we use the technique of quantitative content analysis, understanding the radio networks of the local Osona radio stations as a text from which various elements or content can be studied. In our case, the subject of the quantitative study is the self-produced programmes and news services of the radio stations.

[8] Sierra Bravo, Restituto (1998). *Técnicas de investigación social. Teoría y ejercicios*. Madrid: Paraninfo, pp. 458.

[9] Duverger, Maurice (1966). *Méthodes des sciences sociales*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, pp. 160.

[10] Cartwright, Dorwin P. (1966). 'Analysis of Qualitative Material', in Festinger, Leon; Katz, Daniel. *Research methods in the behavioral sciences*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, pp. 401.

[11] Fuller, Linda K. (Ed.) (2007). *Community media. International perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1.

Amongst this communication network, there are local radio stations, which are the focus of the research. It is understood that the radio stations are not isolated media which operate disconnected from their environment,[12] but are one of the elements that make up the media reality of Osona, and, for this reason, we think it is interesting to contextualise them through the study of current media in Osona. As several authors argue, including Fairchild,[13] local radio stations do not operate in isolation, but must deal with various government institutions, therefore relationships between the parties must be smooth. In fact, according to Rennie,[14] radio is the dominant medium for community expression in most parts of the world, because its contents are relatively easy to produce and radios are still cheaper than televisions.

The radio map of the Osona region

Currently, through FM, radio stations which broadcast from both inside and outside the region can be heard. According to the Radio Observatory of Catalonia,[15] in Osona 29 different radio stations can be heard through FM, most of which are stations that broadcast to the whole of Catalonia or Spain. Alongside these broadcasters the local radio stations, producing their contents only from Osona and with a limited geographical range, have a significant presence. These stations are: Ràdio Vic, El 9 FM,[16] Ràdio Taradell, Ràdio Manlleu, Ràdio Troka –from Prats de Lluçanès–, Ràdio Pista –from Balenyà–, Ràdio Ona –from Torelló–, Ràdio Roda –from Roda de Ter–, Ràdio Voltregà –from Sant Hipòlit de Voltregà–, Ràdio Montesquiu, SER Osona and Els 40 Osona.

Types of radio stations

The radio world in Osona is traditionally linked to its towns. Most of the stations which operate there in villages or towns were created with the intention of giving the town a means of communication for all the population.[17] Today, most radio stations in the region are municipal. There are only four private radio stations, and of these, two are branches of SER and Los 40 Principales, offering radio news and programmes from Osona. The other two are Ràdio Vic, which belongs to the business group which broadcasts the weekly *Osona Comarca*, and El 9 FM, which belongs to the broadcaster of the bi-weekly *El 9 Nou*.

This majority presence of municipal stations reflects the existing situation in Catalonia. In fact, Montse Bonet,[18] in the 2005-2006 edition of the *Informe de la Comunicació Local a Catalunya* published by the Institute of Communication, stated that, because of the way that radio has been structured in Catalonia, local radio, which is broadcast to a specific population taking into account the people and the area, is being reduced to the public sector.

The broadcasters' funding system

In this research on the local Osona stations, we need to look at the companies or public bodies which are responsible for them. In the case of private broadcasters, they are managed by companies which pursue a

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[12] Bel, José Ignacio (1990). *El derecho a la información local*. Madrid: Editorial Ciencia 3 Distribución, SA., pp. 36.

[13] Fairchild, Charles (2010). 'Social Solidarity and Constituency Relationships in Community Radio', in Howley, Kevin (Ed.), *Understanding community media*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, pp. 23.

[14] Rennie, Ellie (2006). *Community media. A global introduction*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, cop., pp. 4.

[15] *Observatori de la ràdio a Catalunya* [Electronic Document]. 2011, in <http://www.l-obsradio.cat> [01-04-2011].

[16] El 9 FM began operating in February 2010.

[17] In this case, the experience in Osona is the same as Corominas and Llinés were able to demonstrate for the whole of Catalonia. Corominas, Maria; Llinés, Montserrat (1992). 'La experiencia catalana de radiotelevisión local. Un importante fenómeno social y comunicativo' in *Telos: Cuadernos de Comunicación, Tecnología y Sociedad*, juny-agost; núm. 30.

[18] Corominas, Maria; Moragas (de), Miquel. (eds.) (2007). *Informe de la comunicació local a Catalunya 2005-2006*. Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

financial return, and for public broadcasters, it is the councils which play an important role for municipal radio.[19] Of the 11 radio stations operating in the region, seven are municipal. After talking with those in charge of the stations, it can be seen that there is a problem with the involvement of the councils in their operation, because in many cases the work of these media is not valued by the administration. While it is true that none of the radio stations reported interference by the municipal authority regarding content, it has been seen that it is a problem for municipal radio stations to depend financially on a municipal budget which often is not determined taking into account the needs of the medium. Here, several radio stations have complained they cannot carry out the necessary projects, such as improved techniques or the application of new technologies, because councils do not provide the necessary funding.[20]

Apart from the municipal stations, in the radio stations which are part of larger groups, the interests of the management company prevail over the interests of the area.[21] In the Osona region there is only one case with these characteristics, SER Osona, which is significant enough for us to take it into account. If these groups decide to set up in a particular place, in this case Osona, it is because they believe that, beyond being able to offer specific and quality programming aimed at the area, there is a market and they can obtain financial results.

The role of volunteers in local radio

Local radio stations, like the other regional media, offer the public a means of social expression which goes beyond the possibilities of expressing opinions in public outside of the media. This means that, through the local media, the residents of the various municipalities of the region find a way to publicize their motivations, concerns or complaints.[22] This means of expression is much more difficult to access through the general media.[23] In fact, these local media incorporate, in their own base, a desire to provide a means of democratic expression to society in a more local environment.[24]

In addition, following the research on the Osona radio stations, one can consider that, in general, these radio stations fulfil the function of publicising a reality which exists in the quarters of the towns, and enables that social activity to be made public. This is made possible by the close ties that most stations have with the cultural and social organisations of the municipalities in which they operate.[25] Through this research it has been found that it is common for organisations to take into account the local stations as a means of publicising their activities. This means that the radios in the region have managed to capture the social movement that is around them and become the spokesperson for the social reality of the area.[26] Furthermore, in many cases, they act as radio training

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[19] A detailed definition of local radio from the perspective of ownership of the radio stations can be found in Barbeito, María Luz et al. (1998). 'Políticas radiofónicas de comunicación local. El caso de Catalunya'. [Electronic Document]. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, número 5, La Laguna (Tenerife). Available at: <http://www.ull.es/publicaciones/latina/a/99radio.htm>. [15-03-2010].

[20] Chaparro, Manuel (1998). *Radio pública local*. Sevilla: Fragua Editorial, pp. 239.

[21] In this sense, Corominas, Guimerà, Fernández and Bonet consider that public radio is limited to municipal stations, because regional or state media function as a group and give practically no coverage of smaller areas. As for the private local radio, "increasingly, it forms part of a nationwide or regional chain, from which it disconnects at certain times to provide its own programming," and in only a small number of cases is it not part of a group and operates autonomously and independently. Corominas, Maria; Guimerà, Josep Àngel; Fernández, Isabel; Bonet, Montse (2005). 'Polítiques públiques de ràdio i televisió local a l'entorn digital a Espanya (1997-2004)' in *Tripodos*, núm. Extraordinari. Barcelona: Universitat Ramon Llull, pp. 639 - 650.

[22] In most cases, this contact between residents and the media is made by telephone, which, according to Lewis and Both, is the system is available to broadcasters to open up to society. Lewis, Peter M.; Booth, Jerry (1990). *The invisible medium: public, commercial, and community radio*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, pp. 142 – 143.

[23] López, Xosé, et al. (1998) "El valor social de la información de proximidad". [Electronic Document]. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, número 7, La Laguna (Tenerife). Available at: <http://www.ull.es/publicaciones/latina/a/68xose.htm>. [17-03-2010].

[24] Howley, Kevin (2005). *Community media. People, places, and Communication Technologies*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 2.

[25] Corominas, Maria; Llinés, Montserrat (1992). *Op. cit*.

[26] Corominas, Maria; Díez, Mercè; Bergés, Laura (1999). 'Vint anys de ràdios municipals'. *Quaderns del CAC*, núm. 4, abril, Barcelona: Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya.

schools, bringing the media closer to the public, and, as Dunaway says,[27] many of the local radio staff started as volunteers and have gained knowledge in addition to their training in order to develop professionally. Having acted as volunteers for stations themselves, therefore, they have greater empathy with the volunteers who participate.

Another of the features observed, and which can be considered as very significant, is the role of volunteers in all the Osona radio stations. By this term we mean individuals who, altruistically and without any financial compensation, give up part of their time to local radio stations for different tasks, such as providing technical assistance or producing a weekly programme, or occasional contributions to a programme discussing a particular topic. These volunteers, who can be seen in all the Osona stations, including the private ones, are important for the social role of local stations.[28] Thanks to the contributors, the radios have a direct relationship with society, because they are the same people who make the programmes and find in the stations a place of expression. In addition, the fact that the citizens themselves are involved in radio causes the rest of society to perceive the medium as close, and each volunteer can easily reach other people who are of the same ideology or social group.[29]

At five of the region's stations, all those involved are volunteers i.e. they are not paid for their work. It can be said that these radio stations deserve special consideration because it is commendable to take forward a communication medium without receiving any compensation. Managing a medium is highly complex, because you have to ensure optimal performance in terms of both content and technique. Therefore, we give a favourable assessment of the work carried out by the directors and the boards of these local radio stations where none of the members receive a financial reward for their work.

The radio programme: the prevalence of formula radio

Not all the 12 local and regional radio stations which broadcast from Osona offer the same type of broadcasting, or dedicate the same time to offering content which they have produced themselves.[30] The Osona radio stations allocate most broadcasting hours to hits and formulaic music (except SER Osona, which broadcasts general programming from Cadena SER). According to our research, the figures are 72% a week Ràdio Vic, 94.8% SER Osona, 71% Ràdio Taradell, 83.1% Ràdio Manlleu, 89.1% Ràdio Pista, 77.8% Ràdio Ona, 81.5% Ràdio Roda, 53% Ràdio Voltregà and 96.4% Ràdio Montesquiu.

The information provided shows that the Osona stations offer few programmes of their own, but it is worth highlighting that these programmes are in most cases produced by volunteers. Therefore, over 20% of the broadcast hours transmitted by the local Osona radio stations is of in-house production, with items and programmes produced in most cases altruistically by local residents.

If reference is made to the effective time that these radio stations dedicate to local information, it should be pointed out that of the five stations with their own news services, SER Osona is the one which devotes most time to news programmes, about 33% of the radio's programming time. It should be noted, however, that the

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[27] Dunaway, David (2002). 'Community Radio at the Beginning of the 21st Century: Commercialism vs. Community Power', in Jankowsky, Nicholas W., Prehn, Ole (Eds.), *Community Media in the Information Age. Perspectives and Prospects*. Cresskill: Hampton Press, cop., pp. 79.

[28] Federació de Ràdios Locals de Catalunya (2008). *Llibre blanc de la ràdio local pública*. [Electronic document]. Barcelona: Federació de ràdios locals de Catalunya. <http://www.radiolocal.cat/pub2/>. [09-03-2009]. According to the *White paper*, the key to the success of local radio in Catalonia lies in the fact that, since its inception, the listener has been able to identify who was driving the communication and the market itself, which is one of proximity and where it is difficult for other media to compete In addition, local Catalan radio has a feature that makes it unique, which is the large number of people who contribute to the media. These are people who like the media and go to local radio stations to make programmes without receiving any monetary remuneration, enabling the viability of the stations' programming.

[29] The former head of news at TV3, Josep Maria Torrent, argued at the Municipal Radio Conference held in Barcelona in February 2000, that local radio stations are an important element of cohesion in the towns in which they operate, and that these types of stations should structure the society which they serve, promoting its cultural, social and educational interests. Ramon, Manel; Moles, Margarida; Font, Abel, et. al. (2000). *Les ràdios municipals en el llindar del 2000: Congrés de Ràdio Municipal: Barcelona, 4, 5 i 6 de febrer del 2000*. Barcelona: Federació d'Organismes i Entitats de Ràdio Local de Catalunya, pp. 142.

[30] Barbeito, María Luz. (1998). *Op, cit.*

Osona branch of Cadena SER only devotes 7% of its total broadcasting time, Monday to Friday, to its own programmes, and that this 33% of the real time represents 35 minutes of news per day. As for the other stations, Ràdio Manlleu devotes 19%, Ràdio Vic 13%, Ràdio Ona 7% and Ràdio Taradell, 1.3%. It cannot be considered, therefore, that these percentages represent an important part of the stations' own programmes, because only in one case is it one third of the total, and in the remaining cases less than 20%.

However, all the time that the area's radio stations devote to news is focused exclusively on local news,[31] and is used to discuss issues relating to a specific town or to the whole region. The Osona stations do not offer any news that is not related in one way or another, to a town or the whole region.

Conclusions. Lack of dialogue between the stations

Following discussion with the directors of the various local radio stations and their news services, we can say that the Osona radio stations face limitations of various types. Not only financial constraints, but also issues such as lack of equipment to provide better broadcasts, and a lack of time to devote to the production of news programmes.

One of the constraints facing these radio stations is that of transmission power. Most of them, basically the municipal and local stations, have a limit of 50 kilowatts, which prevents their voice reaching beyond the boundaries of their town. This means that their operation is restricted to the specific town from which they broadcast and makes it difficult for them to interact with other towns.

As a result of the study, we can affirm that the Osona radio stations, while they talk of proximity and the aim of forging links with society, do not relate to each other. From the interviews it has been shown that dialogue and collaboration between local radio stations, of all kinds, is practically zero. The only contacts established are those at a personal level between people who work there, but at a legal and formal level, there is no relationship between the stations. Therefore, this is one of the areas for improvement in the local radio world, as a good relationship and interaction between stations could help to create an interesting local situation which would be beneficial to the stations which take part. Thus, greater interaction would help to reinforce the concept of region within the local area, as it would be the towns and local residents themselves who would pool their efforts to provide quality programming. Therefore it is believed that it would be positive for the local stations in the region to combine efforts and improve their relationships, which, as far as we have seen, are non-existent.

Vision of the future

As a final consideration, it can be noted that radio in Osona is in good health, but cannot remain in the current situation if it does not wish to stagnate with a model that has been operating for almost thirty years ago. Those who are responsible for its operation need to be aware of the social role they are developing and try to achieve a closer and better relationship with society. Society evolves technologically with the use of social networking and technical innovations which facilitate the interaction between people, and it would be good for the Osona stations not to lose sight of this development and work to keep up with communication in society.[32] These local radios have an important role in shaping the identity of the towns through the programmes they broadcast and the news that appears on their news services, where they exist, but they cannot limit themselves to analogue broadcasting – they need to take a step further.

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[31] As Legorburu points out, the local news offered by the local stations also explains what is happening in the region to the general media. Legorburu, José Maria (2003). 'La gestión de la información local en las cadenas radiofónicas' in López, Rafael; Vilar, Fernando i Fernández, Francisco (Coord.), *Radio y televisión en el ámbito local*. Castelló de la Plana: Universitat Jaume I. Servicio de Publicaciones, pp. 333.

[32] Borja, Jordi; Castells, Manel (1997). *Local y global. La gestión de las ciudades en la era de la información*. Madrid: Taurus, pp. 124.

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