

Participation in Community Radio: a proposal for analysis based on the concepts of *symbolic resistance* and *media literacy*

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Abstract

Participation is one of the core features of community media. The contribution of these media projects is still relevant today as they enable a high level of involvement by their audiences, in particular by groups which have a low profile in the public sphere. This paper presents several case studies of participative content in community radio stations in the Catalan media space and addresses the concepts of symbolic resistance and media literacy as the basis for analysing them.

Keywords

Participation, involvement, community radio, symbolic resistance, media literacy.

Resum

La participació és una de les característiques fonamentals dels mitjans de comunicació ciutadans. L'aportació d'aquests projectes mediàtics continua essent rellevant en l'actualitat, atès que possibiliten un alt nivell d'implicació dels públics, especialment dels col·lectius poc visibles en l'esfera pública. Aquest article exposa diversos casos de continguts participatius en ràdios ciutadanes de l'espai català de comunicació i planteja la idoneïtat d'emmarcar-ne l'estudi a partir dels conceptes de resistència simbòlica i alfabetització mediàtica.

Paraules clau

Participació, implicació, ràdio ciutadana, resistència simbòlica, alfabetització mediàtica.

1. Introduction

The growing relevance of ideas such as *participation*, *engagement* and *community* associated with the media has led to renewed interest in academic research. The internet has extended the rationale of collaborative culture and gradually, and not without difficulties, media enterprises have taken it on board as an action strand, especially since the onset of the recession in 2008 (MASIP *et al.* 2015).

In the media, participation means the intervention of recipients in the production of content and decision-making in a way that alters the vertical and one-sided relationship between company, journalists and audience (PAULUSSEN *et al.* 2007). The spread of digital technologies has enabled an enormous increase in participatory channels as part of networked societies. Nonetheless, a quarter of a century after the first digital newspapers emerged (SALAVERRÍA 2019), researchers note the various kinds of constraints, which still shape participation in the media (BORGER *et al.* 2013; CRUZ-ÁLVAREZ & SUÁREZ-VILLEGAS 2012; MASIP & SUAU 2014).

The key role of participation has called for neologisms in academia to describe how audiences may have an impact. Two

of the most widespread are *prosumer* and *emirec*. Although both concepts were thought up in an era prior to the spread of the internet, they have been widely used in contemporary media research and often as synonyms, despite the fact that they stem from different theoretical approaches (ALONZO 2019) and entail different ways of addressing participation (APARICI & GARCÍA-MARÍN 2018). Likewise, Hamilton (2003) argues that participation in the media can be conceptualised from a one-dimensional perspective, assuming that there are well-defined roles of sender and receiver, or from a multidimensional one which takes into account the complexity of forms of intervention in media processes by an assortment of players who take on different roles; that is, it does not refer to closed categories of author-sender and audience-recipient but rather entails a relationship in which these positions are exchanged.

Alternative or third audiovisual sector are one of the main exponents of media participation (ATTON 2002). Even though over the last two decades there has been growing convergence between mainstream and alternative media in terms of practices and strategies (KENIX 2011), in the contemporary scenario alternative media still present more powerful forms of participation in terms of audience involvement (CARPENTIER,

DAHLGREN & PASQUALI 2014), especially in community media (RODRÍGUEZ 2010).

Research into alternative media began in the 1970s and has attracted growing interest in the media and communication sciences as a whole over the last twenty years (RODRÍGUEZ, FERRON & SHAMAS 2014: 13-14). It focuses on particular aspects of alternative media which have been largely studied from a conceptual, historical and legal standpoint (LEMA-BLANCO, RODRÍGUEZ-GÓMEZ & BARRANQUERO-CARRETERO 2016: 92; LEWIS 2008: 10), an issue of interest given the legislative complexity which has accompanied alternative media since their emergence (GARCÍA, REGUERO & SÁEZ 2011). By contrast, study of the contents of these media, the processes by which they are produced and the ways in which audience participation is moulded have received much less attention (ATTON 2008). Likewise, much academic research into alternative media uses a normative dimension when considering its subject-matter based on the premises that they are independent organisations or opposed to the dominant media, they represent civil society and they are democratically produced to empower the public (FERRON 2012: 136).

This paper points out the need to look beyond the recurrent types of studies on alternative media and address analysis of the contents and production processes that shape them. Based on multidimensional participation, it argues that it would be useful to adopt a study viewpoint that takes into account the specificities of community-driven media instead of observing them through the prism of the mass media paradigm (HAMILTON 2000).

2. Objectives

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the study of alternative media in order to further understanding of their contents and the participation of minority or disadvantaged groups. To this end, it had two specific objectives. Firstly, it presents and describes significant cases of community radio programmes in the Catalan media space – the type of alternative media with the greatest impact in this media framework (CLUA 2010; FLEISCHMAN, REGUERO & SÁEZ 2009) – which are made by minority groups and/or ones facing structural inequality. Based on the description and consideration of the features of the case studies in the sample, the common traits emerging in this initial approach are then extracted.

As the second specific objective, the paper points out two concepts which appear in studies on alternative and community media: symbolic resistance (BAILEY, CAMMAERT & CARPENTIER 2007; RODRÍGUEZ 2003) and media literacy (GUTIÉRREZ 2008; LEE 2010). It argues that over and above the theoretical realm, these two concepts should guide empirical research into these media phenomena, specifically studying the contents and participation processes and confirming the extent to which they meet normative assumptions about alternative media.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Citizen media and participation

The main premise of alternative media is social transformation through democratising access to the media by substantially modifying the mass media system (BARRANQUERO 2010; SÁEZ 2008). Alternative media emerge from civil society, where this means the realm of relationships for conscious association, self-organisation and media created by the public through their associations, ties and alliances and differing from public and market structures (RENNIE 2006). They are motivated by “the distortions, silences and failures of mass media” in representing social diversity and providing opportunities for accessing the public sphere (LEWIS & BOOTH 1989: 163). Thus, alternative media entail the alteration of the traditional sender-message-receiver system (PRADO 1980) and seek to activate audiences not only as receivers but also as stakeholders involved in producing and managing these media.

The term *citizen media*, coined by Clemencia Rodríguez, describes a type of alternative medium which seeks to activate citizenship, where this means the political identity coming from daily involvement in building the community in which a person lives due to the participation of disadvantaged groups in managing and drawing up media contents (RODRÍGUEZ 2010: 18). Citizen media place greater emphasis not only on creation but also on the very structure of the media to socialise organisational decision-making, editorial choices and the creation and reception of contents with the whole community (ATTON 2002). López-Vigil sums up their objectives as contributing to development, expanding democracy, defending human rights and protecting cultural and linguistic diversity (LÓPEZ-VIGIL 2005: 334-337).

The approach to participation advocated by citizen media, enabling community self-representation and fostering empowerment and training (JEPPESEN 2016; RODRÍGUEZ 2003), is tied to the concept of the *emirec*. This term coined by Jean Cloutier refers to leveraging the options provided by digital media to promote participation based on a horizontal relationship between producers and audience, freedom and negotiation to agree on new ways of producing media messages, and using collective intelligence to generate knowledge (APARICI & GARCÍA-MARÍN 2018: 75-76). The *emirec* is an “empowered subject that has the potential to introduce critical discourses that question the functioning of the system” (ibid., p. 77). By contrast, in Alvin Toffler’s idea of the *prosumer*, the media system is not substantially modified and remains vertical, which means that contents generated by users, who have little capacity to bring debate and criticism to bear, simply reinforce “the message of the big media players” (APARICI & GARCÍA-MARÍN 2018: 74). This one-dimensional dynamic can be seen, for example, in the way participation in general interest radio programmes is managed in Spain, where interaction is largely determined by the choice of topics and the discursive frameworks of the stations (RIBES, MONCLÚS & GUTIÉRREZ 2015: 69-70).

3.2. Community radio in the Catalan media space

Citizen radio stations have been in the Catalan media space since the democratic transition. They are part of local media systems in which the direct participation of the public, the appropriation of the media and the proximity between senders and receivers are intrinsic features of a media model that is a counterweight to the homogenisation of the contents of the mass media perceived by civil society (Corominas & Llinés: 1992, p. 125). The first examples, the free radio stations which emerged from diverse social groups seeking access to the media, appeared alongside the state and private radio oligopoly in both Spain and France at “moments of heightened global struggle against the system” (Prado 1980: 163). The horizontal and decentralised organisation and collective content production by social groups that at that time had little or no access to the media was something new (*ibid.*, pp. 164-165).

In the 1990s, the stations began to diversify and there was talk of community radio stations in addition to free ones (GARCÍA-GARCÍA 2013). In the early 2000s, citizen media gained renewed impetus in the context of anti-globalisation mobilisations (SÁEZ 2009). At that time, many alternative audiovisual media projects came together to coordinate efforts to achieve legal and political improvements under the concept of the Third Audiovisual Sector, which is a “strategic illustrator” of the various alternative media approaches (MAYUGO 2006). It is against this background of reactivation of social movements and implementation of ICT that the model defined by García-García as inclusive radio was developed, which enhances the educational aspect of the medium and increases the participation of the groups most excluded from the public sphere (GARCÍA-GARCÍA 2017: 37).

4. Methodology

The research presented in this paper is exploratory and qualitative and designed to describe a phenomenon and the processes which shape it (DEL RÍO in VILCHES 2011: 86). The purpose is to identify and describe representative cases of community radio programmes in the Catalan media space which are founded on participation by groups experiencing social inequality or who use the medium as a vehicle for a discourse aimed at social transformation.

It was decided to have a sample that is limited yet allows sufficient depth in the analysis. Hence the sample was constructed on the basis of non-probabilistic convenience sampling (MEJÍA 2000: 169) and taking into account the following criteria: that they were current or recent programmes, broadcast at some point in the period between 2015 and 2020 on community radio stations in the Catalan media space, and the sample should include cases from all over this language and cultural area. Seven cases were chosen for analysis: one station, Rromane Glasura, and two programmes, *Ràdio Nikosia* and *Ràdio Caliu*, from radio stations in Catalonia; one

station, *Ràdio Arrels*, in Northern Catalonia; two programmes, *Más Voces Entiende* and *Vorba Romani*, from the Region of Valencia, and one, *Taula Educativa*, from the Balearic Islands.

Their content was analysed to describe and characterise each case based on the information on the websites of the broadcasters and the programmes to provide a description derived from the content displayed (VELÁZQUEZ in VILCHES 2011: 117). Codification meant this technique could be used to identify persistent topics in the texts (CARLSON & USHER 2016: 567). The documents of analysis were the metajournalistic discourses, texts which define and legitimise a certain media approach or practice (CARLSON 2016) on the websites. Three categories were set to codify the data extracted from the documents of analysis: the sender, the formal and thematic features of the programme and the discursive approach. By relating the data from the cases as a whole, generalisations can be made about this type of content from community radio stations. Each of the programme descriptions was contextualised with specific references.

5. Community radio stations and programmes in the Catalan media space: participation and social and cultural diversity

This section presents the seven cases in the sample, described on the basis of the analysis of the metaperiodistic discourses and the three parameters indicated in the methodology section.

5.1 *Ràdio Arrels* – Catalan language and culture in Northern Catalonia

Ràdio Arrels is a station set up in 1981 by the *Arrels* Association and is the only one to broadcast entirely in Catalan in Northern Catalonia with information and programmes about the local area. The *Survey of Language Uses in Northern Catalonia 2015* found that Catalan is in a very weak position compared to French in all aspects. Most people over the age of 15 say they can understand Catalan (61%), while less than 40% can speak it (35.4%) and read it (39.2%) and only 14.3% can write it (EULCN 2015). Catalan is associated with older people and intergenerational linguistic transmission has practically halted.

Against this background, *Ràdio Arrels* provides a venue for normal use of Catalan, which is rare or non-existent in other media in the region, and legitimises it as a valid language for describing reality. One of the station's programmes is *Memòria*, a talk show in which journalists from the station, which has managed to become partially professional as a result of grants from the French authorities and public bodies and the Catalan Government, talk to North Catalans with a long history in activism, politics, culture and the arts. This gives a voice to people who have promoted one culture and identity, i.e. Catalan, in a setting where another hegemonic identity, i.e. French, predominates. Another outstanding programme on *Ràdio Arrels* is *Ràdio Menuts* produced by students from

the schools run by the Arrels Association who use a Catalan language immersion model. For all these reasons, *Ràdio Arrels* stands for the community media aspect of promoting diversity and local identities and always with the direct engagement of the communities concerned (FULLER 2007).

5.2 *Taula Educativa* by Ona Mediterrània – The struggle of Balearic Island teachers

The language and education policies which the People's Party regional government sought to implement on the Balearic Islands starting in the 2012-2013 school year rallied the bulk of the island's educational community. The Regional Ministry of Education designed the Integrated Language Treatment (TIL) scheme, enacted by decree in April 2013, which increased the number of teaching hours in Spanish and English and reduced the presence of Catalan in classrooms (BIBILONI 2014). In lockstep to a legal challenge, the teaching community, especially in state education, put together a campaign with the support of parents' associations and a large number of students. The Teachers' Assembly (AdD) was set up to advocate state, secular and quality education in Catalan and called for mass demonstrations on the Islands.

One of the AdD's battlefronts was the media, which until then had barely touched on the educational debate. The community radio station Ona Mediterrània invited teachers to make a programme, and in 2014 weekly magazine show *Taula Educativa* began, coordinated by teachers and which reviewed contemporary educational issues with input from teachers, school employees, families and students. In the three seasons it was broadcast, *Taula Educativa* was "the radio of resistance against the TIL and the People's Party government and also against the subsequent progressive government [which emerged from the May 2015 regional elections] which has also failed to meet the demands of the educational community" (Bonnín 2016). The AdD's mobilisation put education at the heart of the public conversation; in this process, *Taula Educativa* "played a key role in talking about education on the radio" on the Balearic Islands (BONNÍN 2016).

5.3 *Ràdio Nikosia*, by Contrabanda FM – People with mental illness

Ràdio Nikosia has been broadcasting on Contrabanda FM, a free radio station in Ciutat Vella (Barcelona), since 2003. The programme's purpose has been straightforward from the outset: to overcome the stigmas associated with people with mental illness through self-reflection of the people affected as a way of providing an analytical and media space around so-called *madness* (BELLOC *et al.* 2006: 60). Every week, members of the association running *Ràdio Nikosia*, which brings together some seventy people including sick people, healthcare professionals and activists, conduct a thematic programme in which they address a specific aspect of reality based on their experience.

As Wahl (1992) notes, the media is the main source of public knowledge about mental illness. However, the role of the

media in perpetuating or reducing the stigma of mental illness is still a little studied issue (JENNINGS, STOUT & VILLEGAS 2004). Information about mental illness in the media is often based on scientific data and findings, yet when it comes to turning them into news stories, journalists fall back on negative framings and descriptions drawn from the stereotypes about mental illness (JENNINGS, STOUT & VILLEGAS 2004: 556). *Ràdio Nikosia* seeks to turn around and ridicule these preconceived ideas on a weekly basis; to "normalise madness" from a critical and humorous point of view.

5.4 *Ràdio Caliu*, by Ona de Sants-Montjuïc – People with intellectual disabilities

Another group with little media presence is people with intellectual disabilities; the appearance in the media of people with disabilities, whether physical or intellectual, does not match the percentage of the population they account for which stands at 8.5% in Spain (GONZÁLEZ-CORTÉS 2011: 3). There are few programmes where the disabled are the main figures in the story and even fewer in which they take part in producing and realising contents; González-Cortés notes that the few cases in which this does happen are in public media. The consequences of this lack of visibility, which is only interrupted on a very occasional basis, include mixing up people with intellectual disabilities and people with mental illnesses in the news (PONSA 2017: 27). Taking the specific case of Down's syndrome, for example, there is a fairly widespread feeling among the audience that the media does not talk enough about people with this syndrome and they would like to be better informed about it (BELTRÁN *et al.* 2014).

In late 2011, a group of users and educators from the Grup Caliu association, which works with people with intellectual disabilities, kicked off the monthly programme *Ràdio Caliu* on the community radio station Ona de Sants-Montjuïc in Barcelona. In this venue, self-defined as an inclusive radio station, participants talk about the activities they conduct through the association, comment on, and discuss current affairs, such as local news or political events, to have their say about them. The programme leaders stress that *Ràdio Caliu* helps them to learn how to communicate better, find out what is going on in the world and most of all to convey their thoughts to the rest of society and show that prejudices against people with intellectual disabilities are unfounded. It is a question of conveying normality based on the disability standpoint and eschewing the emotional or poignant images which abound in the mainstream media when talking about this social group.

5.5 *Más Voces Entiende*, by Artegalia Radio – LGBTI news

In both news programmes and fiction series, the broadcast media have made a crucial contribution to the spread of heteronormativity as the normative sexuality in our societies (VENTURA 2014). People who do not identify with it and who are usually grouped under the acronym LGTBIQ+ have been

one of the most stigmatised and marginalised groups in the public sphere, and also one of the most active in counteracting discourses which label everything which strays from the heterosexual norm as an anomaly, illness or deviation. Today, and even after decades of awareness-raising campaigns, there is still a sense of taboo when it comes to talking about, for example, homosexual and lesbian relationships or transgender people (CARRATALÁ 2011: 169). The group has seen how its media presence has grown and it has been depathologised. However, the discourse on homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality and transsexuality tends to offer a stereotyped or frivolous image while homophobia persists in more subtle forms (ibid., p. 157).

Más Voces Entiende comes from the group Alicante Entiende, one of the organisations taking part in Radio Artegalia in Alicante. It is a pioneering initiative in setting aside a programme for LGBTBIQ+ community current affairs that seeks to convey the complexity and diversity of this group through the voices of its members. Through different segments, the show addresses all kinds of issues related to homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, and transsexuality from the political, legislative, cultural, and economic standpoints. It focuses on news items, advocacy of rights and prevention in sexual health. Likewise, attacks on and discrimination against LGBTBIQ+ people are reported by Alicante Entiende in its Virtual Observatory against Homophobia and this work is disseminated in the programme.

5.6 Rromane Glasura-Veus Gitanes and *Vorba Romani*, by Ràdio Malva – The Roma

Unlike with other social groups, the media's approach to the Roma has hardly changed. The Roma depicted in the media often reflect more closed and traditionalist Roma mindsets which reinforces the simplistic and folkloric portrait (TORTAJADA 2009). Given the propensity to frame this community in negative stereotypes, Oleaque (2007) calls on Roma associations to get involved in changing its image and invest in recovering their own culture, traditions and language. Over the last few years, two initiatives have been set up in the Catalan media space that draw on mobilised Roma sectors seeking to dismantle archetypes and provide a more complex vision of their situation.

In 2011, several Roma women's associations in the Barcelona area set up Rromane Glasura-Veus Gitanes, "the first Roma radio station in Catalonia". This online station is a venue for representing and publicising the culture of the Roma, especially Roma women who are the driving force behind change in the community. Indeed, Roma women experience threefold exclusion: due to being women, being Roma and often not having any academic qualifications (MACÍAS & REDONDO 2011). The women who take part in Veus Gitanes counteract the stereotypes of the collective mindset around the Roma and take a leading role in the story of their experience. They produce news and interviews about the current Roma situation, far removed from the scenes which only show poverty or crime, and they impact the education of Roma youth and the progress

made by women in the community. The station also runs radio workshops and has produced the documentary *Samudaripen* in which young Catalan Roma women recover the memory of the extermination of the Roma in the Second World War.

Meanwhile, Cabanyal-Canyamelar in Valencia has long been a hotbed of political and social debate between various groups about the future of the neighbourhood in a process which has seen institutional neglect, decay and attempted rehabilitation and gentrification (CUESTA 2011). The Cabanyal Roma community is the target of much criticism, both inside and outside the neighbourhood, which holds it responsible for the decline. The stigma attached to the Roma simplifies the debate and furthers the interests of the most powerful players in the conflict. To turn around their marginalisation in the public sphere, in 2016 several members of the Roma community in Cabanyal started up the programme *Vorba Romani* on Ràdio Malva, the neighbourhood's free radio station which had previously broadcast several interviews with Roma locals. The programme reviews current events, especially in the neighbourhood, from a Roma perspective. It is made by the community and gives voice to its members, who set out the shortcomings they live with on a daily basis and their hopes for the improvement of their environment.

6. Concepts to guide analysis of participation in community media

Following the description of the particular and general features of the case studies in the sample, the concepts of symbolic resistance and media literacy are now introduced based on a number of literature inputs on alternative media. Lewis notes that community radio stations encourage media pluralism by enabling minority and marginalised groups to access the medium and promoting media literacy (LEWIS 2008: 13). These are two different processes which, if interrelated, would work towards the overall objective of community media, which López-Vigil says is "democratising speech to make this society more democratic" (2005, p. 324).

6.1 Symbolic resistance

Alternative media is the space which began to form in the advent of modern societies where "the struggle to be seen and heard by various groups and historically excluded groups" takes place (SÁEZ 2008: 50). Similarly, Bosch argues that community or citizen radio "has the potential to be used for social and economic minorities as a tool for resistance" (BOSCH 2014: 436).

Community media articulate the self-representation of the groups that drive them: the creation of independent, collaborative and participatory media is one of the ways in which people express their discontent and views which diverge from those in the mainstream media (DEUZE 2006: 267). The blurring of the sender-receiver barrier makes local groups and

communities creators of symbols which have the potential to sever the power relations represented in the mainstream media and reappraise what marginalises or degrades them or makes them appear insignificant; this potential is what Rodríguez (2003) calls *symbolic resistance*.

Rodríguez notes that power relations are endorsed and maintained by factors including symbolic legitimisation. Power groups normalise symbols which are weighted in their own interests to describe reality in a given context, and one of the channels for doing this is the media (RODRÍGUEZ 2003: 153). Meanwhile, community media enable subordinate groups in a given context to exercise the power to point out, criticise and subvert the forms which normalise the status quo, the conventional wisdom that mainstream media build and convey (BAILEY, CAMMAERTS & CARPENTIER 2007: 17).

Symbolic resistance involves conveying the opinions and experiences of the groups which are the subject of the two main forms of exclusion in the public sphere: either a biased representation of social and cultural diversity or exclusion from the production of discourse due to major structural inequalities (FERRÁNDEZ & RETIS 2019: 3). Setting up and taking part in community media allows underrepresented social groups to strengthen “their internal identity, manifesting this identity to the outside world, and thus enabling social change and/or development” (CARPENTIER, LIE & SERVAES 2003: 6).

Symbolic resistance adopts specific discursive forms and strategies depending on the person that takes the floor, with the common denominator of being a creative action to generate a dissident culture which is critical of the dominant media discourses (TAMARIT 2012: 43). Analytical and technical skills have to be learned to identify and understand these messages so as to draw up contents later on which dovetail with the reality of social groups and counteract hegemonic representations, and this learning also takes place within community media.

6.2 Media literacy

Breaking down the barrier between the roles of content production and reception involves access to a range of tasks which in the mainstream media are reserved for small groups of qualified professionals, namely journalists. The power to resist symbolically comes with learning these media communication tasks (RODRÍGUEZ 2010: 19). Community radio stations are organisations which deliver media education and training to their participants (Lewis 2008: 20).

Media literacy is a term that was first used in academic research in the mid-1990s (LEE & SO 2014). However, it is based on media education, a discipline which has spread most notably in Latin America due to the work of media educators such as Mario Kaplún with approaches close to the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (BARBAS 2012: 162). Kaplún notes the affinity between the traditional educational model of the “teacher-led class” and the logic of the mass media; he contrasts this vertical, one-directional and individualised approach with education and media seen “as dialogue and

exchange in a space in which instead of speakers and listeners there are interlocutors” (KAPLÚN 1997: 6), an approach which matches the participatory intent of community media.

Drilling down into the analytical side, media literacy prioritises reflective and instrumental teaching along with understanding of the institutional and economic nature of media enterprises and their role in shaping ideologies and knowledge which are widely spread throughout society while not neglecting practical training (GUTIÉRREZ 2008: 452-453). Media literacy in community media fosters the critical application of communication tools to drive social change towards a more equitable society (HIGGINS 1999: 641). These objectives are valid, and indeed more valid than ever in the current digital environment (GUTIÉRREZ & TYNER 2012: 35) as in spite of the multiplication of content supply, the main generators of journalistic information are still the mainstream media (LEVY & NIELSEN 2010). In this scenario, community media have stepped up their educational role over recent years involving fresh synergies with civil society and social movements to foster “critical awareness of the media system” (LEMA-BLANCO, RODRÍGUEZ-GÓMEZ & BARRANQUERO-CARRETERO 2016: 92-93).

7. Conclusions

This paper has suggested the complexity of involvement in community media, which Hamilton (2003) argues should be seen as a multidimensional process in which production and reception are blended in the participation of disadvantaged groups or ones with a low profile in the public sphere. These groups’ leading role in contents, agenda-setting and collective production is tied to the participatory paradigm which is summarised by the *emirec* approach, as opposed to the more vertical *prosumer* (APARICI & GARCÍA-MARÍN 2018).

In the Catalan media space, alternative media have been little studied by the media sciences (CASASÚS 2005) despite their roots and diversity (MAYUGO 2007). Research in Catalonia has focused mainly on the theory, history and legal aspects of alternative media, while analysis of their contents and participation processes –aspects to which alternative media theorisation attributes their differential features with respect to public and private media (BARRANQUERO 2010; JEPPESEN 2016a; SÁEZ 2008)– remains virtually unexplored. This paper is a first step towards noting the diversity of community radio stations and programmes in Catalonia which include the participation of disadvantaged or underrepresented social groups as their main focus.

With respect to the first specific objective, seven contemporary case studies have been described which are representative of the variety of social groups that use community radio as a means of expression. Each is in a different cultural, social and political position, has a particular capacity for public advocacy and is driven by specific objectives. However, analysis of journalistic metadiscourses reveals common features. The senders are in a position of social, cultural or communicative

inequality which in many cases translates into discrimination in their specific context. Hence the main function of the contents they produce on community radio stations is self-representation (RENNIE 2006), which is achieved when they can “name the world on their own terms” (RODRÍGUEZ 2010: 19). As a result, the programmes take on an activist tone in which these groups seek a public significance that they are unable to achieve through the mainstream media and express a yearning for social transformation. Thus based on its own specificities, each of the projects described in the sample would take shape in what alternative media theory has summarised as the concept of democratisation of access and speech (BARRANQUERO 2010; LÓPEZ-VIGIL 2005; SÁEZ 2008) and are in line with the inclusive radio model (GARCÍA-GARCÍA 2017).

This paper's proposal has several limitations. It is exploratory research with the intention of presenting a topic of study and contributing specific case studies while also suggesting a theoretical framework for more in-depth future analysis. Accordingly, the sample of cases is small and the study, which is descriptive, focuses on the displayed content of the metajournalistic discourses (CARLSON 2016) of the radio stations and programmes. However, this initial approach points to more complex questions: how does a media learning process take place in these venues? Which parameters are used to draw up contents and what criteria are used to set the agenda? How do the participants assess their activity in the station or the programme?

These and successive questions need to be addressed empirically in order to go beyond the normative dimension of alternative media theory (FERRON 2012) and to understand how the involvement of social groups in community media, and in alternative media as a whole, takes place in practice. To move forward in this direction of travel, it has been suggested that analysis of the contents and the participatory production of the contents should be based on the notions of symbolic resistance and media literacy as relevant processes theorised in the international literature (BAILEY, CAMMAERT & CARPENTIER 2007; HIGGINS 1999; RODRÍGUEZ 2003 & 2010) to examine how the involvement of the audience-producers in community media projects is structured and point out the distinctive factors with respect to the paradigms of public and private commercial media.

Bosch notes the need for in-depth research into community radio stations' management and participation practices by means of ethnographic observation and quantitative and qualitative study of audiences (BOSCH 2014: 436). Atton also underscores the importance of investigating the operation of alternative media in terms of both production and reception in order to go beyond the “celebratory approach” to alternative media (ATTON 2008: 214). This will make it possible to gain critical knowledge of these media phenomena which validates or refutes the assumptions made based on activism and theory. As Hamilton (2000) maintains, it is a question of studying and understanding alternative media in their specificity.

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