

CHAPTER ONE¹

COMMUNITY RADIO AS A SOCIAL LEARNING INSTRUMENT FOR SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY BUILDING. AN ANALYSIS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE SPANISH THIRD MEDIA SECTOR

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1. Introduction

1.1 Community media, instruments for social empowerment and democratization

Using radio as the voice of the **voiceless**, is the historical philosophy of community radio, becoming the mouthpiece of oppressed people (either on racial, gender, or class grounds) and generally a tool for development (Fraser & Restrepo 2012). Community radio – also known as cooperative radio, participatory radio, free radio, alternative, popular, educational radio—has been defined as having three essential features: non-profit making, community ownership and control and community participation. According to the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC, 2010), community media are private media actors that fulfil social aims, embodying four characteristics: ownership by the (geographic or stakeholder) community they serve; b) social-aimed non-profit making; c) managed by the community with no public or private, political or commercial external interference; d) its programming should reflect the goals of the community. They are independent and non-governmental media that do not do religious proselytizing nor are they owned or controlled by or linked to political parties or commercial businesses (Manyozo, 2011).

The Third Media Sector is characterized, above all, for being open to citizen participation, deepening ideals such as human rights, democracy and social change. Such social and cultural purposes have been recognized by international organizations like the United Nations, the European Parliament or the Council of Europe. Such institutions highlight that media pluralism and diversity of media content are essential for the functioning of a democratic society. In this term, community-based media are effective instruments for ensuring the exercise of the freedom of speech right in all social sectors. Besides, “this media work for the development of different sectors of a territorial, ethno-linguistic or other community, sharing their communities’ interests, challenges and concerns” (La Rue, 2010, p. 11), becoming effective means of strengthening cultural and linguistic diversity, social inclusion and local identity (European Parliament, 2008) as well as by fostering community engagement and democratic participation at local and regional level (Council of Europe, 2009).

The community media sector is expected to become a suitable instrument for social development, community engagement and democratization, which involves social participation, gaining certain competences, and implies “agency in bringing about consequences and producing specific effects at local, societal or global levels” (Scott, 2001 in Manyozo, 2011). In practice, community media often faces obstacles in the form of low journalistic standards, weak technical skills, lack of financial resources, and

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fragmented legal frameworks (McLoughlin & Scott 2010). As Mario Kaplún posits, the mentioned process of media democratization has two prerequisites: (1) citizens media literacy: “popular sectors should be able to deliver messages and operate in media, to handle, understand and dominate media”; which necessary involves (2) a process of demystification of the media (Kaplun, 1983, p. 43), “revealing underlying truths normally hidden from our view” (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 2005, p. 125). In community media, the traditional object of social education (people) becomes an active agent subject of its own destiny, according to its ability to generate language, knowledge and action (Barranquero & Saez, 2012).

Kaplún and Latin American edu-communicators were highly influenced by the work of the pedagogue Paulo Freire, same as European colleagues did from Antonio Gramsci (Barranquero and Sáez-Baeza, 2012). Freire's free pedagogy, associated with the construction of political consciousness as a result of educational processes, remains today one of the pillars of Latin American community radio when designing their educational proposals, understood as tools for citizen empowerment and social transformation. In this context, horizontal learning emerges from knowledge co-production processes between those who have the traditional and conventional wisdom and those with other unconventional—tacit—knowledge, like learning communities do.

1.2 Community media, spaces for social learning and media literacy

The proliferation of mass media and new technologies has brought decisive changes in human communication processes and behaviour, as well as the necessity to empower people by providing them appropriate competencies in order to understand the role, functions and conditions under which mass media work (Grizzle et al. 2013). The concept of *media literacy* has been defined as “the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts” (Livingstone, 2004), which includes the essential competencies -knowledge, skills and attitudes- that allow citizens to effectively engage with media, and develop critical thinking for socializing and becoming active citizens (Wilson, 2011). Media literacy has been approached mainly in the educational context—formal education schools and universities—based on UNESCO's strategy to treat Media and Information Literacy (Wilson et al., 2001). Though, as each individual is constantly learning, Media literacy has often taken place in local communities outside of formal and informal education through local community media which have the knowledge and the infrastructures, despite their limited resources and teaching expertise (Scott, 2009). As Peter Lewis (2008) pointed out, community media have played a relevant role as informal spaces for media literacy and social empowerment.

According to previous research, despite media access is a prerequisite to literacy, “in the normal course of their lives, common people have few opportunities to create media content except those people engaged in community/access radio or in amateur audiovisual production” (Livingstone & Thumim, 2003, p. 15-16). These same authors (2003, p. 21) have also proposed the basic skills that make up media literacy as “encompassing technical expertise, critical reception practices and content production”. Learning and training in community radio commonly involves the development of many abilities, especially considering that people who have never been inside a radio studio are often the ones starting community radio stations. These skills relate to the use of the technical audio and video equipment and Informational and Communicational Technologies; programme production – covering elements such as radio talk; voice performance; script writing; interview techniques; news gathering, writing and delivery; production of participatory programmes in the community; basic communication theory and practice; management skills, overall programming for a community radio...” (Fraser & Restrepo, 2001, p. 33).

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) and the UNESCO have played key roles transferring knowledge and systematization of good practices in community media, as well as to the radio training, establishing the theoretical knowledge and skills required for the performance of radio and practice that has been implemented through numerous educational projects in developing countries of Africa, Asia or Latin America, where community radios have become the first (sometimes only) source of information and education for local populations. These experiences and learning have been reflected in practical handbooks published in the last decade—supported by UNESCO—to enhance media literacy in community radio (Scott, 2009; Pavarala et. al., 2013; Fraser & Restrepo, 2001; Kejval, 2006). In both Latin America and Europe, community media networks (AMARC) have allowed the gradual construction of educational theories that have grown into educational strategies, motivated by the desire to develop

media skills, exercise their “right to communication” and build alternative discourses to the media hegemony.

In Europe, community radio stations are aware of the social impact and the outcomes of the participation of youth and adults in media. A study by Lewis (2008), presented to the Council of Europe (2009), serves to underscore the role of community media in promoting social cohesion and lifelong learning of citizenship (long-lasting learning). Following Lewis (2008), community radio stations favour the acquisition of skills that can enhance volunteers' employability, such as the development of digital skills as well as interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic skills; increased self-esteem and perceived self-efficacy through active participation in community projects.

1.3 Community Radio and Third Media Sector in Spain

Despite the legal issues existing in Spain (Meda, 2015), where most of community radios have no legal broadcasting licenses, recent research indicates that almost 300 alternative, community or educative (non-profit) radios exist in Spain (García García, 2013, p. 116). Such local alternative media have managed to organize and modernize their broadcasting technologies through ICTs and social networks (for example, using streaming and podcasting resources). The Spanish Community Media Network (ReMC), which includes more than 43 media sector projects, has become -since its creation in 2005—a suitable space for horizontal, equal and active participation of radio activists in the Spanish political and media context. This networking experience has enabled the empowerment of individuals and the media. Besides, collective learning processes have arisen as a result of the participation in European long-lasting learning projects (Lema-Blanco 2015). However, these learning processes have not been systematized and reported in scientific or disseminated content, despite certain broadcasting experiences driven by groups of people with mental health problems for which community radio has proven to be an effective tool for personal and collective empowerment for those who participate in a media content, which develop strategies for dealing with stigma (Garcia and Meda, 2012, p. 3).

In the Spanish context, the pioneering research “Youth and the Third Communication Sector in Spain” (www.jovenesytercersector.com), funded by the *Centro Reina Sofía sobre Adolescencia y Juventud* (Center Queen Sofia on Adolescence and Youth), has mapped the existing third media sector experiences in the Spanish context. Researchers assess the involvement of young people in the different stages of community media, like its conceptualization, aims and motivations; management, financing and sustainability of the media; broadcasting activities and main content created by younger radio producers; learning processes developed and perceived by youth radio activists. This paper presents the preliminary results of this research and analyses how young people engage in community media and which tasks they commonly develop within this context. Secondly, participants were asked about the formal and informal learning processes developed in their media, the evolution of their values and motivations as well as learning and building processes emerging from interactions between volunteers and local community.

2. Methodology

The study combines quantitative and qualitative research methods. An online questionnaire was distributed via e-mail between February and June 2015. This survey was filled out by 54 radio stations (community, educative or alternative) from the whole Spanish territory. The results were analysed using SPSS software. Qualitative analysis included documentation review (analysis of best practices developed by the media participant in this project) and four focus groups (Krueger & Caiser, 2000). Researchers conducted the focus group discussions aiming to obtain insightful information regarding motivations, experiences and learning processes perceived by young people engaged in community radio.

A total of 28 people (20-35 years) participated in the four discussion groups held in four different Spanish regions (Sevilla, Madrid, Barcelona and Vitoria) counting with a range of 6-8 participants in each focus group. The focus groups were audio and video recorded and literally transcribed. The analysis of the data content was carried out manually following a descriptive coding method (given the exploratory nature of the focus groups) and an interpretative one (Miles & Huberman, 1994) focusing on the interactions between participants and their agreements/disagreements about the various topics. Besides the random procedure, the reliability criteria (Valles, 1997: 103-104) were reinforced by data triangulation (arising

from the focus groups and the questionnaire) and peer review (the discussion groups were classified by at least two researchers).

3. Results

3.1. Reasons to join and be engaged in community media

Young people join community media following the desire to communicate content that reflects their personal interests and identities, not sufficiently or appropriately represented in the mainstream media agenda. Besides, voluntarism and social commitment were motivations reflected by participants in the discussions when they approach to community-based media:

Three reasons are threefold: one, to make radio programmes, I don't care what they are about; two, to make radio programmes on specific topics, cinema, literature, etc.; and three, to belong to a group and make its information known (FG01_community radio in Andalusia).

A second group of participants join community radio with the object of acquiring professional skills and practical experience with regard to academic training. They are students and graduates in Journalism and Audio-visual Communication studies who seek a place to gain experience and freely develop their profession, without the usual restrictions found in commercial media:

I wanted to do things outside university because I didn't get enough personal development there. When you see that you can do something more than what they have taught you and that it isn't complicated, you are keen to stay (FG02_free radio Madrid).

Radio activists describe certain radio episodes as "engagement experiences", where they feel committed to a different kind of journalism, more aware of social inequalities and committed to citizens. This "process of personal fulfilment" is developed through member's participation in community media. The perceived usefulness of their activity and the community recognition reinforce young people's social commitment:

In the cover of the last general strike, the unions and the pickets approached our microphones before they did to those of SER radio station, because they knew that SER did not broadcast live. For us feedback is very encouraging, to know that people want to tell you their stories and that what we do has some worth (FG01_community radio in Galicia).

3.2. Activities performed by young people

The study shows that young radio activists often develop activities related to the creation of media content (Table 1-1). Broadcasting activities usually include production and presentation of radio programs (conducting interviews, scriptwriting or dramatization). Almost 40% of young people perform tasks related to editing and computing (audio editing, control mixer, sound equipment, etc.). Another 30% would perform tasks related to the maintenance of computers and technical equipment. To a lesser extent, younger members also participate in the management of the media (e.g. administration and financing, marketing and communication, gaining social impact, etc.). These activities are described by the participants as "responsibilities that require certain experience, background and extended involvement in the community project" which cannot be performed by newcomers.

Table 1-;Error! Secuencia no especificada.: Activities performed by young people in the Spanish community radio sector.

ACTIVITIES PERFORMED WITHIN COMMUNITY MEDIA	
Media Production	Broadcasting, producing community content
Cultural / social activities	Organizing external events (concerts, seminars, etc.) Collaborating with social groups and institutions
Training	Providing training, workshops and lectures to new partners, members or non-members
Administration, management and fundraising	Media management, development of community activities, fundraising
Communication	Social networking, web maintenance, social media
ACTIVITIES PERFORMED BY YOUNG PEOPLE	
Media Production	Scholarships, complementary to university education, professional experience
Filming and editing	Soundboard, mixing desk
Technological support, community activity and media management.	Computer maintenance, cultural and social activities, communication and community management

3.3. Training processes

The questionnaire shows that the majority of Spanish community radios develop processes of media literacy (79.6%; n= 54), mainly focused on training new members to produce and undertake a radio programme (namely "initial training"). Regarding the content of this training, community radios display a combination of lectures (on community media and communication rights, communication for social change) with practical knowledge (production and development of audio-visual content, photography, writing), technical skills (mixing boards, editing, computer and software, web sites management) and, occasionally, social and management abilities (management and financing of non-profit institutions, social skills, teamwork, conflict management).

This voluntary-based training activity fosters associates' communication skills and techniques to autonomously produce and broadcast their own radio program. Few experiences of formal and informal agreements between educative and social institutions and community radios allow children and young students to have meaningful broadcasting experiences in a real radio station. *Onda Merlin* (Madrid), *Cuac FM* and the "School Radio" project developed by the *Union of Free and Community Radio* in Madrid (URCM) are three exemplary training experiences in community media. *Cuac FM*, a community radio based in A Coruña (Galicia, Spain), has implemented a comprehensive annual training program which combines initial training for new partners with specialized workshops oriented to both young and adult long-term associates.

3.4. Self-taught: "learning by doing"

Based on the questionnaire and the focus groups, we conclude that the majority of people involved in the third media sector have not background or professional training in media. Consequently, training activities become significant tools for people gaining media competences, which permit wide public to acquire the required abilities and knowledge to produce a radio program. However, these learning practices are combined with learning-by-practice experiences and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange with senior colleagues. As some participants pointed out “practice itself involves the most effective learning method”. Besides, processes of "mentoring" are observed in community radio in which experienced associates are involved, counselling and accompanying newcomers in their first broadcasting experience.

3.5. Perceived learning

Community radio activists particularly highlight the insightful knowledge exchange among peers which occurs within the media even above other educational practices. Young people describe these media as a space of freedom and creativity, which permit them to use their imagination and being inspired at the same time they acquire useful knowledge and personal skills that seem to be transferable to the professional context (e.g. communication skills, social media, teamwork, management and fundraising, etc.). Interviewees report that such involvement in community projects facilitates changes in values and attitudes, towards altruistic and collaborative positions.

Table 1-**Error! Secuencia no especificada.**: Training activities performed by community radio/Learning experiences perceived by young radio activist in Spain (focus group analysis).

TRAINING OFFERED IN COMMUNITY MEDIA	
Introductory training	Training programme
Support training	Mentoring, supervision and peer support
Radio workshops	For non-members
Specialised training	For all partners (Lectures and technical training)
LEARNING PERCEIVED BY YOUTH	
Theory, conceptual learning	Lectures and technical training on communication/editing, radio comments/directing and community media or communication rights
Attitudinal learning	New values and attitudes such as solidarity, commitment, volunteerism, empowerment
Procedural learning/Skills	Skills acquired through practical exchanges and new tools production (conflict management, teamwork), social skills

We would like to point out the role of community media as spaces for social inclusion and empowerment. A number of community radios involved in this project, enhance the engagement in their broadcasting activity for collectives in risk of exclusion. Among several examples, we remark the work of *UniRadio* (Huelva), which broadcasts a radio program with convicted people from a local prison. *Cuac FM* (A Coruña) produces a program conducted by homeless people. *Radio Vallekas* (Madrid), *Radio Enlace* or *Radio Ritmo* (Getafe) all have remarkable inclusive radio experiences with people diagnosed with psychological disabilities.

4. Conclusions

Citizen's media literacy has not been one of the main goals of the Spanish third media sector and little literature has studied this relevant topic in Spain. This article presents the preliminary results of the study "youth and third media sector in Spain" which aims to examine the role of community and free media in Spain as tools for media democratization. For this purpose, we analyse the training processes that free and community media conduct within these organizations, focusing on young people engagement in media training processes.

The study methodology combines both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus groups) research methods. An online questionnaire, which focused on citizenry –and youth- participation in the third media sector media was responded by 94 media. In addition, four focus groups were conducted to obtain insightful information in terms of motivations for engaging community media as well as existing training and learning experiences arisen within Spanish community media. This research concludes that young people approach community media aiming to communicate content that reflects interests and identities not always represented in the mainstream media agenda. In case of young journalists, they stress the opportunity to acquire professional skills and practical experiences which are not facilitated in academic contexts. Thus, community media fulfil social needs which formal contexts do not commonly provide.

The study concludes that a high percentage of the Spanish community radio develops formal or informal processes of media training mainly oriented to new members and volunteers. Young people (16-35 years) engage in training activities related to broadcasting activity, which usually includes production and presentation of radio programs, scriptwriting or dramatization. In second term, participants acquire knowledge and skills related to content editing and the use of technical equipment. Beyond formal or informal educative activities, interviewees stress the importance of experimenting on their own. Thus, meaningful learning takes place through learning-by-doing while peer-to-peer learning opportunities are also highlighted by participants.

The quality of training offered by community media has started to be a concern for community media managers, institutionalizing their training courses, improving methodologies and contents. There is some networking experience towards the construction of a common pedagogical approach (Lema-Blanco 2015c) which facilitates new associates engagement in community media. However, as training process are mainly oriented to broadcasting activities, only a minority of younger members are involved in media management duties. This fact is considered an obstacle for the third media sector development in terms of innovation and leadership change. Engaging new generations of broadcasters would reinforce the third media sector and approach alternative media discourses to younger social activists.

Despite still being a minority in the media sector, community radios would become important instruments for media democratization and media literacy as the UNESCO, the European Parliament (2008) and European Council (2009) acknowledge. Community media are, in many areas of the world, the main non-formal social education instrument, approaching mass audiences at relatively low cost. In Spain, where most of community radios have no legal broadcasting licenses due to legal issues (Meda, 2015), community radio has become an important media literacy instrument which also strengthen cultural expressions and plural identities associated with democratic citizenship.

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