Community radios in the Portuguese-speaking space: mapping the differences of a community empowerment

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Abstract

Portuguese-speaking countries are quite heterogeneous at different levels. From geographic to cultural characteristics, from economic to political conditions, there is a great diversity albeit the mutual influence that is still visible. Such diversity is closely related to the different traditions that shape the development of community media in different continents.

A framework to identify and analyse the different goals and missions of community radios in the Portuguese-speaking countries is presented in this study. The main objective is to identify and characterise the different typologies of community radios that can be found in Portugal, Brazil, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, East Timor, Macau, Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe. This framework draws on the discursive analysis of programmes, in-depth interviews to content producers and systematisation of sociocultural characteristics and media policies. We propose the characterisation of 3 radios from Portugal (1), Brazil (1) and Angola (1) for this presentation, which has an explanatory approach.

Keywords:
community radio; empowerment; Portuguese-speaking space; third media sector
Introduction

Community radios are established and recognised by law in several countries of the world. This broadcasting scenario can be found in the North of Europe, Australia and South America. In Africa or in some Asian countries, there is a growing tendency to find a way for legal recognition, therefore a big number of community radios have been established.

When the Portuguese context is analysed, a very different picture is found; without legal support, FM broadcasts are normally forced to take place as online community projects (Ribeiro, 2015).

The first non-mainstream transmissions all over Europe took place in the 1970s by pirate radios: neither private nor public stations; their work was illegal and provided by one community (Lewis, & Booth, 1989). At the same time, South America reinforced the definition of this third broadcasting sector that had begun to do the first steps in Bolivia, in the 1940s, where a colliers group had established the first community broadcast. Despite this, Brazil only experienced the “free radios” (called rádios livres) in 1995 (Peruzzo, 1998).

Afterwards, in the 1990s, NGOs (Non-governmental organisations) had a leading role in the community radio system edification in several African countries. The implementation of this third sector allowed the community to participate in the subject’s production, the schedule programming, the management and the property of media, and provided technical knowledge, especially in rural areas.

Framed within the concept of belonging, this investigation will be regarding the community as a place or a group with shared features and common social identities (Scott, 2009), as well as an imagined community (Anderson, 1996): a concept of belonging reinforced by the new media, the new technologies and the Internet; a growing-up feeling linked to the globalisation and transnational sharing of information (Appadurai, 2003).

This study is still the beginning of a process of investigation that will analyse the community radio sector in Portugal. The study intends to be the first step towards the design of a map of the community radios, and the identification and analysis of the different goals and missions of these radios.

There are a few radio projects in Portugal that present themselves as community projects, therefore there is the need to determine if these radio projects are actually made for and by the community, and if they can be the voice of the community where they are integrated. In other words, the purpose here is not only to analyse whether this third broadcasting sector expresses the ideas and concerns of the community, and gives voice to their culture, but also to understand if volunteers make the work of the radio projects, and whether these volunteers receive technical training or not.

This is an exploratory study focused on three case studies: one Portuguese community radio called Rádio Manobras; one Brazilian community radio called Rádio Independência do Ceará and the first Angolan university
radio: UNIA. The analysis concerns the website contents of these radios and one interview to Anselmo Canha, from Rádio Manobras, Rose Castilhos Gonçalves from Rádio Independência and Felisberto Filipe, from Rádio UNIA.

Community radios: the third broadcasting sector

In an article issued in Colombo by the World Press Freedom Day in 2006, under the title “Community Radio and Empowerment”, Steve Buckley argues that community media should be seen as independent organisations, born inside the civil society, in the community where they operate and without financial purposes. By these assumptions, he argues that governments should create legal conditions that could favour the “pluralistic information, freedom of expression and the recognition of the crucial role of the community media” (Buckley, 2006, p. 1). Otherwise, the community media would only be able to ensure access to communication by marginalised and isolated groups.

In order to understand the role of community radio stations, it is important to recognise the existence of two dominant broadcast media sectors: public and private. Although some media included in these two sectors are able to create a dialogue with the audience, they still maintain a one-way communication model.

Public service broadcasting, despite its public purpose and its plurality of subjects and sources, cannot be independent from the political power, being used, in many cases, as a tool for the governments.

As for the private sector, it is conditioned by reducing its range of diversity and by the strong political and economic influence. Furthermore, it does not allow for a more participatory and democratic approach, or a strong and dynamic civil society. As a consequence, the third broadcasting sector emerges within the civil society (Fraser & Estrada, 2001, p. 6).

Community radio stations are independent of the State and have non-commercial goals, appearing as a reply and an attempt to find a way, by the communities without media expression, “to express their own ideas, concerns, cultures and languages, and to create an alternative to public broadcasting owned by the State and the growing commercial media sector” (Buckley, 2006, p. 6). Regarding community radios, this third sector aspires to be a public space for debate, where people expose and discuss issues of a common interest, rather than creating spaces that are merely satisfying the immediate needs of certain members of the community. They are community media when they are “dealing with identity, values, ideas, thoughts and opinions that refer directly the community of individuals, which is either the active public or merely a receptor; and when they are seeking consensus via the affinities of interests, accomplishing common goals and social practices” (Leal & Ribeiro, 2007, p. 76).
It is within this context that the community should be a public space, ruled by citizenship, with active individuals, with their differences in positioning their plurality of opinions and diversity of thoughts, leading to an egalitarian, democratic and emancipatory model. The decision between being a mere receiver of information, or a transmitter (an active participant) is in the hands of the community and not in the hands of the media holder; especially because accessibility to any element of the community is one of the main principles of a community radio.

Peruzzo (1998, p. 10) shows the essential features for a community radio: to be a non-profit medium, a community product with interactive programming and fully committed to education and citizenship, encouraging the production and transmission of local cultural events. Also, it must be emphasised that community radio stations have the potential to democratise the power of communication by training and providing people with technical knowledge, such as how to talk in a radio or how to make a radio show. Any individual belonging to the community cannot be excluded or denied his access to the community radio because of his lack of education or technical knowledge: the crucial point in this matter is to have the will and interest to be part of it.

The Portuguese context

There are a few community projects that assume themselves as community radios in Portugal. We can find that they make the programmes almost exclusively for the Internet (Ribeiro, 2015), having FM broadcasting only occasionally. It’s not easy to have an operating license because the community radios are not included in the radio legislation. The operating license needs to be constantly renovated and no law regulates the sector.

According to the United Nations, in the 21st century, governments must implement legal support that fosters pluralistic information, freedom of expression and the recognition of the crucial role of the community media, as well as provide access to communication for isolated and marginalised groups; however, Portugal still does not recognise this in the law or radio (Lei n° 54/2010, 24th December), neither the community broadcasting activity. Instead, it punishes it according to the article 66 of this law.

In the late 1980s, Portugal began the legalisation process of pirate radios, causing the disappearance of several projects in different communities. However, comparing to other countries, the Portuguese delay on
recognising the community sector of the media is significant; for instance, Australia legalised and regulated the community radio in 1972, the Netherlands did so in 1981, Ireland in 1994 and Brazil in 1995.

In Portugal, there are some projects that call themselves community projects or community radios, which are non-profit and developed within specific communities, namely: Rádio Zero (Lisbon, 2004), Rádio Manobras (Porto, 2011), Stress FM (Lisbon, 2011), Quase FM (Lisbon, 2011), Rádio Âs (Aveiro, 2014), CCFM (Porto), Rádio Engenharia (Porto 2007), Rádio Aurora Outra Voz (Lisbon, 2009). Maybe local radios should be analysed in Portugal as part of this third sector of radio broadcasting because local radios are strongly attached to regional culture, focused in the communities and the community life (Bonixe, 2012).

Community radio stations are a symbol of proximity. They give voice to minorities, bring together people with common interests and experiences and part help to building and maintain the structure of the broadcasting community. Intersecting the study regarding the concepts of categorisation in Brazilian community radios presented by Leal and Ribeiro (2006) with the work of Luís Bonixe (2012) regarding his approach to the Portuguese local radio stations and the communication of proximity, one can perceive such local radios as community ones, which are viewed and named as general community radio.

In Portuguese local radios, the communication is held horizontally, which means, in an informal way, close and somewhat affectionate towards the listeners. This is something that the listeners cannot feel in the national radio or other media. Local radio brings a sense of regional identity, belonging and location. Local radios are trained to be means of incrementing citizenship and democracy, creating programming strategies linked to the local and the audience.

Local radios represent social communication directed to populations, embodied in monitoring the social instincts of the communities in the effective realisation of a programme schedule where tradition and local history would strengths such as the practice of journalism proximity. (Bonixe, 2012, p. 7)

The Brazilian reality

Brazilian reality is totally different than the Portuguese one. Despite being the last country to have a law regarding the community radio sector in South America (1998), there are now 3836 legal community radios in Brazil. The numbers are presented by the Obscom, contacted in May 2015, but there are several authors, such as Peruzzo, who claimed in 1998 to have found more than 10,000 community radios in Brazil, most of them on illegal operations, though.
After the approval of the law that recognised these radios, they manifested a new tendency to be more commercial, including marketable programmes and advertising; in fact, they weaved a solid commercial structure, as they sort of reproduced the commercial broadcasters’ logic. In more concrete terms, the stations planned their schedule following religious or electoral motives, which eventually did not fulfil the true role for which they were created.

Within this reality, Abraço – the Brazilian Association of Community Radio Broadcasters – demands a review of the current law in order to incorporate a more contemporary concept of community broadcasting, beyond the geographical limitation. More than a matter of size or scope, what makes more sense in the understanding of community communication in Brazil and Latin America is the confluence of purpose (Peruzzo, 2006, p. 151).

Their work covers just small places, like small neighbourhoods, and in reference to this, authors like Sayonara Leal and Lavina Ribeiro (2007) reveal us two types of community radios: general community radio – that has a commercial structure, with advertising, receives money from enterprises, but it still focused on the community and made by the community itself; and, in the other hand, the intercultural community radio, which, without the support of the private corporations nor the government, lives thanks to the donations of the community.

Angola without NGO’s in the community media

Angola is an undefined country when it comes to community radio stations. For many years, attempts were given so as to implement a network of community radio stations, but never succeeded. A law project was created in 2009, but never applied. Why? Because the government wanted to centralise all the decisions, the regulation, and the implementation of the community radios websites. The government created an expansion programme for these radio stations two years ago (2013), which in broad terms would put the community radios under the control of RNA – Rádio Nacional de Angola, the public state radio –, which is under state regulation.

News reports indicate that the first Angolan community radio came to life in 2011 in the province of Bié, municipality of Nharea, with a tower of 40 meters and a transmitter of 250 watts. That radio came under the purview of local government, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Communication. Nevertheless, this radio emerged controlled by RNA, as there are indications that community radio stations such as Cazenga, Rádio Escola do Cefojor, Centro de Formação de Jornalistas, and Rádio Viana, located in Luanda, are also linked to RNA group.

In 2012, the Development Workshop NGO showed interest in supporting projects aimed at establishing community radios in Angola, as long
as they would handle “specific issues of social concern, be it political, cultural, religious or other, since they are connected with the life of a particular community”, against the model of community radio established by the Angolan government. The decentralisation of RNA would thus be possible.

Felizardo Epalanga, from the Open Society Angola Foundation (Bonixe, 2012), believes there is a void in the true role of this type of radio in Angola, noticing the highest importance that the approval of the broadcasting law has, since this third sector appears framed and defined in the document.

The broadcasting law of the Angolan Republic (2009), sets in section 3, article 4, the community scope of the broadcasting sector, restricting the issue just to a local transmitter (article 5), and directly relating the choice of content for producers to the cultural proximity to the location of the radio (article 6).

In this act there is a section exclusively dedicated to community broadcasting, defining who can accomplish the goals or the duration of licenses, granted by the Ministry of Social Communication. To highlight that article 12, it is emphasised that this type of broadcasting provides citizens the right to be informed, but also to inform.

A reality that still seems far in 2015. Angop – Angola Press Agency – announced on 12th May 2015 the will of Luacano municipality to have a community radio station instead of a “repeater of the Rádio Nacional de Angola (RNA) installed since February last”. Subsequently, the RNA station “does not satisfy the desire of local people, as it emits only channel A and Ngola Yetu”. The agency underlines “the interest of citizens in actively listening not only the reality of the country and the world, but also the emission of programmes of local interest to enhance the language, habits and customs, as it strengthens citizenship”.

The Portuguese case study – Rádio Manobras

Manobras presents itself as an independent radio, a community radio with laboratory experiments and intervention possibilities. “From citizens, for citizens, for public citizens, private, associative, forgotten, committed, chaotic, exuberant, restless, discrete, transient, unlikely”. Manobras was born with Manobras Project in Porto in 2011 and was formalised with the creation of an association in 2014. It also has a permanent FM broadcast. It broadcasts only intermittently at dial 91.5 FM for the Porto region, the only frequency that is available for the region. Licenses are up to six months, renewable for the same period, and are taken to cover sporadic notes, usually with a socio-cultural order, required by Manobras or by another association, which is directly or indirectly connected to the event that will be the target coverage. The broadcast is continuous and performed mostly online, although frequently

filled with pre-scheduled content. Currently there are 13 programmes that can be heard and three others are expected soon. Any of these programmes is performed by Porto citizens or with cultural affinities to the city.

They are generally part of the cultural sector, architecture, and have an interest in local and social issues. The script depends on the moment, sometimes focused on culture, while there are others facing the social area, or even political activism. (Canha, personal interview, 2015, June)

After analysing the mission and goals of this community radio, which in its Internet site appears as “Manifesto”, Manobras appears to be a radio for Porto city, an area of “diversity, openness, to scrabble in a hurry, with depth”. These concepts connect with the data collected from the interview to the founders of Manobras:

Our goal is to combat the radio format as it is assumed. Release the space of visibility, of speaking. Be open to everyone, go deeper into the subject, and go to the dilemmas that are not registered, go to people who have no voice. Do this collectively, in mutual information. Be nonconformist, go deep, explore, and listen. (Canha, personal interview, 2015, June)

In its homepage, Manobras is displayed as a radio of possibilities, where concepts such as “citizens and laboratory experiments” stand out. In the “News” section, the content analysis denotes that the semantic field they address more often contains words such as “young, intervention, interrogations, questions and Aleixo”.

The team consists of 12 volunteers and has remained cohesive. There were some elements that moved away, but are starting to come back again. They are mostly volunteers, although there is a need to provide paid work, particularly to ensure payment of current expenses and to secure the purchase of new material.

Manobras takes on a straightforward speech radio production and refers to certain Porto events to show the population how to make radio broadcast “with a computer, a mobile phone and two hours of training. There’s a whole technology-demystification work” (Canha, personal interview, 2015, June). Manobras ensures the training of volunteers to make radio programmes and do not demand quality voices, but interested people.

For legal reasons, the Manobras radio even considered to plunge into the university radio area, since in Portugal there are university radio bylaws. But the existence of several universities in the Porto city, and its functioning guardianship issues, would trigger a political negotiation that the founders of Manobras thought it made no sense. Another less positive aspect of this path would be the radio mission today becoming inaccurate as it would intend to be an area for sound research, opposing to the prevailing philosophy, even among college students, that are geared to perform formatted programmes for the labour market, avoiding taking risks (Canha, personal interview, 2015, June).
The Brazilian case study – Rádio Independência do Ceará

Independência was created on 5th February, 1997, in Ceará region (Brazil), and worked only on experimental basis. The founding members, namely the Community Association of Independence Broadcasting (Acordi), decided on 2nd December, 1996, to train all volunteers who would take over the operation of the radio. This approach remains today. The elder members of the radio team provide training to any community member who wants to make a programme. All around the region, there are about 60 radio journalists who started their radio experience in Independência Ceará.

Also in 1996, the struggle for legalisation with the Ministry of Communications and the National Telecommunications Agency of Brazil (ANATEL) began. Resources were infrequent and there was a lot of red tape, but the radio started its first two experiments and so remained until 17th September 2002, when federal police closed the services, “pulling all equipment, snatching everything, leaving the community bewildered” (Gonçalves, personal interview, 2015).

Two years later, on 31st August 2004, Independência manages the authorisation of the Ministry of Communications for the operation, albeit provisionally. The same ministry has just issued the operating license for ten years, after the approval of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate on 21st December 2005.

The inadequacy and excessive paperwork regarding the law results on the illegality of most Brazilian community radio stations, leading to “some political or religious groups [that] end up taking advantage to control these community radio stations” (Gonçalves, personal interview, 2015).

During 16 years of broadcasting, the heads of the station made an effort to find volunteers and people that could help in their training to “provide a quality service to the community” (Gonçalves, personal interview, 2015). This radio survives with the care of volunteers, “community of people with a passion for radio” in full “community democratic management”, without relying on public funds. Independência has a scarce cultural support, and needs to have the provision of the membership’s fee, donations from friends and community organisations (Gonçalves, personal interview, 2015).

There is an evident tendency for resources to be reduced, the monthly fee paid by the radio partners is low, the cultural restraints imposed by law do not cover the amount of expenses; and furthermore, the monopoly and influence of the private media are prohibitive to build “a society truly democratic and participatory” (Gonçalves, personal interview, 2015).

By analysing the contents of the site homepage, the ten most referenced words are “communication, community, training, quality, service, people, young people and community, culture and broadcasting.” Also considering the news page, the words “forum, resources, justice, violence and adolescents” are also highlighted. One can assume that these concepts have
the global purpose to “reflect the local reality events” and to allow “preventive interventions in overcoming women's vulnerability and others victimised by migration, violence, prejudice and discrimination,” expressed by the volunteer and manager Rosa Gonçalves (2015).

The idea is that community citizens and entities are gathered around a common goal, disseminating information and local initiatives, valuing the culture of the people and “giving time and voice to all members and entities collaborating in the cultural and social training, valuing local and daily community initiatives, the expressions of traditional culture and the social struggles of the people” (Gonçalves, personal interview, 2015).

**Angolan case study – Rádio UNIA**

UNIA radio came out in 2014 in the Independent University of Angola, based in Luanda, as a college radio. Under the direction of Filipe Felisberto, who is also a journalist on TV Zimbo Company, UNIA broadcasts on 92.3 FM from Morro Bento (Luanda).

Although inaugurated within an educational institution, the radio does not assume itself as a community radio, neither having a schedule designed for the student community. It is a college radio, with a new format – the first experience of its kind in Angola. The broadcast is made from the university and the transmission is made to Luanda (city and region), and to the world via the Internet.

By analysing the homepage site, one can see that it is still very rudimentary and scarce regarding the interaction with listeners. Even though, it should be noted that it allows an online hearing edition, being also linked to the page of the university, to the programme schedule, Google+, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. Also, various departments of the radio are available to be reached by phone or email. The programme contents are related to crime and accidents/road safety and include a workshop, intended for the general public, oriented to teach how to do radio.

By looking at the schedule, it appears that the programmes are steady from Monday to Friday with a regular broadcasting time between 7h to 24h. It begins with an informative magazine that lasts about three hours and is focused on topics such as Education, Culture, Politics, Sport and Health. In the morning hours, the radio space is for the great interview, debate or round table, ending with the summary information.

At lunchtime, the space is for recipes, trivialities and health tips, and the evening begins with the “Concert at the Radio”, a radio show about live music not only from Angola, but also the rest of Africa and the world. Shows like “Magazine”, “Triângulo de Ideias” and “Kimbundo Classes” among others, are scheduled in the afternoon, which ends with the two-hour show “Youth Zone”. The pace slows down at 7pm to broadcast the “Jornal Unia” and the
edition continues until midnight, sometimes replaced with already broadcasted programmes.

On a final note, “Morro Bento”, named after the district where Radio UNIA is located, is a show about the history, life, culture, dreams, leisure and businesses of the area. Finally, the radio programme “Angola Voices” brings a larger proximity to the location of the radio programmes.

**Final remarks**

There are many countries where we can find non-existent policies, laws and regulations that could otherwise empower and encourage community broadcasting. Portugal is one of the examples.

The absence of legislation remains an obstacle for the communities to arise sustainable models of community media; models that could contribute towards an economic, social, cultural and educational development of communities. It is expressed that this lack of legal sustain disables the emergence of community radio stations in Portugal, and also obstructs the fluent functioning of existing projects, making use of provisional licenses to operate and develop their work on the Internet based on podcasts.

The Brazilian reality is different. There is legislation and there are restrictions. The immoderate paperwork of the valid law is also delaying the proper functioning of the community radio stations and therefore promotes the continuity of many projects on illegal terms.

In Angola the main problems also include the excessive paperwork, added to the centralised decision-making in the State and particularly in the Ministry of Social Communication, which prevents the advent of real projects in or rural communities or directed by NGOs. Meanwhile, the Angolan government keeps calling community radios to some stations that are merely relays of RNA – the national and public radio. The community media analysed show that this third broadcasting sector is central to give voice to the population, with tangible impact on the quality of life and sense of community, culture, shared values and even the sense of security (Buckley, 2006 p. 7).

It is assumed that, in Portugal and in Brazil, the community broadcasting projects intend to be an area for the communities to express themselves, following the democratising duty to communicate, as they are designed and developed mostly by volunteers. Because of this, there is a constant need to obtain funds, usually to support the current management of the radio and purchases of new materials.

In both cases, it is confirmed that those wishing to make a radio programme receive proper training to do it. Both radios are non-profit community products that are made entirely by community members.

The Portuguese situation prevents community radio stations to be able to have its own headquarters, and its technical functionality relies on the
goodwill of some of the elements working in the radio stations. In Brazil, although there is greater stability, community radios are exploited by the Ministry of Communications, due to excessive red tape and the impossibility of taking a definitive license of operation.

Finally, as to the goals and mission of community radios, this study shows us that there are concepts that intersect the analysed stations, specifically regarding their ambition to be the expression of a community and wanting to focus their projects on the community. In both cases, Portuguese and Brazilian, young people are mentioned as a point of reference to be included in programmes and in listening to them. Community radio stations have the will to be a forum for sharing of experiences and intervention. Both intend to be an alternative to commercial broadcasting, with the diversity and depth of the issues engaged. While the analysed Portuguese community radio is more focused on cultural themes, the Brazilian case focuses on the vulnerability of minorities and discrimination.

Overall, this preliminary study points out several points in common between different community radios in the Portuguese-speaking world. However, their differences are almost minor when compared to the general problems these radios have to overcome in order to be acknowledged within the civil society and the community itself: formal and political obstacles that delay the advent of such radios or governments that insist on their illegality when the laws and amendments are too slow to accompany the social and cultural needs of these communities. There are, of course, specifications in regard to the cultural and social nature of these communities, but they strive for the same need: to have a voice in the communication media, to give value to their cultural life and habits, to promote their social dynamics within the community. It must be added that, for the World Association of Community Radios (AMARC), community projects exist precisely to give voice to those who do not have access to mainstream media, and provide a loudspeaker for those who suffer any form of social, gender or class oppression, thus promoting a relevant tool for social, cultural and technological development.

This analysis on community radios of the Portuguese-speaking countries is particularly relevant on an international context, mainly because it mirrors different states of socio-political and economic evolution, ranging from Portugal, restrained in an economic crisis, to the fastest growing economy of Brazil and the African development promises.

References


