
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Freedom Waves: Giving People a Voice and Turning It Up! Tuning into the Free Radio Network in the Basque Country

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In this article we propose a historical chronicle about the role of the free radios and community spaces of social communication in the Southern Basque Country, analysing recent changes in this field and its implications. The Basque case is meaningful in two ways: quantitatively, because of the high number of these free radio stations since the eighties; and also, because of the current changes in the political context, a less conflictual scenario. Starting with an analysis of the contemporary reality of the Southern Basque Country and of two free radio stations – *Hala Bedi Irratia* and *Eguzki Irratia* – this article looks at the hybridisation between alternative social movements and media. We look at the progressive evolution towards stable funding formulas (memberships) and the openness and quality of this type of radio. Finally, we highlight a fundamental difference between media such as free radio in contrast to mass self-communication through ICTs: besides the message, the media is (self-)constructed collectively by those involved.

Keywords: Communication; free radio; social movements; Basque Country

Introduction

Free radio, as an alternative communication channel, demonstrates a strategy articulated by social movements against ideological domination: counter-information, communicative challenge and the appropriation of technologies. This article will look at the characteristics and emergence of free radio networks as a tool for contemporary political resistance, and for the construction of new imaginaries, in the case of the Southern Basque Country.¹ The Basque case is meaningful in two ways: quantitatively, because of the high number of these free radio stations since the 1980s; and also because of the current changes in the political context, in the radical culture, and in the imaginaries of its protest movements. The paper pays special attention to

¹ Southern Basque Country (the provinces of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Araba and the autonomous community of Navarre) refers to the Basque territory belonging to Spain – in opposition to Northern Basque Country, that belongs to France.

the case of free radios like *Hala Bedi Irratia* and *Eguzki Irratia*, both paradigmatic and significant and on the air for several decades. *Eguzki Irratia*, born in 1982 thanks to the initiative of a group of ecologist activists, is the oldest pirate radio that exists today in the Southern Basque Country, and *Hala Bedi Irratia* is the second oldest one (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010).

We start by reflecting on the theory applicable to the relationship between social movements and alternative media. After this, we will introduce the Basque reality by means of a brief context analysis that covers the social, political and cultural changes and conflicts that have taken place over the last five decades. Thirdly, we will analyse and discuss the key ideas relating to free radio gleaned from two sources: on the one hand, from document analysis, fundamentally from material produced by the two Basque free radio stations we study, and on the other hand, from personal semi-structured interviews with collaborators, members and the listeners of these free radio stations, aiming to understand their perspectives. Informants were selected as veterans with a long track record and extensive experience and involvement in these radios. They are privileged informants because of their proximity, accessibility, trust, and first-hand information. We also undertook direct observation, a method which has historically been used to get basic contextualized information in order to assess hypotheses or to isolate dependent and independent variables (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010). In addition to which, a search for complementary secondary sources has been carried out, and contrasted with the current reality. Thus, we pursue a methodology founded on a qualitative method of analysis undertaken via direct observation and interviews with privileged informants.

Finally, we use the former to develop our conclusions on various points: the hybridisation between social movements and alternative media, the importance of the sociopolitical context, and the difference between this type of media and mass self-communication through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

On the move: communicating and effecting change

Free radio and social movements, as agents that present alternatives to the *status quo*, share common characteristics, but can also be considered as a whole. Social Movements can be defined broadly and inclusively as collective action sustained over time (Tarrow, 2004); as well as from a more disruptive – or perhaps more revolutionary – perspective, centred around activities and methodologies of social dialogue which differ from institutionalised ones. In this arena, it is possible to differentiate between, on the one hand, classic social movements, and on the other, the amalgamation that Offe (1996) calls ‘New Social Movements’. The former arose from conflicts central to modernity such as national liberation, the struggle of workers and of the working-class, inspired by socialism, communism or anarchism; and the latter started to spread in the 1960s in such forms as the feminist, environmentalist, neighbourhood, squatter, LGBT or student movements. In free radio, all these movements and related demands would be able to find a vehicle through which to express their ideas and proposals beyond the limits and the filters imposed by the mass media.

In relation to political processes, social movements combine two distinct elements: one which is fundamentally static, defined by a series of characteristics which are relatively stable in time, which connect with the *institution-form*, that is, of a stable and identifiable social configuration. The other is more dynamic, in that its modes of action and internal organisation change over time (Ibarra and Tejerina, 1998). The *institution-form* of social movements is structured as a stable agent and presents itself as an interlocutor in front of authorities. In this process, information channels not controlled by large communication companies emerge as media through which alternative ideas can be expressed. These media have their own voice to express their views. In free radio, the dialogue fostered through these alternative channels finds a functional element through which to make demands and assert itself.

Ramirez de la Piscina (2010) proposes three approximations to the concept of Alternative Media (AM). On the one hand, and according to Atton and Couldry (2003), AM are those channels produced outside mainstream media institutions and networks. Judith Purkarthofer, Brigitta Busch and Petra Pfisterer (2008) offer more details about this concept. They suggest that, in opposition to public and private-commercial media, AM are characterized by their differing view of communication processes as well as of the producers and recipients involved. They defend the idea that these media see the consumer and producer roles as intertwined activities and look for a broader involvement of the audience. Finally, Trejo Delarbre (2000) defines AM as a response to the difficulties faced by several social groups to get access to commercial media, sometimes with the explicit objective to confront them. Free radio, marginal cinema, alternative press or non-conventional video are some of the resources used by social movements and political activists.

In fact, social movements, in the same way as free radio, try to incentivise alternative messages and ways of life, as well as active citizen participation – what Wampler (2012) calls *voice*. Therefore, when talking about social movements and free radio, it is important to highlight that they are not just a form of alternative communication and media; they are more than this, as the activity itself and the interpersonal networks they create are ends in themselves, arenas for autonomous socialisation contrary to those imposed by formal institutional mechanisms.

As various authors propose (Martínez, Casado and Ibarra 2012), social movements themselves can be considered as non-discriminatory and non-hierarchical schools of learning through which to imagine other possible worlds. This alternative knowledge is also one of the key aspects of free radio. In this regard, imagining and learning to envision other worlds leads to the construction of a *framing process* (Benford and Snow, 2000) which may be radically different from the officially institutionalised one. Free radio and social movements find a connecting link in this context in which both feed back into each other.

It could be suggested that this relationship between free radio and social movements is similar to the relationship social movements have with ICTs. The impact of ICTs on social movements is undeniable, to the extent that a sort of mass self-communication emerges (Castells, 2012). From this point of view, social movements are able to self-communicate and in this regard they propose technological tools to facilitate the implementation of their own organisational, programming and collective decision-making activities. However, free radio demonstrates a qualitative difference in relation to ICTs, as free radio itself bases its operations on a collective, autonomous model in which both the structure and the medium (the communicative infrastructure of the radio and the people involved) can be considered to be a political agent in its own right. This reality takes shape as a hybrid locale between social movements and alternative media, where the dividing line between the two is increasingly blurred.

Not only the logic of communicating in an alternative way, but also the actual dynamics of how free radio and social movements develop and operate show they share common characteristics. A key element of social movements is mobilisation, collective action sustained over time or visible social protest on the streets (Tarrow, 2004). This is defined by a series of tools used in struggle called Repertoires of Collective Action (Tilly and Wood, 2010). These can be more or less confrontational. Movements must constantly reinvent themselves and innovate their repertoires, because the authorities and formal institutions specifically aim to adapt to these struggles and integrate them into their official frame, by co-opting the movements and their leaders, or directly oppressing them to deactivate them (McAdam, 1983). However, just as authors such as Tilly (2007) point out, democratic systems themselves are the result of popular struggles, that materialised through many diverse combinations of repertoires of

contention. These were used to challenge prior pre-democratic regimes and have changed them. This rationale of making demands and popular action is applied to setting up free radio stations because, as we see in the case of the Basque Country, these were the dynamics of mobilisation that lead to their creation. Therefore, it is possible to talk about a sort of revolution in movement, of communicating and effecting change simultaneously, in which free radio and social movements inevitably go hand in hand. Pirate radio can be considered as 'the station which defends an ideological trend which is against the established order, non-profit seeking and manned by voluntary workers. However, community radios are different in that they accept advertising and economic support from public institutions and employ salaried professionals. Nevertheless, they don't belong to big broadcasting companies' (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 313).

In respect of the free radio stations, we can consider the definition that the Basque Government offers that free radio is understood to be like 'all those stations that do not have an official concession adjusted to the Decree, whether exploited by a political, cultural or friends group' (Peñafiel, Casado and Fernández, 2005: 59). But in terms of the concept and definition of free radio there are different understandings as Maria Teresa Santos (1999) underlines: the Free Radios Coordination Group of Spain being defined as 'a means of communication based on the radical confrontation against all type of social relations of domination'. The European Federation of Free Radios (FER) considers as such 'all those non-commercial projects that produce a communication outside the world order of information, denounced by UNESCO and the McBride report' (Santos, 1999: 31). In this vein, Txema Uriarte (2001: 176) describes five characteristics of free radios:

Each radio station has full autonomy and from there each radio defines its project. In total, we could say that there are five characteristics that define free radio stations:

1. They are not run by professionals and do not aim to obtain economic benefits.
2. They maintain a self-managed activity, and make decisions directly.
3. They remain outside political, economic and advertising groups.
4. They participate in actions in support of the local community.
5. They fight against the monopoly and centralization of the mass media.

And now let's see how this framework applies in the case of the Southern Basque Country.

Broadcasting the Basque context

The Basque social space was constituted from the end of the nineteenth century by different historical narratives that expressed the 'national subject' from diverse positions (Sáenz de Viguera, 2007). In the Basque case, however, a political phenomenon preceded nationalism in the political sense. Regional administration ('foralist' from the Spanish) was the basis of a Basque identity widely diffused in social life and between different classes, strata and ideologies (Camus, 2012). And this gives rise to other expressions of nationalism other than the linguistic one: the traditionalist foralist. In 1895, the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) reflecting Basque nationalist ideology, yet also conservative and of Christian inspiration, was created. It will become the majority party.

Nation state normative narratives – Spanish and French – show a deficit of legitimacy, to the extent that they gave rise to cultural and political Basque counter-structures. These counter-structures took the shape of spheres that corresponded to the State, elaborating a mimetic counter-identification with respect to it (Letamendia, 2000) – and

whose emblematic expression would become the leftist Basque nationalist and separatist armed organization ETA, 'Basque Country and Liberty', founded in 1959 and then later evolving from a group promoting traditional Basque culture to an armed group. The element of mass movement was very marked within Basque nationalisms, as in popular linguistic European nationalisms (Anderson, 1993), even from its conservative and foralist beginnings. It developed symbols, iconography and many elements of contemporary Basque imagery. It set up venues that also functioned as taverns, created youth and women's associations, cultural groups and sports competitions, promoted trade unions, supported the networking of schools in Euskara (Basque Language), the *Ikastolas* ... (Camus, 2012). To this national issue was added a Basque historical contradiction: strong economic development and with it an earlier entry to modernity with all its contradictions, alongside with weak State institutional political construction (within the Spanish dictatorship from 1939 to 1978). In this context emerged popular movements in defence of Basque culture that were linked with grassroots political and social movements, and vice versa:

Moreover, unlike the satisfied cultures of nation-states, our double gap (dependent institutionalization and lack of cultural and educational policy until the last third of the twentieth) has been so immense that it explains that cultural defensive movements have been linked to political movements, and vice versa. They have been forced to compensate for these failures. This brings with it virtues (placing eroding culture and language at the heart of political programs) and perversions (risks of instrumentalization, polarization and social cultural disintegration according to political affinities). (...) It is easy to conclude that without the nationalisms of the twentieth century, 'the Basque' would only be a name without substance. (Zallo, 2013: 234)

Yet actually, in the last 50 years, the Basque Country has witnessed major counterculture phenomena. From the 1960s, traces of traditional Basque language and culture acted as powerful magnets, since they were able to carve out countercultural symbolic apertures, and blend with new cultural phenomena, giving rise to interesting mutations (Amezaga, 1995; Del Amo, 2016; Larrinaga, 2014). In a context of crisis, unemployment and continuing repression, the decade of the 1980s in the Basque Country saw the emergence of a youth resistance movement, organised around punk and 'Basque Radical Rock' (Pascual, 2010). This movement represented a spatial reconfiguring and was manifested in a constellation of small record labels and expressive communication channels: fanzines, magazines, music, concerts, style, and several free radio stations. In a cultural sense, the movement of the period involved the development of a 'Basque radical culture', a social, political and cultural phenomenon that disrupted the categories of political subjectivity established by the framework of political-institutional narratives that made up the social space (Saenz de Viguera, 2007). This radical culture maintained a special interaction with a Basque-speaking culture which, because of its subordinate character with regard to the dominant (Spanish-speaking) one, was also structured as a popular culture (Amezaga, 1995). This relationship was reflected in the growing role of the Basque language in music, free radio stations, or in the (contentious) attempts to frame the movement through the (counter)hegemonic mobilising narratives of the Basque nationalist left. In recent years, this complex scenario has undergone important changes, amongst which is the abandonment of armed struggle by ETA as well as cultural transformations emerging from the base.

The countercultural ethnogenesis

In the decade of the 1960s, the Basque music-cultural group Ez Dok Amairu – with figures such as Mikel Laboa, Xabier Lete, Lourdes Iriondo and Benito Lertxundi – was the main focus of a wide-ranging musical movement known as *Euskal Kantagintza Berria* ('New Basque Music') and which included other pioneering figures such as Michel Labeguerie and Imanol. It was very much open to the influence of international music trends, represented by figures such as Georges Brassens, Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Woody Guthrie, Violeta Parra, and Víctor, and the *Nova Cançó* in Catalonia (Amezaga, 1995; Larrinaga, 2014).

One of its main figures, Xabier Lete, represented at least three expressive elements in this movement. Firstly, that of those who understood it as a cultural recovery of the Basque language. Secondly, those for whom it was, above all, a national recovery in the political sense. Finally, that of those who considered music as an important part of a Basque aesthetic renewal project, including the sculptor Jorge Oteiza. All of these expressions appear at the same time and also mingled in the context of *Euskal Kantagintza Berria* musical movement to the aesthetic renewal project led by Oteiza, to the cultural front approaches of the armed organization ETA (Amezaga, 1995; Lete, 1977). The cultural front granted a central importance to the language and its recovery. Opposing the racial and genealogical version of traditional nationalism, ETA's alternative proposal considered the language to be a key element in the definition of the Basque identity and nation (Amezaga, 1995; Larrinaga, 2007), in accordance with popular linguistic nationalisms (Anderson, 1993).

Together with the cultural recovery movements, from 1962 strong conflicts were registered in the field of labour. Debates were reflected within ETA, which, at its second assembly, declared itself openly socialist, introducing a heterogeneity into the national narrative by which class and nation were identified as two aspects of the same event (Sáenz de Viguera, 2007). Although at times contradictory, this facilitated an absorption of nationalism by a working class mainly made up of Spanish immigrants (Herreros and López, 2013). Factory struggles also moved into the urban space in the form of neighbourhood movements, demanding improvements in living conditions (Estebanz, 2006; Herreros and López, 2013; Larrinaga, 2014). The creation of a new Basque community nationalism took place particularly in the three years from August 1968 to mid-1971, being defined especially in anti-repressive terms, above all after the Burgos court case and the wave of solidarity that occurred around Europe (Larrinaga, 2014; Letamendia, 1994). Although clandestine, this new nationalism became hegemonic, its identity fundamentally transgressive and anti-repressive.

Spheres that belong to the State, such as education and cultural promotion, start to be expressed alternatively and from a Basque national viewpoint. Thus, many actions that took place in the field of culture were private, but with a desire to make them public, belonging to the market, but with a national-activist intention. The Basque language, group consumption and reproduction of elements of Basque culture whether traditional or in its new manifestations and the Basque flag, the Ikurriña, banned since 1939, became symbols of this new identity (Larrinaga, 2014; Letamendia, 1994). Huge mobilisations were made around anti-nuclear campaigns and in favour of the Basque language or political amnesty.

In relation to the nuclear issue, there was a huge nuclear power station built at the time but not opened (Lemoiz), that was prevented by massive popular protest, but also because of ETA's activity. Numerous demonstrations, activities and festivals attended by thousands were being held across the southern Basque Country by ecologists and left-leaning groups to demand the closure of the station (Letamendia, 1994). On 3 June 1979, the anti-nuclear activist Gladys del Estal from Donostia died after being hit by a bullet from the police force *Guardia Civil* during a demonstration in Tudela (Navarra). Meanwhile, ETA planted some bombs, and kidnapped and shot the chief engineer from the nuclear power station, Ryan, in

1981, causing an outcry and the first anti-ETA strike. In May 1982 ETA killed Ángel Pascual, who had taken over the responsibilities of Ryan as chief project engineer. At this point a de facto stoppage of works at the site followed, and the power company Iberduero, owner of the facilities, officially stopped the works.

At this time town and city councils, some more willingly than others, were handing over powers to organise *fiestas* (a city, town or neighbourhood's yearly festivities) to peoples' committees, which had representatives from cultural and sports groups, as well as from the anti-repressive community. To raise money, makeshift bars, or *txoznas*, were set up in the streets, and these often offered their own cultural events, becoming ephemeral but influential spaces reflecting the new political and cultural hegemony. By the end of the 1970s, despite political, social and organisational turmoil, it seemed that a cultural cycle had come to an end (Larrinaga, 2014).

Basque radical rock explosion

Despite a celebratory Spanish consensus, in the Basque Country the agreements for reforming the Spanish Dictatorship were confronted by an explicit rejection or a critical acceptance. This political framework – and the repression that accompanied it – produced a sensation of exclusion and distance. A second factor that fed this feeling of exclusion was socioeconomic: with the capitalist crisis and restructuring, were the dismantling of the major steel and ship-building companies, a deficit of public services, and incipient ecological problems. In many districts this involved youth unemployment levels of up to 40% or even 50%, and worker resistance that in some cases resembled urban guerrilla warfare (Amezaga, 1995; Herreros and López, 2013; Lahusen, 1993; Larrinaga, 2014; Pascual, 2010).

In this context, heroin arrived in fertile territory: the number of AIDS cases was one of the highest in Europe (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010). But there were also other cultural references: the '*No Future*' ethos of punk and its ability to communicate the present. The negation of the 'already established' crystallised especially in the most economically disfavoured areas in an explosion of punk groups labelled, not uncontroversially, Basque Radical Rock/Rock Radikal Vasco, RRV (Pascual, 2010). Together with that, and no less important, was a redefinition or differentiated use of specific physical spaces by and for young people: 'the street' full of people, certain types of bar, a wave of squatting of *gatzetxes* (social centres run by young people). And also a constellation of small music labels and independent and self-managed communication channels: fanzines, magazines, stickers, graffiti, comics, amateur music-making, record shops, the circulation of recorded cassettes (demos), concerts and style, and even coarse, direct language that challenged moral taboos. This was the sociopolitical and cultural context in which free radio stations arose.

This cultural and social creativity, which combined both negation and creation (Porrah, 2006), did not occur in a sociopolitical vacuum, but rather arose within the political and social magma of popular initiatives that had been proliferating since the last years of Spanish Dictatorship. Yet there was a negation of seriousness and solemnity as necessary registers of political rebellion. The playfulness, celebration and irreverence would now be put forward as fully valid dimensions of this antagonistic culture (Herreros and López, 2013; Pascual, 2010). Pleasure did not cancel out the political, but rather reaffirmed a countercultural community and a transgressive praxis (Lahusen, 1993). This scope and dimension is not easy to understand without bearing in mind the rise, already mentioned, of new independent, or autonomous, media, which could be both symbolic or material; or without paying attention to the conjunction of the cultural and the political (Herreros and López, 2013; Pascual, 2010). It meant, above all, a space for expressing both symbolic and physical antagonism and struggle, as well as social redefinition of the structural variables that had created it.

Furthermore, these groups of young people were not the only ones to feel excluded from the agreements made to reform the Spanish Dictatorship. The new nationalism that had arisen from the countercultural ethnogenesis of the previous period split in two: a political culture that wanted to take advantage of the possibilities offered by the political reform and the new autonomous institutions, governed by PNV, whilst others, with the pro-independence leftist HB (Popular Union) as their electoral vehicle, felt that there were still chances to carry out a revolutionary rupture. In the European elections which took place in June of 1987, HB obtained its best results with 18.4% of representation and more than a quarter of a million votes. This vote was divided, to a large extent, along generational lines (Larrinaga, 2014).

In the optimistic atmosphere regarding the possibilities of revolutionary rupture, and given the continuing harsh political repression, the powerful military organisation ETA(m) decided to maintain its dynamic and pull towards it a large part of the social forces accumulated in the countercultural ethnogenesis. Local and communal groups, student movements, unemployed workers, ecologists, feminists and many more would be found maintaining those positions of rupture – sharing spaces and struggles (Larrinaga, 2014). Repression would act as the glue that held them all, including the young punks, together. In fact, direct nationalist references were hardly made by RRV groups, who preferred negative circumlocutions expressed in anti-repressive terms – against those who acted against the Basque country's construction (Porrah, 2006).

The youth movement and the nationalist left would coincide, not only in terms of their anti-repressive dynamics, but in the new resignified spaces: *gaztetxes* (squats), the old quarters of towns and cities or alternative bars. After an initial rejection, there was recognition by the pro-independence left of the mobilising and agitating power of the youth movement. In the 1990s, young people who had grown up within the punk counterculture appeared in the street, in schools, at concerts and in *gaztetxes*. They would not experience tensions between orthodox nationalists and punks; a new cultural identity was being consolidated (Del Amo, Letamendia, Diaux, 2016; Larrinaga, 2014). At the end of the 20th century, specifically in 1997, Basque social movements had 354 different organs of expression; most of them were music, local, political and underground fanzines (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010). This new wave of young people, unlike the last one, would after the first few years, experience a decade of economic bonanza.

Tuning into the free radio network in the Basque Country

In Europe, especially in France and Italy, free radios emerged destabilizing the traditional communicative architecture, as a new weapon against the traditional channels. In March of 1978 a meeting of Free Radio stations organized by the ALO (*Association pour la Libération des Ondes*) and FRED (*Federazione di Radio Emitenti Democratiche*) took place in Paris, in which free radio communities of several European countries participated (Doğç, Sanchis & Deó, 1985).

In the Basque Country the first free radio station, called Osina Irratia, appeared in Donostia-San Sebastian in February 1979. Its promoters belonged to a group composed of various political parties and organizations. The station had an alternative character and at least a small portion of the broadcast was put out in the Basque language, Euskara (Santos, 1999). In Iruñea-Pamplona, the first radio station to air, Sorgiña Irratia, broadcast in a semi-clandestine way and was closed in May 1979. Later, Radio Paraiso came into being. This was better established, less clandestine, and was also closed down a number of times. An assembly-based

system, a shift-based formula and self-management were the basic pillars of these first free radio stations, with a clear political and ideological motive. Radio Paraiso introduced radical heavy metal and punk music into their programming from the offset. Off the back of Radio Paraiso's success, other free radios like Eguzki Irratia emerged.

Eguzki Irratia was born out of the Iruñea Anti-Nuclear and Environmental Committees in 1982. They had a magazine called *Eguzki*, and planned to create a radio that would serve as a voice and tool for the popular movement and counterculture. Eguzki means 'Sun', and it is an emblematic ecological symbol. It was a way of making a very fresh, irreverent and direct sort of radio, in which the important thing was for people to express themselves. That is the beauty of it (Eguzki Irratia, 2016).

In Vitoria-Gasteiz, the capital of the Basque Autonomous Community with 244.000 inhabitants and historically characterized by its traditional atmosphere, and where the *abertzale* (Basque pro-independence) movement was not so strong, the alternative youth movements in the 1980s rejuvenated the city, particularly the Old Town. There were many different initiatives: alternative parties, atheist processions, the magazine *Resiste*, bands, the *Gaztetxe*, the world of comics, theatre and cinema. Among all these popular initiatives was the free radio station of Hala Bedi. Hala Bedi in Basque means 'amen!' and 'irratia' means Radio. This is 'an obvious joke because it originated just coinciding with the first atheist procession which took place in Gasteiz in 5th August in 1983; that is the most important holy day in the fiesta of the town, the day of Our Lady of the White Virgin' (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 316). Hala Bedi was born of diverse social and popular movements which had no voice in the conventional media. It first emerged from the anti-military movement and the Zaramaga Neighbourhood Association. The Association started to hold open assemblies, in which a lot of different people came together: people from all parts of the left, gathering together a platform for the unemployed, people from neighbourhood associations and people's representatives, the anti-gender violence group, alternative groups and individuals not linked to any particular group (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013).

Miguel Angel thinks back with fondness to that first effort:

Meetings went on for a good number of months and the radio started to take shape, intending to include all the subjects within the alternative movement, not just the anti-military element. The fundamental issue up for debate was if the radio should be closed or open. In the end we leaned towards a setup which allowed total freedom of expression. (Espinosa and López, 1993: 75)

In the first six months of 1983, all those groups started to meet. The Assembly, in turn, started to define matters relating to the organisation of the radio station, to the contents of the programme schedule, the conditions for getting involved and the radio station's name. At the beginning times were tough and uncertain: a lot of police surveillance, blackouts, radio closures, protests, fundraising initiatives, demonstrations, threats, atheist processions, taking to the streets, internal political debate, and alternative *fiestas*. People started warming to the radio station little by little, seduced by the attraction of the project and the street atmosphere (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013).

The 'golden age' of this kind of radios took place between 1979 and 1988. Something of a crisis arose in 1989 and lasted until at least 1995 (Gutierrez, 2002; Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010). Since that time, the free radio phenomenon has been revived with renewed energy (see **Figure 1**).

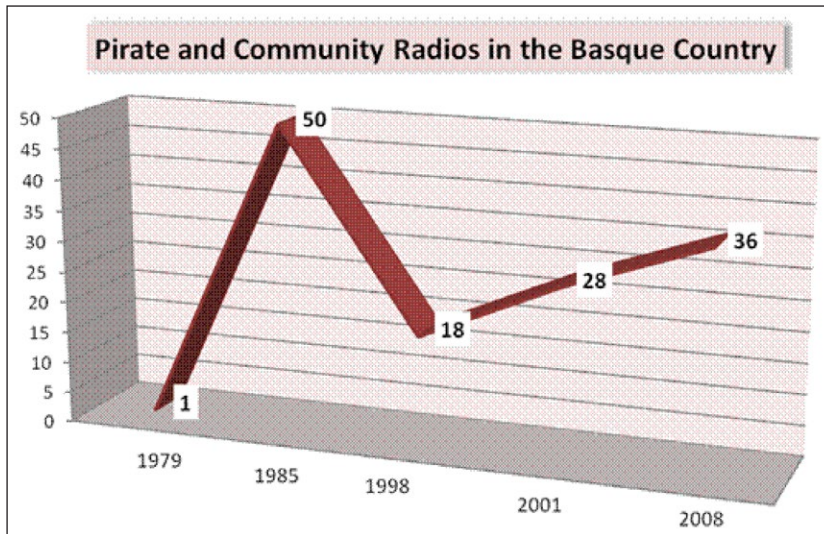


Figure 1: Source: Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 314.

An important factor in understanding the vigour of the pirate and community radio movement is the unique role played by the *Egin* newspaper:

From its birth in 1979 until its death in 1998 (decided by a judge from Madrid), this daily newspaper was an important catalyst of these media. *Egin* published weekly a page informing about the main news related to this movement. The newspaper that succeeded *Egin* in 1999, *Gara*, has continued this trend up to the present. (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 314)

The decrease from the end of the 80s until the end of the millennium can be understood as a result of different factors:

Lack of material and economic resources, poor quality of the media, social changes experimented in Basque society, the crisis of voluntary work and the permanence of the Basque conflict which provoked a generalized disillusionment among the most active sectors which theoretically are the most appropriate to develop these kind of practices. (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 320)

However, from the end of the millennium until today, audio-visual Alternative Media have experimented a moderate increase supported by the impulse embodied in new technologies:

Today, the internet is the perfect scenario for these kinds of media. Anyway, this moment is very different to the explosion of creativity that the alternative movement lived during the 80s. (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 320)

So, let us now listen to the voices of its protagonists.²

² All the interviewees gave their informed consent to participation in the research of this article and to use their views in quotation.

The voice of the voiceless

From the beginning until today, Hala Bedi station has tried to ‘give a voice to collectives without voices’ (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010). As regards the radio’s ideological definition, this was discussed at length in Hala Bedi:

What sort of information we should broadcast and who could participate in the radio show was discussed a great deal. What was clear was who the doors were closed to: the pigs, the fascists and all those who were already reflected in the established media. Hala Bedi is for people who don’t have a voice anywhere else. (Blasco, 1986: 42–43)

To illustrate to us the internal philosophy of one of these free radio stations, Amaia, Hala Bedi collaborator, presenter and writer of the programme *Suelta la Olla*, explained that:

We try to offer information which has not been manipulated by the large mass media that the information oligarchy tries to impose on us. We analyse reality from different points of view giving a voice to those who have no outlet in the mass commercial media, emphasising and taking into account speakers and transversal values such as, among others, environmentalism, feminism, and anti-capitalism. In this we are looking for other points of view to try to increase the visibility of realities that often exclusively come to light through alternative media.

Eguzki Irratia also declares their intention to give a voice to many social agents, being an alternative media reference point (Eguzki Irratia, 2016). Participation in its radio is free and the contents must comply with some minimum requirements that are in line with the radio’s statutes and ideology: no sexist, racist, homophobic or fascist messages. The radio intends to be the voice of popular collectives which generally do not appear in other media (Santos, 1999). They are the channel of communication for people who have no other media outlet.

Some interviewees highlight the connection with specific social movements in particular. For example, in the words of Sejo, the fight for sexual freedom and for LGBT communities:

As a means of communication I would highlight the visibility of the realities and policies of the LGBT movement, an element which is of vital importance for any social struggle, more so if referring to bio-political struggles forced into hiding – a structural and corporal closet which denies the diversity of sex, gender and desire.

From the point of view of political affiliation to social environmentalist activism, Luis, member of the platform *Fracking ez!* and Hala Bedi member and listener, underlines the relevance of free media, stating that ‘free radio is important because there are many ways to describe reality, and social movements aren’t usually reported in official media.’ Reiterating this idea, and referring to the mass and official media monopoly, Begoña Oleaga, member and listener of Hala Bedi, says that:

In the current situation in which the news media is concentrated in the hands of few multinationals, the existence of and contribution made by Hala Bedi Irratia is fundamental: the variety of the news, the different treatment of the subjects, the nuances, the fact that it gives a voice to so many people, associations and situations which, without this media outlet, would remain invisible. Having media to which you can turn whenever people or associations need it (to report, denounce, call, request solidarity, etc.) is another of the main contributions that Hala Bedi makes. If Hala Bedi did not exist now, it would have to be invented.

Sejo, Hala Bedi member and listener, supports this same idea, at the same time as introducing the dimension of its shared and internal makeup, the character of the radio as a space for meeting and exchange.

As the free radio that it is, Hala Bedi has represented and continues to represent a space for communication and a meeting point between different social realities which have no voice or presence in the conventional media. Its main contribution has been a media which provides an opportunity for political, social and personal enrichment, to exchange and learn about the experiences of a plethora of political and personal expressions.

And the fact is that free radio is not just about acting as a kind of spokesperson for social movements, but that in this shared process the border between media and social movement blurs.

Free radio as a social movement

In Hala Bedi, from the beginning the intention went beyond that of simply being a radio station; the intention was also to create a social movement. So, apart from driving trends and critical opinions, many saw the need to consider the radio station as an agent of change to get people onto the streets. The people at the radio station felt that critical action was necessary (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013). At the time, the Vitoria-Gasteiz social movement was lacking steam. It was a time of disenchantment: the struggles generated during the transition had not achieved their expectations. There was a great divide between the political parties, there were many splits, and within the left, division also reigned. Many people, disenchanted with everything in the political world, started to move towards Hala Bedi. These people wanted to continue working, but they did not feel comfortable within the closed, sectarian political structures of the time: Trotskyists, Maoists, *Abertzales*, etc. Alongside this amalgamation of people, there were people from other struggles: the recently formed anti-militarist movements, or the anti-nuclear movements.

In the opinion of Natxo Cicatriz, one of the emblematic groups of RRV, 'Hala Bedi, at the beginning, was the *baska* (gang) of the moment, a mix of nearly all people who were in any way revolutionary, Sandinist, *porreros* (stoners), there was a mix of *baskilla* (a crew formed by different gangs) you know? We were the product of the times we found ourselves in: a bit hippy, a bit revolutionary.' (Espinosa and López, 1993: 75)

Txema Ramirez de la Piscina also supports the same idea:

One of the keys which can help us to interpret these movements – radios and local magazines is the strength of the social movements on which they are built. These associations didn't emerge from nothing. The voluntary work of tens of supporters and militants was and is behind them, volunteers who defended a wide variety of causes which went, for example, from antimilitarism to the defence of the normalisation of the Basque language. Thanks only to that, it is possible to understand the magnitude of these phenomena. (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 320)

Along the same lines, one of the people we interviewed, Jon, Hala Bedi collaborator, 3Kortxea programme host and member of the music library, defines the radio in this way: 'Hala Bedi is an association of colleagues who do much more than radio. We are people who are full of curiosity, are concerned and who have a lot to say. We are not happy with what there is or what they give us.'

Speaking freely

Free radio as a space for freedom of speech – in contrast with the control exerted by the conventional media – has been another of the key ideas widely reported in the interviews. So, for Unai, from the programme *No Te Salves* from Hala Bedi radio:

Hala Bedi is an important, necessary medium because it provides a space, that doesn't exist in other conventional media, where social movements and other different collectives can emit their messages in an unbiased way. It is a space of and for the people.

Interviewing Salama, from the programme *Radio Balautad* from Hala Bedi radio, he stressed the importance of the free media, in contrast with conventional media which he considered to be controlled and politicised:

The free media such as Hala Bedi Irratia are necessary because they offer a real alternative for free expression, because the common media are controlled and have their political biases. Free communication allows people to express what they want freely, without control. This is very important because the tendency is to silence our problems due to political interests.

So, in relation to the importance and mission of the free media, the interviewee stresses that he thinks their existence is essential: 'free and self-managed media are fundamental pillars on the path to conceiving a more human, fair and desirable society.'

Amaia, Hala Bedi collaborator, presenter and writer of the programme *Suelta la Olla*, reiterates this vision and mission, and the connection with social movements:

Free communication is essential to create an alternative social fabric, with commitments to social justice and solidarity because we live in a mediated world. The alternative media are a tool to encourage the coming together of social movements and giving value to their voice.

When we asked her to define the radio in one word she said, 'Hala Bedi is a reality. It is alternative communication! It is opening up a space on the waves where social movements are the protagonists, where the norms of a broken society do not rule. It is a space in which different voices and people express themselves freely.'

Everybody can have a programme in Hala Bedi Irratia:

Normally all proposals are admitted except those which go directly against the philosophy of the station, like for example, formula-radio programmes because they understand that these kinds of programmes correspond to commercial radio stations. (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 307)

In fact, free radio is not free from political and ideological direction: stations are involved in social movements, and they reject sexist, racist, homophobic and fascist messages. And free radio stations have not been spared, as we will see later, the political tensions that shook the Basque Country.

Clamour of voices: A change is coming

At the beginning, as happened with the youth movement and punk, the pro-independence left did not approve of the revitalising nature of Hala Bedi. There was a bit of everything: cooperation, but also serious problems. On some occasions, with in the midst of fierce dialectical

disagreements, it nearly all broke down (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013). Around 1986, there were many discussions about reporting methods. Ultimately, those tended towards introducing change, without renouncing the radio's specific style: more informal than official or conventional radio stations, but leaving behind the gratuitous insults. Ultimately, this change of style and the act of defining the type of radio that they wanted was simply a reflection of the changes that were taking place in society (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013). The more radical elements, for many reasons, went through a significant change during that period of the 1980s. They had to adapt to new times: a new generation had arrived which came from a different world and which did not want to work within the closed doctrines typifying the beginning. This lack of agreement was patently obvious in cultural, aesthetic and musical terms. The perspective of some young people at the time was very clear, in the words of Elo, a former member of Hala Bedi: 'We were fed up with singer-songwriters, they were boring. Also, we were looking for things that were outside the official and religious *fiestas*.' (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013). They felt they had to renew the movement, to do happy and fun things, to invent another way to have a good time. It couldn't, for them, be a case of spending all the time waiting for independence or a revolution. This was the youth movement of the time's mentality: their demand for irreverence, immediacy and parties, as we have described in context: 'We are going to do something that does something for us: something that is fun, something that changes the day-to-day things.' (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013).

Rocking the radio

In 1987 Hala Bedi organised a concert with the following groups: Kortatu, La Polla Records, Vómito and Quemando Ruedas. The rough-cut recording of this concert was a huge hit among the youth, it went beyond the mere act of fundraising. The so-called Rock Radical Vasco was tremendously important for the radio station. The radio gave an opportunity to groups which had no other space, and to the youth who had never heard music of this type that they could listen to. The relationship between the radio and music was crucial, both for organising concerts as well as for disseminating music (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013). In this way, Jon, Hala Bedi collaborator, from the programme 3Kortxea and the music library, highlights that, 'In Hala Bedi you are free to put on whatever music you want. Styles that didn't fit with commercial radio stations, unknown, local, *maketa* (demo) group...'

To resist is to win

The free radio movement that developed though the 1980s endured its most difficult years at the end of the decade. This decline was something that all countercultural movements in Euskal Herria (Basque Country) suffered. There are a number of reasons to explain this decline: repression, the movements' own internal dynamics, inertia, the lack of new volunteers to take over roles, and as people started to settle down (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013). From then on new people started to join the radio stations, arriving from different places. As a result, an interesting time commenced. A very diverse mix of people got together and, from this diversity, managed to agree on basic ideas for the Hala Bedi project: what to broadcast, what to not, how to function, and so on. In achieving this, many problems were discussed in as many debates as were needed to solve them, little by little. During those years some very interesting initiatives emerged throughout the city, some created within the radio environment, other with strong links to it. The magazine *Resiste*, the alternative information agency Tas-Tas and the *Gaztetxe* are just some examples of this (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013). In 1988 the radio suffered a shutdown, police surveillance and various acts of sabotage. The police, with warrant in hand, entered into the radio station's premises and seized all the equipment. Off the back of the attack everyone mobilised straight away. In a month Hala Bedi was back

on the air. They had 'a lot of problems with governors, especially in the first years and as a result of those they suffered five closures, in 1983, 1984, 1985, 1988 and 1990' (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 316). Although a number of shutdowns took place at Euskal Herria, this one and the shutdown of Eguzki Irratia from Iruñea were the most significant (Eguzki Irratia, 2016).

In Eguzki Irratia, in 1988 the first news programmes were launched in the context of the first visit from the Spanish King. There was brutal repression on the streets and Eguzki Irratia, faced with the impossibility of protesting there, became the only media to protest. This led to it being shut down and then being taken to the High Court accused of slander against the King, in which the prosecution demanded seven years of prison for a presenter who was later absolved of all charges (Eguzki Irratia, 2016). In 1992 Eguzki Irratia suffered another shutdown in the context of the first general strike called by the Basque nationalist unions *Euski Langileen Alkartasuna* (ELA) and *Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak* (LAB). The shutdowns were intended to interrupt the radio's rhythm and prevent the continued growth of the project. The best response the radio station felt was to get back on the air as soon as possible. The result was that the whole project was bolstered and colleagues at Eguzki Irratia became more convinced than ever that they were going in the right direction. This was the last time Eguzki Irratia radio was shut down (Eguzki Irratia, 2016).

Reinventing the radio: self-financing and self-management

Throughout its journey, as with any social or popular movement, Hala Bedi had obtained income directly from the people. Consequently, fundraisers, stickers, sale of materials, *txosnas* (bars where regional *fiestas* are held in the Basque Country), or programme fees have always been a source of income (Santos, 1999). At the beginning of the 1990s the membership programme was reaffirmed, which was to have a positive influence on the radio's finances. Having members ensured that free radio stations could operate sustainable budgets. Although at the beginning there were only tens of members, they mapped out the future for the radio (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013).

Eguzki Irratia suffered a crisis at the beginning of the 2000s, with the prohibition of *txosnas* in Iruñea. This, together with a change of location, left the radio without any funding sources. As the response to the council's aggressive action of closing the *txosnas*, a massively attended festival was organised with the motto '*A la mierda!*' (Go to hell!), with the groups Tijuana in Blue, Gari, Betagarri and Selektah Kolektiboa. This gave Eguzki Irratia the energy and funding to start the project up again. The first few years were very hard, with few bespoke programmes and a lot of music. The station also committed to a membership system to get a securer grip on logistics and infrastructure. In 2006, they came back with another type of project, which, thanks to new technologies, allowed for another mode of broadcasting. Now the membership base (*eguzkides*) supports the radio economically and guarantees stability for this new phase for the radio (Eguzki Irratia, 2016). Asier, member of the radio slots board for Hala Bedi, confirms that the station rejected commercial advertising:

In Hala Bedi we have no commercial advertising. We have slots which are intended to spread news of initiatives or transmit messages for the different collectives which come to us. These slots may not publicise private or personal interests, we do not do commercial advertising.

And Bego, Hala Bedi member and listener, defends the principle of self-management and financial independence as key to the ethos of the radio: 'Self-management is a difficult path, with many obstacles, but it is a position that can and should ensure financial independence, freedom of expression, plurality and diversity and participation.'

Beyond resistance: committing to stability through quality

In Eguzki Irratia, with the passing of time, a space for reflection about the need for better quality, more preparation and more seriousness opened up. The way the radio had been operating had led to a certain marginality, which is not what the project had intended. The objective of the project was to fight misinformation and the manipulation that occurs in other media. To do this the importance of offering a quality product was recognised (Santos, 1999). After many debates the conclusion was reached that the project would not move forward if measures weren't taken to guarantee a product of a minimum quality. At that time a concern to define counter-information emerged, and many approaches were developed. Also, instruments to work on the subject of alternative information were created. The News Agency Tas-Tas was created, in which Eguzki Irratia participated (Eguzki Irratia, 2016).

Hala Bedi also committed to programming of a similar quality to that of commercial radio stations. They professionalised the technical aspects of their output, achieving better sound quality. The aim to reach ever wider audiences made quality work necessary, because the radio had to be *audible* to reach people. Hala Bedi were clear that they didn't want a radio for a minority, and that the objective was to transmit messages that were harsh but true, with as wide as reach as possible. To do this, they needed an infrastructure like those of commercial radio stations, and, in order to maintain it, stability (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013).

The most important hours –prime time- are occupied by magazine shows:

They are the 'flagships' of the station. 'Suelta la olla' is the most popular programme. It's in Spanish and according to the figures given by the station it has achieved 5,000 listeners. 'Zebrabidea' is the afternoon magazine in Basque. The principal managers of these programmes have been working disinterestedly for years. Apart from these magazines, there are two kinds of programmes defined by their authors: programmes promoted by collectives (in favour of or against a specific issue) and programmes made by private individuals. (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 317)

And so, at the beginning of the 1990s, in each town there was an attempt to stabilise the free radio stations to compete with other radio stations. The radio started to grow, little by little. Hala Bedi, being a social movement, shifted to being a leftist, independent, assembly-based and financially self-managed media platform; in short, media that wanted to reflect the struggle of social movements. From then on, and until now, there has been a kind of balance amongst those who keep the radio station going. In recent years, the most important development has been the new location of the station, which has offered many possibilities to the collective. Around 90 people work every week on the programmes or other tasks, making sure that the new infrastructures run smoothly (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013).

Also according to Txema Ramirez de la Piscina (2010: 320), there are four causes that help us to explain the continuation of Hala Bedi Irratia over more than 25 years: 'the evolution experimented by the project, its close relationship with social movements (specifically with the *Gaztetxe*), its broad-minded functioning and its connection with the Basque culture'. Normally pirate and free stations do not appear in the figures produced by the firms specialized in measuring media audiences. In fact, the audience has never been the goal of free radio stations:

'Our main goal' – say the current managers of the station – 'is not necessarily to get a bigger audience. Our principal objective is to extend our influence area to more and more important social networks, sectors close to our communicative project. (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 318)

However, both Hala Bedi and Eguzki appear in the ranking done by CIES (a prestigious Opinion and Market Research firm which operates in the Basque Country). It is true that these audiences have always been very modest if we compare it with other stations, but 'in any case, its share is remarkable taking into account that we are speaking about a non-professional station that doesn't have any income from advertising or official institutions' (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 318). The next graph shows the audience of Hala Bedi Irratia (HBI), measured by CIES, from its birth until 2008 in thousands of listeners. The total data that appears in the graph is the average of all listeners during the week at all hours. 'According to the data produced by the current representatives of the station, the 'flagship' of Hala Bedi today "Suelta la olla" could have, at its height, 5,000 listeners' (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 318).

Another graph below shows the audience of both Hala Bedi (see **Figure 2**) and Eguzki (measured by CIES) from 2008 to 2014 in thousands of listeners (see **Figure 3**).

In any case, beyond the audience data, which have never been a goal, there are other elements that indicate the social relevance of these free radios:

In the last few years, there have been some important landmarks, especially during 2008: on 11th October, for example, approximately 10,000 people met on the streets of the Medieval Part of Gasteiz to celebrate jointly the 20th and 25th anniversary of the Gaztetxe and of Hala Bedi Irratia respectively. The slogan was 'Piztu Gasteiz. Okupa tu lugar' ('Wake up Gasteiz. Occupy your place').

It was a very well attended and popular day in different areas and with a lot of concerts, performances and cultural activities for all kind of spectators (children, young people and adults) in a very jovial atmosphere, favoured by spectacular good weather. To get an idea of the success achieved on that day, it suffices to say that the organisers sold all their tickets – 700 – for the lunch which took place in the open air. It was a very big fiesta in a very captivating ambience. Coinciding with that day, the highest institutional representative of the Department of Culture in the province, Lorena Iz.

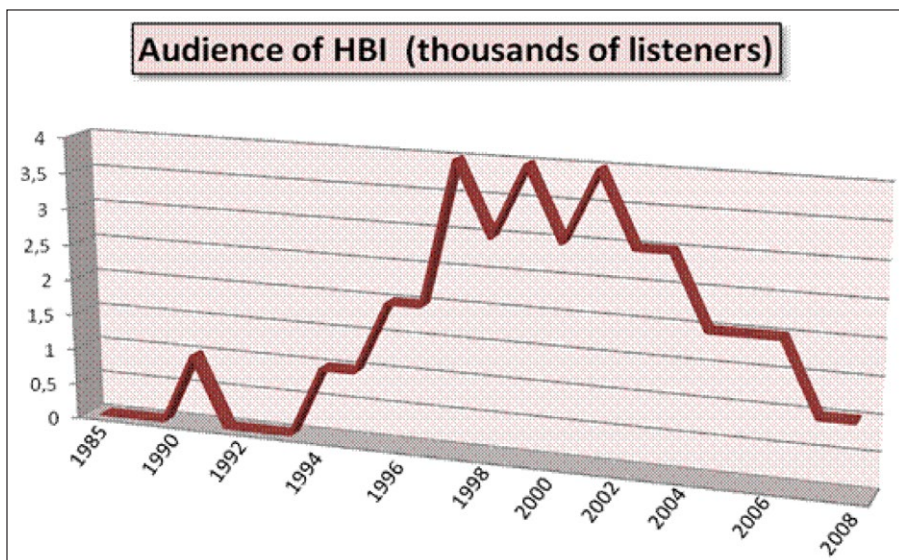


Figure 2: Source: Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 319.

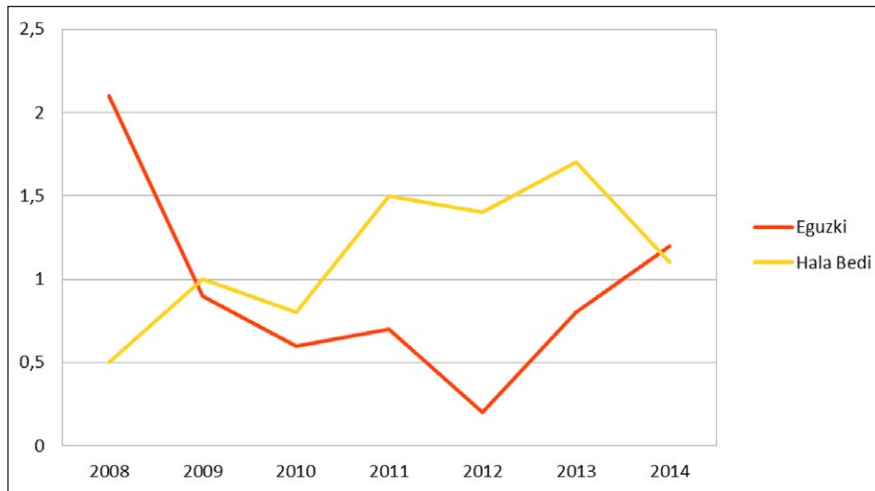


Figure 3: Source: Salces, 2016 (completed by the authors).

de la Calle, praised 'the dynamism of these collectives and the important work done by them in favour of culture'. (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 318)

In fact, the real importance of these free radios exceeds their theoretical 1000 listeners. Txema Ramirez de la Piscina gives another example:

In 2005, the managers of Hala Bedi Irratia thought that in order to alert the population about the dangers of nuclear power, it would be interesting to broadcast a false news item (classic guerrilla-communication action) informing about an important nuclear leak at the plant of Santa Maria de Garoña which is 45 km away from Vitoria-Gasteiz. That joke was very similar to the famous programme 'The War of the Worlds' made by Orson Welles on CBS in 1938, which collapsed the streets of New York with a crowd of anxious people who thought that the Martians were really invading the Earth.

After reporting the false news item, a lot of people began calling commercial stations demanding the confirmation of the report. The telephone-switchboards of the principal radio stations were collapsed by calls from people who believed the joke. Even the main public swimming-pools of the city located in Gamarra were evacuated by the authorities to avoid fatal consequences. So, we can say that in spite of HBI not having an important audience, its relative presence is more relevant than its data shows. (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 319)

Those at Hala Bedi Irratia expect to 'continue progressing, improving their quality, extending their social influence and preserving their identity and independence; that means continuing to be non-dependent on official grants' (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 319).

Free radio network and cooperation: Arrosa Sarea

The Arrosa project was born in 2001. From the beginning, a number of radio stations from all around the Basque Country were involved: free or community radio, local radio and radio in Euskara (Basque). The main objectives were to promote and strengthen cooperation between small radio stations, exchange resources and to encourage communication in Euskara.

Thanks to Arrosa, more programmes were increasingly being exchanged. Ties between the other radio stations in the network became closer, which would lead in the future to joint production of programmes (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013):

That is why we bet on a radio model that in its organization and scope surpasses the strictly local framework to occupy a wider space, in our case Alava territory (historical territory of the Basque Country), a space that allows a greater profitability of the effort made and at the same time that feeds the internal needs of the collective. And this is why, as a result, we are committed to working in a network with the rest of the Basque Country stations that develop their work under parameters similar to ours, sharing techniques, programmes and resources, creating a common network that is extended throughout the country, jumping boundaries and creating experiences. (Uriarte, 2001: 177)

However, the experience accumulated over recent years had clearly demonstrated to those at the radio that they had to go beyond the borders of Basque Country. Therefore, intending to expand the collaboration beyond our borders, in March 2012 Hala Bedi Irratia joined the AMARC (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters). Thanks to their relationship with them, Hala Bedi have realised that community radio stations, notwithstanding their location all over the world, share a clear discourse about broadcasting rights (Saenz de Argandoña, 2013).

Speaking in Basque

Regarding the role of the Basque language, Eguzki Irratia has always tried to offer half of its programmes in Basque. They have believed in the importance of promoting its use and dissemination. It is not easy for Eguzki Irratia to produce these programmes in Basque. However, thanks to Arrosa, the Basque Country free radio network, these slots can be filled (Eguzki, 2016). In the case of Hala Bedi Irratia, broadcasting programmes in Basque has always been an objective as, 'The proportion has been changing in favour of Basque in the last few years' (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010).

In 2014, broadcasting on a second frequency started, this time completely in Basque. While Hala Bedi Bat (1) broadcasts bilingually, Hala Bedi Bi (2) broadcasts solely in Basque, being the only free radio station in the province of Araba to broadcast entirely in the language.

Closing tune

The key ideas that we have sourced from the testimonies and materials produced by the members of the free radio stations Hala Bedi Irratia and Eguzki Irratia, contextualised and combined with our context analysis and secondary sources, have helped us to arrive at five basic conclusions.

Revolution of society and culture

The case of the Basque Country particularly shows that the emergence and development of free radio does not occur in a sociopolitical and cultural vacuum. 'In the specific sociopolitical environment that took place during the 80s, the Basque Country was an important laboratory of Alternative Media experiences' (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 320). In fact, it is the prolonged unfolding of an antagonistic and countercultural humus, which provides a context propitious to the proliferation of free radio stations. Their own cultural definition (transgressive and irreverent), musical and linguistic aesthetics, and funding present an account of a radical culture that crystallised in the Basque context. These also reflect conflicts that run through this culture, both internal and external.

Such elements also explain the continuation of a number of free radios over more than 25 years: 'the evolution experimented by the project, its close relationship with social movements, its broad-minded functioning and its connection with the Basque culture' (Ramirez de la Piscina, 2010: 320). And it is also the national conflict, and the character of the popular mass movement of Basque Country's nationalisms, which develops cultural and political Basque counter-structures, a key factor that promotes alternative communication. In a general sense, Ramon Zallo underlines:

It is the political responses that generated the collective consciousness of cultural and national identity, of community with the right to live as such, and have saved that part of cultural identity. The thrust of the community and of its civil society have maintained a level of mobilization and cultural voluntarism that, today, in the present young parents have kept it alight for transmission through generations. (Zallo, 2013: 232)

Such changes in context have occurred in parallel with the transformations that have taken place in free radio: in parallel with the weakening of an antagonistic radical culture, these free radio stations have reinvented themselves in the light of other models.

Members and self-financing

Concerning the financing of their activities these radio stations have developed a system of members and partners who economically sustain the radio. Throughout the evolution of the most important Basque free radio stations a commitment to stability and quality has stood out. Membership system and fees have been shown to be key in this regard, complemented by initial funding avenues such as the *txoznas* during *fiestas*.

Free radio as a social movement

The way in which free radio stations function – based on a collective, autonomous model – encourages the communicative infrastructure of the radio itself and supports the people involved such that it – and they – can be considered as a political agent or agents in their own right. Free radio thus takes shape as a hybrid: social movement and alternative media.

In this case study of Basque radio stations, reiterated calls to the mission of the radio as a spokesperson for social movements is combined with the radio's explicit vision of itself as a social movement.

The self-communication of before: create the media and the message

As stated by Castells (2009, 2012), mass self-communication is a tool that can be useful and effective for social movements. However, this phenomenon is not radically new. In fact, in this article we can see experiences of alternative communication in the Basque case, which were and still are lively and rich. Free radio stations in particular have been paradigms of alternative communication, allowing people to organise their own symbolic and communicative spaces. It could even be said that in the Basque context, mass self-communication already existed, or at least the intention was there.

But there is also something specific to these forms of mass self-communication. The reiterated reflection and denouncement of the political filters that exist in the conventional media results in the counter-construction of this alternative media, which is what free radio does: a 'Do it yourself'. This is an act of mass self-communication and self-construction, in which both the media and the message are constructed in a collective and interlinked way.

Self-communication today: spread the message via the media of others

The development of ICT enables messages to have more massive, more global reach. The absence of certain filters on the internet previously imposed by major mass media organisations allow the opening of new communication channels to express other viewpoints on social reality. In this context, ACAPs (Audiovisual Cultural Artifacts of Protest) use these new channels and are configured as new forms of protest or as tactical innovations (Letamendia, Del Amo, and Diaux, 2014). This means that nowadays the construction of media infrastructures is no longer so necessary for social movements; they can use the media of 'others' (communicative companies) in a more accessible way. The main characteristic of ICT – based mass self-communication today is that it may potentially be more massive. But there is also another characteristic, in contrast with the free radio model: that such self-communication can construct the message but not the media, they use 'other people's' digital media. These contemporary digital media may be more free than classic media (TV, radio, press), but they still have a determined political economy – orchestrated by large technological and communications companies – which does not fully escape mercantilist logic.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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