

# Portuguese Community Radios on the Internet: Broadcasting Exclusively Online and the High Practice of Podcasting

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## Abstract

The Portuguese community radios, with their exclusively online presence, enhance new ways of civic participation and a new democracy stage (Dahlgren, 2013; Ferreira, 2012), and assume themselves an ideal place to mobilize people to a common cause. The participation's intensity is observed by the fact that their programs are being made by their own listeners and regards some subjects that don't find space in the mainstream radios. Consequently, it reinforces the proximity with the local communities. For instance, each radio program corresponds to a different author, clearly existing diverse contents or subjects, even though we can notice there is an excessive number of musical programs. About the contents, 367 radio programs of these 21 radio projects were analyzed, following a grid made based in the studies of Beaman (2006), Bonini et al. (2014) and Fleming (2009). The 21 online radio projects analyzed mostly present a program grid with the name and time of broadcasting. Online broadcasting occurs in 62% of these stations, the same percentage of projects that makes their programs available in content format. This percentage equals 13 radio projects that allow listening to the programs in streaming (57%) or podcast (19%). Of the 367 analyzed programs, the majority is inside a musical author typology. We can also see a few programs in the categories of radio drama, call-in-phone in, soundscape, sports, and religious.

**Keywords:** *Community radio; Internet; Podcasting; Online broadcasting*

## 1. Introduction

There is a set of transversal characteristics to all community radios, related to ownership, management, objectives, revenues, scope of broadcasting, contents, producers, training (of volunteers) and accessibility (Midões, 2019).

These radios should be formed from groups of citizens (and may assume the status of a foundation, association or cooperative) and have to be non-profit, where citizens participate actively and directly in their management, for common benefit. The objectives of these media include giving a voice to minorities (sexual, ethnic, age, etc.), safeguarding local interests, increasing literacy, ensuring cultural and linguistic diversity, local development and the use of communication as a tool for development (Gordon, 2012; Mollgard, 2018; Peruzzo, 2009; Scifo, 2014).

Despite these broadcasters should be non-profit, the set of possible incomes includes local sponsorship and advertising, community donations, state funding or funding from international organizations, as well as fundraising events (Loncar, 2010; Mollgard, 2018; Price-Davis & Tacchi, 2001).

In the Portuguese case, there is no legal status for these broadcasters, so these radios don't have a radio frequency, existing exclusively on the Internet. However, in other geographies, where the third

broadcasting sector is legalized, the frequencies are always low power and the range limited to a radius never exceeding 10km.

The contents covered on community radios should be linked to the respective communities, with a plurality of voices on air, in which the audience is also protagonist and active in the production of content. The staff, consisting mostly of volunteers, participates in learning activities of contents (for example, sound design), thus leading to the technical development of human resources (Malki, 2006; Zuculoto, 2005).

Finally, and in order to promote the democratic process, the accessibility of all community members to the radio broadcasts and the respective construction of the program schedule should be guaranteed (Dieng, 2013).

In the first mapping of Portuguese community radios, conducted between 2015 and 2020, aiming at the analysis of a third Portuguese broadcasting sector, 21 radio projects were identified with community nature present at *online* space (Midões, 2021) and that, in some way, mentioned to be focused on geographical communities (Bell & Newby, 1971; Burns, 1976; Delanty, 2009) or communities of interest (Anderson, 1993; Castells, 2010; Rheingold, 1996) and that involved the participation of these communities, using the internet as the preferred communication channel.

In this first mapping, it can be seen that these potential community broadcasters with exclusively *online* broadcasting appear mainly in the Portugal's areas and they are located on the two largest metropolitan areas: Lisbon and Oporto. At the same time, in Portugal, in the most densely populated areas, there has been a greater bet on broadcasts chain by local radio stations with the consequent loss of contact with their local genesis, being also these "territories with more market and audience potential" (Costa, 2017, p. 58). By switching to chain broadcasting, local radio stations significantly broke the connection they had with the population and local communities. This loss creates a void which, at the same time, becomes a space of opportunities for community projects of this kind, enabling the public discussion of local issues, thus establishing a new close relationship with the respective communities. This trend towards the disappearance of local radio stations on the Portuguese coast shows a divided country, with the coast where local radio stations have been diluted, and the interior, where there is still a local radio projects, with websites, news, debates and interaction with the communities.

Portugal doesn't have a law to the alternative media or community media, neither the inclusion of community radios in the radio law. So, legally, the country only has public and private broadcasting, and because of that Portuguese community radios don't have an FM frequency which lead us to a new generation of illegal radios, reminding us of 20<sup>th</sup> century pirate radios. Despite this situation, with all the internet possibilities, they started appearing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the first was Rádio Zero, in Lisbon, in 2004.

## 2. Methodology

Mapping as a research method is still sparsely worked on and there is a reflexive void about the principles and procedures to be adopted throughout the development of this method (Voniati, Doudaki & Carpentier, 2018). The diversity of community media and their often-informal nature complicate this

process. There are also few literatures supporting mapping as a scientific method, at least one that goes beyond simple cartography or inventory.

Voniati, Doudaki and Carpentier (2018), who carried out the mapping of community media in Cyprus, refer that there are five fundamental characteristics that should be part of this research technique and which we also sought to be present in this mapping of Portuguese CRs: first, the clear definition of the object of study, the geographical area covered and the period of analysis; second, the incorporation of all units of analysis, i.e. the population and not just a sample; third, the creation of a Mapping Index Card (MIC), a recording instrument, which allows the annotation of the information collected; fourth, multiple sources and techniques of data collection should be used, such as: interviews, documentary, archival and website analysis; and finally, the collected contents should be treated as data, analyzed with qualitative and quantitative techniques, making mapping an information-generating source, something more than just a simple count.

This study about the broadcasting exclusively online and the high practice of podcasting is a part of this mapping. After the identification of the 21 Portuguese community radio, all websites, social networks, grides and online broadcasting were analyzed, and also the types of programs, transmission formats and distribution platforms. All these informations were completed and reorganized with 21 interviews to each of these radios and theirs teams of volunteers.

In the total, 367 programs were listened and 286 were available on podcast or streaming. It is a significant number of programs to a small group of radios, with an average of 17 programs per broadcaster. This reflects that the most part of these projects were very active between 2015 and 2020 and they had regular broadcasting.

Based on Beaman (2006), Bonini et al. (2014), and Fleming (2009), it was created one table of 11 types of programs and these 286 podcasts were catalogued and identified about their typologies: music program with an entertainer; playlist; information and news; entertainment and talk show; radio drama; interview; phone in-call-in; sports; cultural magazines; soundscape, and religious.

### **3. The exclusively *online* presence of Portuguese community radios**

In Portugal, these new radio projects exist almost exclusively on the internet and arise because digital has become the fastest and most economical solution to expand the offer (Costa, 2017; Evens and Paulussen, 2012).

Despite all these community radios appeared in the 21st century, the first experiments for community radios were carried out in 1997, by *Engenharia Rádio*, which only started to broadcast regularly in 2007. So, *Rádio Zero*, which operates at the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE), was the first to start regular broadcasts in Portugal, in 2004.

Most of these projects arise within higher education academic communities, polytechnics or universities. Nevertheless, there are also social and cultural projects. The social broadcasters appear mainly in social neighborhoods of the two main Portuguese metropolis and seek inclusion and active citizenship. The stations found with a cultural vocation, such as *Rádio Quântica*, aim at an activist intervention, giving voice to national artists, that don't have this possibility in *mainstream* radio stations.

Although the phenomenon is recent in Portugal, it seems to be getting stronger. Only during 2018 three new radio stations emerged exclusively *online*, without Hertzian frequency, in Coimbra, Lisbon and Porto. In 2020, and already off the mapping made by Miguel Midões (2021), at least two more exclusively *online* community radio stations were created, *Zuca Tuga* (Coimbra) and *Radio 23 Milhas* (Ílhavo). In 2021, also off the mapping, three other broadcasters of this kind became official, *Rádio Freguesia de Belém* (Lisbon), *Rádio Antecâmara* (Lisbon), and a potentially community radio and exclusively *online*, in Lisbon, in the Marvila neighborhood, *Radio Zip*.

The inability to have an FM frequency and the development of information and communication technologies, allied with the growing use of the Internet as a means of communication, has enabled the growth of these broadcasters exclusively *online*.

#### 4. The use of *podcasts* to broadcast content

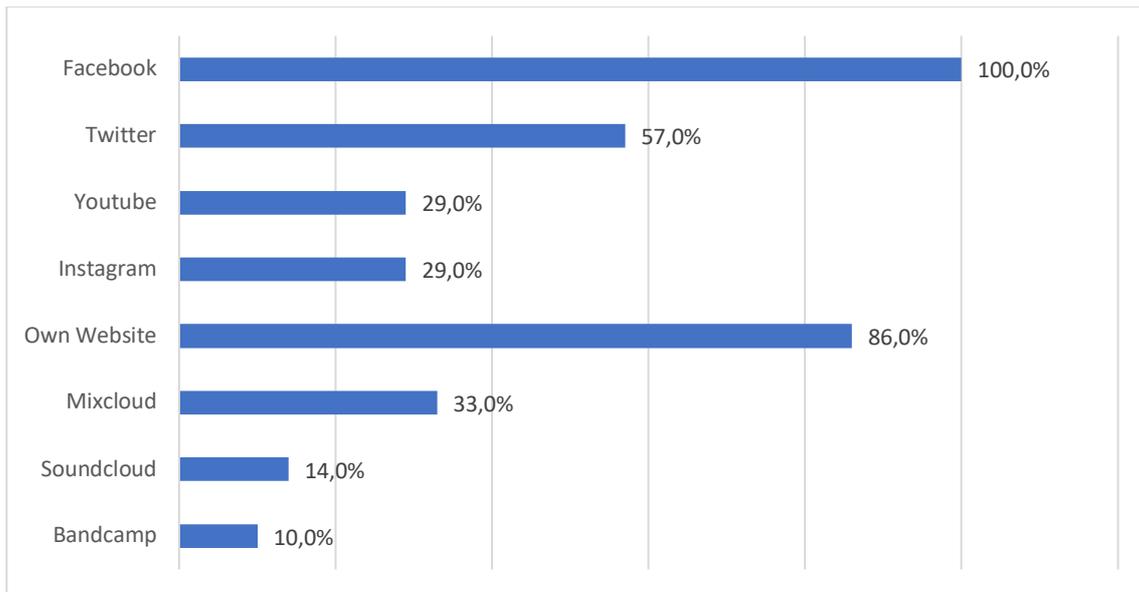
During the mapping and characterization of Portuguese community radio stations, carried out between 2015 and 2020, in the 21 selected stations that make up the third sector of Portuguese broadcasting, 367 programs were quantified as broadcasted or available *online*, either in *streaming* (real time listening) or in *podcast* (allowing the download of files to a device). This number makes up an average of about 17 radio shows per broadcaster, with *Rádio Quântica* standing out as the broadcaster that provides the largest number of shows (n=53), between those on the grid and those exclusively disclosed on platforms such as *Mixcloud* and *Soundcloud*.

From the 21 *online* radio projects analyzed, 42% (n=9) presented a program schedule with the name and time of broadcasting. Continuous *online broadcasting* occurs in 62% of these stations, the same percentage of projects that make their programs available in content format. This percentage equates to 13 radio projects that allow listening to programs in *streaming* or *podcast*. Of these radios, 12 put their programs in *streaming* (57%), four in *podcast* (19%), the same number of radios that allow both modes of listening. It is also important to mention that only the *Radio Engineering* and *NRC* stations allow subscription to the *RSS feed*.

In two situations there was no possibility to access *online* content: on *Radio Aurora*, which broadcasts its programs on FM through a partnership with local radio stations, and on *RRE - Rádio Refúgio Emigrante*, also in *Quase FM*, the programs are broadcast live inside the Universidade Católica Portuguesa but are made available later *online* as a file.

Regarding the platforms on which these projects are disseminated, 100% use social networks, generally complemented by the existence of their own website for the same purpose (86%). Within the social networks, *Facebook* stands as most chosen platform. A significant difference can be seen in relation to *Twitter*, the second most used social network, followed by *Youtube* and, lastly, *Instagram*. In more than half of the cases (57%), these broadcasters advertise and promote their programs on more than one social network.

In addition to social networks, some of these projects under analysis also publicize themselves on other audio platforms such as *Mixcloud*, *Soundcloud* or *Bandcamp* (see Figure 1), but with lack of significance.



**Figure 1 - Identification of audio platforms and social media where Portuguese *online* radio stations with community potential disseminate and communicate their programs. Source: own elaboration.**

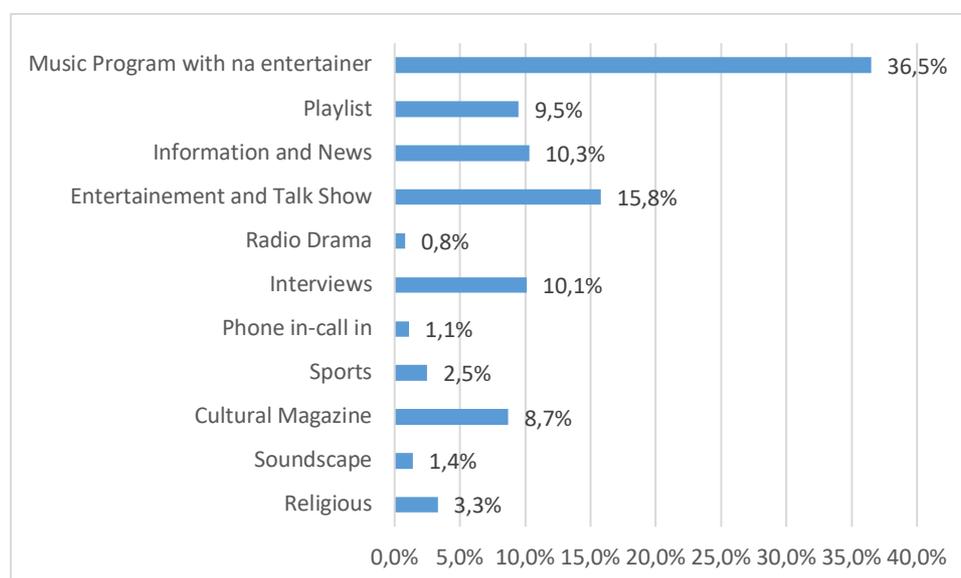
After verifying the format in which the programs were made available, an analysis was triggered to the program typology of these broadcasters, according to the categories presented in Table 1 - prepared based on Beaman (2006), Bonini et al. (2014), Fleming (2009), Radioking.com (2019), Radiotoolkit.net (2019) e Spacial.com (2019). The purpose was to find out the typology of the content presented in these 21 Portuguese projects, identifying the programs as music with an entertainer, playlist musical, news and information, entertainment and talk show, radio drama, interview, phone-in-call-in, sports, cultural magazines, soundscape and religious.

**Table 1 - Radio programs typologies**

<b>Music Program with an entertainer</b>	A music program, which is based on a person's choice, and which has the active intervention of an entertainer, announcer or any other broadcaster, through the presentation of the program and the respective songs.
<b>Playlist</b>	Exclusive of music, which is based on the choice of a person, but without voice or the active intervention of any broadcaster.
<b>Information and news</b>	In news or current affairs format, with an informative character, which may assume various formats, including the debate of ideas or conversational register.
<b>Entertainment and Talk Show</b>	With humor, satire or social criticism, with the possibility of also having a competition format. It may resort to interviews or audience participation to make the format more dynamic.
<b>Radio Drama</b>	Theatricality of stories, with recourse to dialogues and sound effects.

<b>Interview</b>	Programs that focus on one or more individuals, with a question-answer format.
<b>Phone Talk / Call-in</b>	Programs open to the participation of the public and the sharing of opinions, which debate a specific theme.
<b>Sports</b>	In a news, interview or sports magazine format.
<b>Cultural magazines</b>	Dedicated to culture in its different areas and in various formats.
<b>Soundscape</b>	These programs focus on sound rather than words, without a broadcaster's voice and with exclusive use of sound effects.
<b>Religious</b>	Programs under the editorial responsibility of any religious denomination. Exclusively religious, regardless of its format.

Regarding all of the 367 programs listened, 134 (36.5%) concerned to musical nature. We can also see that there are very few programs in the categories of radio drama, only three (0.8%); *call-in-phone in*, which registered four (1.1%); soundscape, no more than five (1.4%); sports, with nine programs (2.5%); and religious, with a total of 12 identified programs (3.3%), all of them on only one of these stations. This programming diversity is boarded in Figure 2, where we can see a distribution of contents by remaining categories of playlist musical, news and information, entertainment and talk show, interview, and cultural magazine.



**Figure 2 - Distribution of the 367 programs listened to and analyzed. Source: own elaboration.**

Within this group of categories, it is understandable that, after the author music programs with 36.5%, the second category of programs with the greatest relevance is entertainment and talk show, with 15.8% (n=58), while the others present a very similar quantity: 10.3% (n=38) news and information, 10.1% (n=37) interview, 9.5% (n=35) playlist music, and 8.7% (n=32) cultural magazines.

## 5. Concluding remarks

These data suggest that there is diversity of programs and contents in Portuguese community radio stations, also showing multiplicity of formats, styles and subjects, a set of parameters that Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada (2001) indicate as essential for these alternative broadcasters. However, we observe that the Portuguese RCs are too focused on music, once that almost half of the 367 programs were music-based, thus relegating to a second plan their role of social intervention, of alternative to the mainstream media, following a path followed also by Portuguese local radios, which privilege, according to the Obercom report (2018), more and more, the music theme, to the detriment of information and programs with listeners' participation.

There are projects aimed at local development and fight against social exclusion, confirming what Brock and Malerba (2012) consider primordial in these community *media*, but they are still few in number. Similarly, to what we find in private radios, also in Portuguese community radios, after the programs of musical nature, the most common are entertainment contents. Less frequent are the programs that allow the participation of the audience, namely the interviews and the phone-in - call in, which, however, would be the ones that should receive more relevance in a community radio station. The democratic potential of these radios and their use as a tool for empowerment and building capacity of the communities represented in them is thus diminished, neglecting what David Hendy (2002) proposed for these media.

The most positive aspect found in the Portuguese CRs is the range types of programs that we can see in their broadcasts and also the multiplicity of formats in which they make their contents available.

In Portugal, these radios have easily taken advantage of the digital service, creating a kind of multiplatform media, allowing both the online listening of the broadcasts and their later listening in archive, using streaming or podcast. This study shows that there is a reasonable number of broadcasters who bring together all these forms of content availability. Most of the listening and dissemination formats are available on their own website and are strongly complemented by the use of social networks, where all of them are present.

Based on the results mentioned above, it can be noticed that the number of existing programs in these community radios is considerable for the still small number of existing projects in Portugal. It can be seen that there is a remarkable set of projects which present a structured programming. In 29% of the cases, the broadcasters present simultaneously a program grid, continuous online broadcasting and make their programs available for later listening, varying then the resource to streaming or podcast. However, we were able to observe that the use of podcasts is discrete and even less the RSS feed.

The importance of the Internet for these projects can be seen, for now, in their strong presence on social networks. In addition to the dissemination that is done on these networks, they complement their promotion and availability of programs by using their own website, but also to audio platforms.

Generally speaking, radio projects are mainly music-based, since the sum of author music and playlist music programs makes up 46% of all programs identified and analyzed. Nevertheless, there are radios where the weight of their programming falls on formats more related to information, news, interviews and cultural magazines. Despite presenting a diversity and structured programs, and being

a multiplatform media, there are still a few number of programs that allows the active participation of the public, in which we can find the listener as a broadcaster too.

In Portugal, community radios are arising, because of the internet possibilities, but they are a kind of ghost broadcasting. It is mandatory and urgent the review of the actual radio law (reviewed in 2010).

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