

By any means: Paths to sustainability for Argentina's community radio stations

Pablo Fisher*

Centro de Producciones Radiofónicas (CPR-CEPPAS), Argentina

Abstract

During 2016 and 2017 the Centro de Producciones Radiofónicas (CPR-CEPPAS) conducted a research project on the ways 11 community radio stations in Argentina generate and manage financial resources. We selected a comprehensive sample with different types of community radio stations and used UNESCO's Media Development Indicators as a starting point. The main goal of the investigation was to deepen our knowledge about the relationship between community radio stations and the market, taking into account work, financial planning and management. We approached the radio stations with the understanding that their sustainability could be measured on multiple levels, not only financially, but also by putting special attention to the economic aspect of sustainability. We draw regularities, identified strengths and weaknesses, and pointed out creative fundraising methods. Our main conclusion is that the multiplicity and diversity of funding sources is a distinctive element of the definition of community radio.

Keywords

Community radio, sustainability, financing, funding, media development, fundraising

Introduction

Throughout 2017, the Centre for Radio Productions (CPR-CEPPAS) investigated a field with which we are familiar yet – at the same time – we had so far overlooked to do in detail: the financing of community radio stations. We wanted to respond to questions such as: how do community radio stations support themselves economically? How do they pursue projects when financial needs are always an issue? What strategies have they developed over the years to remain sustainable, in some cases for decades? With support from UNESCO, through its International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), we have taken on this study, which achieved its first goal with the publication of a book (in Spanish): 'Como sea - Sostenibilidad económico-administrativa en radios comunitarias de Argentina' (Ediciones del Jinete Insomne, August 2017).

We began the investigation with some certainties that we had from our understanding of the realities facing community radio stations, both in Argentina and throughout Latin America, having worked with them in several projects over the years.¹ As the investigation advanced, we discovered new problems and questions based on the radio broadcasters' own experiences in sustainability. At the same time, we considered what tools we could provide to help improve often difficult financial situations. We thought about how many community radio stations could use the experiences, ideas, and methods of other broadcasters, and also about how to encourage more exchanges and cooperation, and to connect the experiences of radio stations that, despite their potential distance in geographical or institutional terms, have large and diversified organisational models. Some of them are smaller than others, and with simple structures, but equally effective –

and can mutually benefit from understanding the distinct and varied ways to achieve economic sustainability.

For this we tried, from a theoretical and methodological perspective, to demarcate one category of sustainability and distinguish it from others. We refer here to Economic-Administrative Sustainability (EAS) as the understanding of how radio stations generate income, how they are organised, how they seek different sources of funding, and who they interact with for the sources of funding.

We also refer to social radio stations or broadcasters. These includes community, alternative, popular and many other broadcasters that are difficult to define. We are talking about all non-profit radio stations that throughout history were defined by different theoretical models or by the context in which they emerged. In this investigation we do not distinguish between community and social radio stations, with both referring to the same big family of radio experiences:

the so-called community, alternative, popular, free, peasant-farmer, local, counter-hegemonic, and neighbourhood radio stations, among others ... Each of these types of radio has its own specifics, but they share a broad vision of communication, which is diametrically opposed to that of the mass media. That is why we call them social radio stations as a contrast to commercial radio stations (Godinez Galay, 2011).

Our idea was not to complete a statistical or exhaustive national study. Based on our experience, we selected radio stations that face diverse realities: those from big and small cities; those with a large or simple organisational structure; young broadcasters and those with a long history; those forming part of a social, cultural, or political organisation and those which are an organisation in themselves. We chose certain experiences, targeting the qualitative over the quantitative, to gain a deep understanding of each experience, identifying common themes with good practices that could serve all social radio stations, wherever they may be.

We interviewed 11 social radio stations: Ahijuna (Quilmes, Buenos Aires), Alas (El Bolsón, Río Negro), Barriletes (Paraná, Entre Ríos), De La Azotea (Mar del Plata, Buenos Aires), Frecuencia Zero (Ciudad de Buenos Aires), La Colectiva (Ciudad de Buenos Aires), La Cultural (Paraná, Entre Ríos), La Tribu (Ciudad de Buenos Aires), La Quinta Pata (Córdoba, Córdoba), Tierra Campesina (Jocolí, Mendoza), Sur (Ciudad Buenos Aires). And we added an interview with an online radio station, Colmena (Ciudad de Buenos Aires), to compare their experiences, concerns, and problems.

In addition, to examine the role of the state with respect to these radio stations, we analysed – in the book on which this publication is based (Binder, Fisher & Godinez Galay, 2017)² – public policies in support of community media, and examined how they feature in the distribution of government advertising, a very important source of financing for both social and commercial radio stations in Argentina. In the book we also analysed the conduct of the state regarding these issues, while also questioning to what extent the role of the public administration is fundamental – or not – for the sustainability of community media. The book includes a series of interviews with experts³ in media, public policy, government advertising, and community radio stations: Agustín Espada (Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, UNQ), Martín Becerra (Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, UNQ y Universidad de Buenos Aires, UBA), Claudio Vívori (Argentina's Audience Advocate's Office), and Sofía Loviseck (América Profunda, NGO) which discuss sustainability in the sector.

Defining concepts for a road map

Though our goal is to study social radio stations, we also aim to define sustainability for all other radio broadcasters – whether included in our investigation or not – that have social, political, and cultural objectives that differ from commercial radio and are not part of public media. In our

interviews, we primarily tackle the subject in economic-administrative terms, but we do not ignore all the other forms of sustainability for radio – the political, social, institutional, cultural – in line with different theoretical models developed over time (AMARC, 2009; Gumucio Dagrón, 2011; Lamas & Tordini, 2007).

With this in mind, we understand the broad concept of sustainability as the capacity of radio stations to be self-sufficient and balanced over time in economic, administrative, political, communicational and cultural terms, acknowledging also that this is a multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon. Though we wish to understand radio from an economic perspective, we believe that to fully grasp the phenomenon we cannot separate it from other dimensions such as the political or communicational. Following ALER (Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica/Latin American Association of Radiophonic Education) and AMARC's (the French acronym of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters) definition, 'the sustainability of a radio organisation is its capacity to give its radio initiative continuity' (2008: 6).

For our investigation we identified, structured, and ordered three pillars of sustainability: the economic-administrative, the political, and the communicational. We do not think of these categories as a rigid taxonomy – that they are mutually exclusive – but rather as overlapping perspectives from which we can analyse sustainability. In other words, we analyse as a whole the capacity of radio stations to sustain their activities in a balanced manner over time.

Economic-Administrative Sustainability (EAS)

This category is centred on the resources a radio station has as its means to keep functioning. Apart from available cash and funds, these can include infrastructure, workforce and administration. They are all the assets and administrative processes required to function in a stable condition: income generation (advertising, subsidies, productive projects); the place of work; legal situation (in terms of operationality and licensing regulations); budget status and accounting; work conditions for members of the radio; and equipment management. We began the investigation with the intention of finding out the mechanisms through which radio stations are financed: did they apply for subsidies, hold fundraising events, or charge for advertising? In the existing literature about community radio there seems to be a certain taboo regarding these matters. It is, paradoxically, as though being a political initiative impedes any debate about something as simple as finding the money to pay for the electricity required to operate the radio station itself.

Economic-Administrative Sustainability (EAS) is also related to team management, because ultimately people are needed to produce radio. The coordination of different groups is one of the biggest challenges, especially when working in unstable conditions. How do community broadcasters manage their commitment to being participative? How do they encourage it? And, thinking in economic terms, how can they capitalise on the time invested training personnel? The radio stations we interviewed explained how they would often invest resources in training people who would then leave if they found a job elsewhere. Are community radio stations only participative spaces when there are people available with free time or are they able to 'make some time'? What is the balance between the activist spirit and the need to generate income? For how long can ethical considerations sustain participation when economic needs become urgent? The time dedicated by those who participate in community radio is one of the most critical resources that broadcasters should consider in terms of economic-administrative sustainability.

Political sustainability

This is another pillar of sustainability and is based on the core values underpinning the radio project and how they are manifest in daily practice. If the core belief is to be fully participative, how is this achieved in the programming schedule? And if maintaining a horizontal hierarchy is a fundamental value of the organisation, how will this be reflected in the way the radio station is

managed? Some radio stations have clear political values that have been debated and agreed upon – they have created spaces for ongoing discussion or drawn up a document outlining their stance on certain subjects. Others, perhaps born in the heat of a specific context, have not yet gone through the process of externalising or codifying their vision of the world and have, in fact, been intuitively learning what that is as they develop.

We can also include in this category the organisational mechanisms at the radio station: how many people participate and in what capacity, what their decision-making bodies look like, what areas there are for community participation, whether they know their audience, how they interact with other radio stations, and whether they participate in provincial, national, or regional media networks. Evidently, there are as many organisation models as there are radio stations. But in terms of sustainability we are interested in which models guarantee – or at least support – politically-balanced radio stations.

Communicational sustainability

This dimension refers specifically to the radio station's communicational proposal, not just in political or cultural terms but also its aesthetics. As with political sustainability, there are values that radio organisations believe should be reflected, or not, in their programming. Because, even though a community radio station is much more than just what is transmitted on air, it is ultimately providing radio content to an audience. Gumucio Dagrón (2011) believes that the programme content is the expression of these components, in reference to the three dimensions of sustainability that he identifies (economic, institutional and social). However, though we agree with this perspective, we believe that as a media outlet, communicational sustainability is central to radio and as such warrants a separate category.

The radio station must have a specific plan for its content and beyond the collective organisation's general initiative. Some issues we consider when evaluating a radio station's communications values include the degree of participation by the local community, the use of inclusive language and gender perspectives in radio production and presenting, as well as the pluralism of voices in news coverage. But we should also pay attention to the aesthetics: is it innovative and creative radio? Does it sound the same as all the others? Is there a difference in listening to a commercial radio station or a community broadcaster? Should social radio stations experiment with audio to try to transmit their values? Aesthetically pleasing programming is indeed fundamental for the sustainability of a radio project.

Methodological Notes

While we highlighted economic-administrative sustainability (EAS) to examine the ways in which radio stations are self-sufficient, our extensive interviews with radio broadcasters also explored other forms of sustainability. From the very start of this journey, when hearing the first testimonies, it became clear that even those broadcasters that had not clearly defined sustainability as something exclusively related to economic and financial matters had become self-sufficient. Notwithstanding difficulties that social radio stations always face in securing funding, paying salaries and taxes, and upgrading equipment or infrastructure, we found that radio projects – those included in this investigation and others that are not but are well known within the sector – continue regardless. They focus on other forms of sustainability to keep the radio operating and, above all, keep growing over time, facing innumerable difficulties but supporting themselves despite their financial situation.

These social radio stations are usually sustained over time because of the durability of their communicational, political or socio-cultural initiatives. The spirit of activism among their members and their role in the community are key. Achieving full economic sustainability often takes time, but the radio stations function regardless: with fragile administrations, scarce financial

resources and an unstable economic situation, they are driven by other types of sustainability. Our investigation focused on the experiences of social radio stations regarding money, funds and credit; with administration, projects and planning; with banks and the state. We wanted to find out how these radio stations were financially managed with what they have and the context they operate in.

We view the economic affairs of a social radio station as an element that, given its unavoidable significance, should be well planned and delivering positive results. That radio stations should actively manage the issue, finding the best solutions and keeping its finances in mind when developing ideas. We question some hypotheses that suggest that simple activism and ethics are enough to sustain an ideal and develop a radio initiative. It must not be forgotten that material resources are also necessary and that to consider the simple pleasure of participating as enough reward for endeavour – as has always been the case in many social radio stations – is to undermine workers.

Our investigation lays out diverse objectives: to expose the contradictory nature of social radio stations when it comes to economic matters; to address our own bias and concerns over the subject; to chart the different forms of sustainability for social radio stations; to analyse diverse models and experiences; and to scrutinise public policies and question the responsibility of the state. We also hope to contribute to this field, be it the codification of knowledge that already exists, the discovery of new ideas, or proposing of new solutions and concepts. We hope this serves as a platform for ongoing studies into the subject, to keep pushing for the economic rights that correspond to these broadcasters, and to highlight the responsibility that lies with all of society.

The UNESCO Media Development Indicators

Given the many efforts to understand the processes of sustainability among community radio broadcasters, we used previous debates and existing consensus as triggers for this investigation. For example, we started with publications such as *Indicators to Assess Media Viability* (UNESCO 2015a) and *Community Media Sustainability: Strengthening Policies and Funding* (UNESCO, 2017) as benchmarks for theory and methodology. We decided to take the issues covered in the Media Development Indicators (MDIs) as a departure point for drawing up interview questions, though we also added our own angle. For example, we did not want to analyse the media market but rather understand how community radio stations see the market, what their relationship with it is like, and how they position themselves with respect to other media outlets.

The method we adopted was to ask the community radio broadcasters about all the dimensions included in the MDIs. And beyond listening to the reflections and conceptualisations that the interviewees made on the subject, during the exchange we encouraged broadcasters to reflect on their own experiences and ideas. In this way the interview could support the radio station by having its members think about these themes, to take an hour-long pause from the busy daily schedule and analyse how far they have come, consider new possibilities, accept errors, and develop other ideas.

Building a methodology on the go: a qualitative approach

When we began the investigation, we thought it was important not to focus too much on quantitative analysis. To obtain answers to our questions for chosen radio stations and to discuss sustainability with them, we decided it would be more interesting to concentrate efforts on qualitative research. Our aim was to extract a sample of the methods used by community radio stations to generate income and sustain their mission. We thought it would be more useful to describe and analyse the conduct of certain broadcasters rather than take a quantitative approach based on a statistical analysis of all radio stations, without being able to elaborate on the details

of each. As such, we preferred a case study based on concrete experiences and in-depth interviews.

Our main criteria for selecting broadcasters was diversity. We wanted to make sure we included community radio stations in both large cities and small towns; likewise we sought out broadcasters with a long history as well as newer arrivals; that there were radio stations organised as civil associations and others as cooperatives; that we spoke to members of all three main national networks (the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters – AMARC, the Argentine Forum for Community Radio Broadcasters – FARCO, and the National Network for Alternative Media – RNMA); that we included radio stations with different commercial approaches; that there was a mix of broadcasters that were more professional and others more rudimentary, and those with large and small audiences. Based on these criteria we selected 11 social radio broadcasters, which we do not hold up as a statistically representative sample of the sector. To this group we added one urban online radio station, to compare other practices, decisions and methods of sustainability. Here we expected to reveal major differences, but in the end found very few.

We chose to approach the radio stations with only semi-structured interviews. We had a path along which we wished to take each interview but left enough flexibility to allow them to express themselves fully and draw attention to the points they deemed most relevant. These types of interviews allow for a more personal exchange, creating a relaxed space in which the radio station representatives could feel comfortable in telling their story. Where possible, we conducted the interviews at the broadcasters' premises, again to encourage a more comfortable experience for the interviewee. This also gave us an opportunity to see each radio station – its installations, the way it operates – and ensured we caused minimal disruption to their activities. The interviews with broadcasters based in remote areas were conducted via VoIP (e.g. Skype) or email. In cases where the exchange had to be conducted in writing, we prepared questions based on the subjects we had addressed in previous face-to-face interviews, sending them by email and giving the interviewee the opportunity to return answers in writing or as a voice recording.

The analysis of the interviews consisted in finding common ground among the different experiences, whether agreements or disagreements, keeping in mind the specific context of each case. Do all community radio stations diversify their sources of income? What are the common methods? Do different broadcasters share similar criteria? Is there an exceptional case among the methods for generating income? Is there one experience that stands out for its approach the subject and why? What lessons can we take from each story? What do the broadcasters themselves think about these issues? Are there similarities within the sector?

After gathering all the bibliographical information and interview material, we identified similarities in the models of economic sustainability and drew some conclusions about the current situation. This allowed us to reflect on our research and write up some of the elements that exist in today's climate, as well as consider innovative ideas that could support the longevity of these community radio initiatives.

Economic-Administrative Sustainability of Social Radio Stations in Argentina: the radio stations and the indicators

During the investigation we reviewed the Media Development Indicators proposed by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2015a; UNESCO, 2017) in order to analyse the viability of community radio stations in Argentina, keeping in mind certain exceptions that we made in their application and in processing the results, and draw some conclusions, which are presented here.

The general environment in which social radio stations operate is not favourable for their economic-administrative sustainability, despite some positive changes over the years. Argentina is a relatively unstable economy, with structural cycles of crises like those of 1989 and 2001, for

example, which caused significant social instability, hyperinflation, high unemployment and capital flight. As such, if we only look at the country's macroeconomic climate we would find that there are few incentives to launch a social radio initiative that will be economically and administratively sustainable. On the other hand, radio has the comparative advantage of being a relatively accessible medium: it is not a paid service, listening devices are cheap and diverse (mobile phones, computers, stereos, radio receivers), and in Argentina there is a well-established radio culture.

A lack of effective legal recognition of social radio stations, and by extension limited support for the sector, remains a key problem. This is seen as a major obstacle by the broadcasters themselves, who draw a direct connection between legal recognition and access to financial resources.

In their relationship with the wider market, the social radio broadcasters are generally sceptical of commercial logics. They lack confidence in the market or view it as an uncomfortable place in which they must operate. They tend to form connections with small-scale economic actors, such as local businesses and Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs), on the one hand. On the other, they feel more comfortable when initiating reciprocal exchanges with what could be called an 'alternative market', as the country's recovered factories and businesses, cooperatives, and other social economic actors.

There are numerous barriers that social radio broadcasters face to enter the media market: legal difficulties, a lack of understanding of their role by the state, problems with the management of some organisations, challenges in securing income, a highly-concentrated media market, a radio spectrum that is saturated in urban areas, limited advertising, and a lack of clear rules when it comes to the distribution of government advertising, among others. However, in general terms, none of these factors are sufficiently discriminatory for social radio organisations to cease operations. We have identified three key elements that explain the specific nature of social radio: ethics – translated into 'activist spirit' – creativity, and resilience. Each radio station has a point of equilibrium between its ethical outlook and the financial requirements to operate without compromising its ideology, thereby creating an opening for income generation. In this way, Argentina's social radio stations survive even when they are barely able to cover their expenses.

Most social radio broadcasters have a model of economic-administrative sustainability based on diverse and multiple sources of income, obtained and administered by themselves. Depending on the context in which each project is run, some funding sources may be more common or accessible than others, but in all cases, broadcasters try to access as many as they can.

One of the most common shortcomings of social radio stations is a limited understanding of their audiences. There are few examples of broadcasters who have completed a study of their listeners, and, even though they consider themselves part of a community that they know well, there are no certainties over who is listening, when they tune in, or why they do so. Knowing the socio-demographic composition of the audience, as well as its cultural habits, would provide some useful information when designing a plan for economic-administrative sustainability.

A large majority of those who participate in social radio projects are removed from the general concept of a labour market and the classic notion of work. They do not consider themselves salaried workers in terms of economic dependency, though perhaps in terms of commitment. We view this as a developing feature of the ethical activism that these radio initiatives require: members do not participate as a typical employee in a regular job but because of what the radio stations signify and because they can develop their own experience and support the radio station's transformation. But this of course clashes with every person's need to generate income to live on and continue contributing to these projects. This problem is tackled in different ways, but in general members of social radio stations secure income from outside of the project, finding other jobs to cover their basic needs. If they receive any compensation from the

broadcaster (in the form of 'disbursements', 'incentives' or 'expenses'), they are typically considered symbolic. All the radio stations agreed that they would like more funds to distribute among their members. Those who participate in the project do so with the underlying tension of not being formal employees and therefore not being guaranteed the workers' rights that this would entail.

Overall, social radio broadcasters lack financial strength. They spend months in the red, are regularly 'putting out fires' as they go, and in the best cases secure the income necessary to cover all their costs. But this has not prevented them from expanding and developing a mature initiative, which in itself is an interesting and curious phenomenon. We understand that this is achieved in the way they tackle day-to-day tasks, based on ethical-economic models and using all kinds of strategies to make up for financial weaknesses. Of course, in financial terms this does not represent a stable path to sustainability. But it provides a general platform which has allowed numerous radio stations to continue broadcasting over many years. These stations have managed to build some stability despite their economic fragility. For this reason, they are continually seeking legitimate sources of income, using their creativity to develop new mechanisms, and petitioning the state for development policies, for tax breaks and for a fair distribution of government advertising.

Most social radio broadcasters include public funding as a possible source of financing; this is why a national law on government advertising with clear rules is necessary. These are funds that social radio stations count on, but it is the state that is usually failing to provide them. We have analysed the almost unique case of FOMECA,⁴ which is very useful for social radio stations. As for government advertising, at the time of closing this investigation (in 2018) a new law was under debate and if sanctioned would be the first time Argentina lays down clear rules at a national level so that government advertising ceases to be used as a leverage tool by the ruling government. We analysed the municipal Law of Neighbourhood Media in the City of Buenos Aires⁵ as a relatively successful measure, concluding that government advertising is always a mechanism for development, even among commercial media outlets. It is therefore legitimate to claim government advertising for social radio stations, no matter how small their audience. All the radio broadcasters are clear on this and, leaving aside their ideological views of the state, consider it a legitimate and necessary source of income.

There was agreement in all cases that the full regulation of broadcasters (with a licence) is a key mechanism to achieve economic-administrative sustainability. For a long time, the social role of these broadcasters was poorly understood by governments, who reacted with fear and tried to limit their expansion. The legal obstacles that were imposed became a barrier to sustainability and, in several countries in the region, continues.

With their own methods and approaches, most social radio broadcasters take the time to develop an annual budget. As they are typically small teams, they do not have separate commercial or administrative departments, but these responsibilities are delegated to specific members of the radio station. This is complemented with an assembly-based form of operating, in which decisions are made by consensus and with external support from specific experts for certain issues. In this way we find social radio broadcasters to be quite ordered, very transparent and with an appreciation of the need to be meticulous in these aspects, something that was not the case a few years ago.

There is still a need for more studies of social radio listeners. There are individual cases where studies have been conducted, but they are exceptions to the rule. Social radio broadcasters have a different type of relationship with the community in which they operate, but even allowing for that we believe it necessary to conduct audience surveys. They might be different to the typical research conducted by commercial media outlets, but they are still a necessary tool. This is without doubt fertile terrain for future investigations and initiatives.

Listening to the radios: the interviews and what we got from them

From the interviews conducted during the investigation, we obtained a series of answers resulting from the experience of community radio stations in terms of economic sustainability, which, organised into a series of topics, can give an overview of the broad knowledge of broadcasters in this field.

On the diversification of revenue sources: finding multiple and diverse sources of revenue is a common strategy among all social radio stations. This emerges from the experience of developing initiatives, in which they must navigate financial difficulties, as well as being a political decision not to depend on just once source of finance to maintain the radio station. In other words, they use interdependence to secure independence.

On planning and budgets: in recent years, social radio broadcasters have achieved high levels of professionalism and organisation when managing balances, budgets and plans. This has not been without difficulty, but among the radio stations we analysed we found a great deal of dedication, ample experience and a shared notion on the importance of clear and meticulous accounting.

On participation in the radio: in all social radio broadcasters, we found a notion of non-traditional labour as well as paid employees. Members' relationship with the project has more to do with ethical or activist motivations rather than economic reward. Those who participate in the project do not perceive themselves as employees, though they work hard. It is a characteristic of this type of media: the same people who manage are those who must partake in a wide range of daily tasks and so by the very definition of the initiative cannot exploit the workforce. But this also means fragile workers' rights, with the exact impact varied according to the level of institutionalisation of each initiative. It is therefore up to the state to include these participants, recognising their role as workers with particular circumstances.

On the role of those running technical operations: in general, social radios do not calculate an exact payment per hour of work for those who participate in the project, except for those people in charge of technical operations. This can cause tensions and concerns: why is this role considered remunerable while others are not, even though they may require the same number of hours work at the station? The broadcasters we interviewed explained that it was down to experience, though had their own doubts. In our view it is understandable given that the operator is the one who guarantees the radio stays on air, is often the face of the radio and is sometimes the only one physically present, especially at night or during weekends.

On the role of audiences: the social radio broadcasters have a fluctuating relationship with their listeners. They choose to call them by different names (for example 'radio participants') but in practice do not formalise the links that this new role could have for the broadcaster. Online interactions are increasing, but many radio stations still do not exploit these channels due to a lack of understanding, time, or people to take on the responsibility for it. All these factors that can influence the idea of strengthening links with listeners often have financial repercussions later when considering fundraising strategies – without these links some options are simply not feasible (e.g. fairs, parties, running a bar or cultural centre, workshops and raffles).

Few radio stations have attempted to receive direct and sustained support from the local community by forming a 'listeners club'. This speaks of the difficulties they have in spreading awareness of the social role of the broadcaster and translating this into economic support or even in community ownership of the station. This is a problem that social radio broadcasters continue to face and prompts us to again highlight the ongoing deficit in conducting audience studies.

On commercial advertising: receiving payments for broadcast adverts on air is a method that is still undeveloped for most social radio stations. Those that have developed mechanisms to do so, with team members responsible for dealing with advertisers and others in charge of

transmitting the adverts, do not maximise the revenues they could receive by dedicating more resources to the area. Other broadcasters do not see this as a strong source of financing, or they do not know how to tackle problems when dealing with local businesses – which admittedly often hold certain prejudices about how effective media advertising is. As a result, they frequently fail to properly address this very viable source of income, be it due to a lack of knowledge, organisation, or simply because of existing prejudices. It remains without doubt an area for social radio stations to explore, with significant possibilities for growth.

On the relationship with the market and services: the social radio stations are also driven by their political mission and socio-cultural role, placing less significance on their relative positioning in the market – that is, beyond the immediate surroundings of the project in urban areas or more suburban, peripheral or rural settings. As such, social radio stations have diverse relationships with the market – and some do not have one at all – typically getting involved in initiatives or projects that they feel more closely aligned with: small producers, social economic actors, collective organisations or cooperatives, and small businesses. They always find themselves ethically torn between these desirable actors and those of the traditional marketplace who are less suited for the broadcaster's vision but are nonetheless unavoidable. A key point in this area is the ethical consistency of these social radio stations, none of whom enter into commercial agreements with large or multinational companies.

On private funding and development cooperation: another main shortcoming of social radio broadcasters is their access to private sector funding, including loans (from banks or elsewhere) or international financing, to name two key examples. Limited access to bank loans is related, naturally, to the difficulties that arise when the state does not legally recognise the social radio stations. With this recognition, broadcasters would enjoy far more possibilities to take out bank loans, obtain a licence, and access other legal tools. At the same time, the social radio stations do not usually look favourably on bank loans as they imply taking on long-term debt. This could be related to the country's credit culture or the uncertainty over generating the income required to make repayments in the medium and long term.

We also noted a considerable deficit in the understanding of how to access funds from development cooperation instruments, though some radio stations have taken advantage of this option. This is something we could highlight as a path for social radio stations to explore.

On development funds and government advertising: most of the radio broadcasters we interviewed consider the state as another source of financing. They apply for available public funds and those with a larger administrative structure usually have the greatest capacity to utilise them. Many broadcasters also attempt to secure advertising from different levels of government (city, provincial, national). And even though there are some cases in which no attempt was made to obtain public funding due to political reasons, all broadcasters agree on the need for clear rules and a national law to regulate government advertising.

Conclusions: Towards an Ethical Model of Economic Sustainability

We have outlined our view that sustainability is not just measured in economic and administrative terms; the political component and to a lesser extent the communicational component are both vital, especially for media projects with a social development slant. We also understand that the financial aspects of an initiative are often subject to its political objectives. This multidimensional character of sustainability is the reason that financial difficulties alone are not sufficient to endanger a project. According to Amparo Cadavid (in ALER & AMARC; 2008: 16): 'if your broadcaster functions successfully over a period of time, provides a service for the community, is known by the public, and has an audience, that means it is sustainable'.

Social radio stations survive despite their weak revenues. But we must be careful with the message that 'community radios survive anyway', one often spread by the broadcasters

themselves, as this could serve to justify the lack of public policies to support them or the legal barriers that some countries place on receiving advertising or expanding their reach. It is important to be clear, including among the broadcasters themselves, that although social radio stations can survive despite their economic weaknesses, that does not mean this fragility should be intrinsic to the definition of social radio, nor that it is wrong that they should have abundant resources, nor that the state should neglect its responsibilities to the sector.

Each radio broadcaster finds a balance between its spirit of activism and its ability to secure funding; this ethical-economic equilibrium is the place where each individual project is ideologically comfortable with the search, acceptance and utilisation of financial resources. There is no universal model, with each broadcaster finding its balance based on multiple factors: the socio-political context, the broadcaster's location, the economic actors it deals with, its longevity, the number of members and listeners, their commitment to the project, and even the personalities of the people leading it.

It would be useful for all broadcasters to recognise this internal balance and work on it. This would avoid certain misunderstandings, internal conflicts, lost time and above all lost opportunities for financing. But how does a broadcaster arrive at its ethical-economic equilibrium? One way could be to draw up an internal 'ethical-economic code', though this could be an exhausting process if there is no clear plan. It would therefore be a good idea to dedicate time and energy – collectively running a workshop, with new methodologies – to arrive at a consensus. It is important that social radio stations are aware of their own equilibrium point. This implies accepting – even if reluctantly – that the economic-administrative component of sustainability is fundamental to the project and that the search for funding will allow them to develop other pillars of sustainability (political and communicational).

A new component in the definition of social radio

We have also reviewed how a community, alternative, or popular radio station is defined, and what distinct features characterise them as such. We have discussed participation, horizontal organisations, independence, the absence of profit-seeking, a counter-hegemonic agenda, an alternative focus, assembly models, the right to communication, open microphones, the capacity to intermedialise and interject, local work and community interests, having no geographical restrictions, and viewing the broadcaster as a social space. We grouped all the radio stations that include these elements within the broad definition of social radio. This has enabled us to summarise concepts, facilitate analysis and group projects that perhaps consider themselves to be more distant to one another than they really are.

However, the financial component does not appear in any of the definitions offered in theoretical references. After discovering the ways in which broadcasters generate income, one service we can provide through this investigation is to add this component to the definitions of social radio:

A social radio broadcaster (community, alternative, popular, local, etc) has multiple and diverse sources of funding:

- Multiple: in the sense that they do not sustain themselves with just one source of income. Firstly, because it is difficult to secure one source that can cover all of a broadcaster's costs, and secondly because this could threaten their independence and freedom to act – multiplicity is itself a strategy.
- Diverse: they implement distinct models and seek diverse sources of income. In general, they receive small amounts of revenue from many sources of all types, sometimes even creating new ones. They may rent spaces to third parties, use commercial advertising, government advertising, cooperation projects, subsidies, individual donations, sales of

merchandise (e.g. records, promotional material), offer services (e.g. radio production, training, investigations), run a bar or cultural centre and so on.

We believe it important that these elements are included in the definition of what constitutes a social radio broadcaster, even though it is a subject that remains neglected or taboo for the broadcasters themselves. It is a distinguishing feature from other types of broadcasters and speaks also of the resilience, resistance, adaptability and creativity of social radio stations. By considering multiple and diverse sources of funding as an essential element of the definition of social media we could avoid, for example, certain laws that exist in Brazil and Chile,⁶ and which define community media outlets, among other things, as those that cannot accept commercial advertising. This limits their ability to function, in the same way as other legislation that restricts the range of this type of media initiative: limiting the possibilities to obtain funds from commercial advertising.

The utility of adding this component as part of the definition of social radio can also be seen from an opposing viewpoint. An initiative that is sustained economically by one external source of revenue, even if it does not impact on the editorial line, appears more like a private entity or type of patronage, which at some point could affect its independence, its freedom of action, its essence as social radio and even its survival if that funding source is removed. One example of this could be the community radio stations set up and financed by the state of Venezuela.⁷ They can address matters of social interest and have a horizontal organisation structure, but being created and solely sustained by the state undermines their essence as community radio stations.

We conclude, therefore, that the economic-administrative sustainability of social radio broadcasters does not depend solely on the efforts of the radio initiatives themselves, but also requires a favourable environment of public policies that offer the necessary guarantees for them to sustain themselves over time. At the same time, radio broadcasters have the obligation to put financial matters on the table and adopt a clear position, precisely so that they do not undermine their own political and communicational sustainability.

References

- ALER/AMARC (2008) *Atrapa sueños. La sostenibilidad en las radios populares y comunitarias*. Buenos Aires: Ritmo Sur. Available at: http://www.vivalaradio.org/gestion-radios-comunitarias/PDFs/GES_organizacion_07atrapa-suenios.pdf.
- AMARC (2009) *Principios para un marco regulatorio democrático sobre radio y TV Comunitaria*. Available at: http://www.amarc.org/documents/14Principios_Legislacion_Radiodifusion_Comunitaria_ES.pdf.
- Binder I, Fisher P & Godinez Galay F (2017) *Como sea - Sostenibilidad económico-administrativa en radios comunitarias de Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Jinete Insomne. Available at: <https://cpr.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/media/uploads/documents/como-sea-web.pdf>.
- Godinez Galay F (2011) Radios sociales. Comunicación para la democracia. *Centro de Producciones Radiofónicas (CRP-CEPPAS)*. Available at: <https://cpr.org.ar/article/radios-sociales-comunicacion-para-la-democracia/>.
- Gumucio Dagrón A (2011) La sostenibilidad de los medios de comunicación comunitarios. *El Portal Comunicación InCom-UAB*. Available at: http://www.portalcomunicacion.com/catunesco/download/AGD_presentacionppt_Sostenibilidad_medios_comunitarios.pdf.

- Lamas E & Tordini X (2007) El diseño colectivo de la gestión. Un proyecto, cuatro dimensiones. In: *Viva la Radio*. Available at: <http://www.vivalaradio.org/gestion-radios-comunitarias/organizacion/gestion.html>.
- Presidency of Argentina (2009) *Ley 26.522. Regúlanse los Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual en todo el ámbito territorial de la República Argentina / Law 26.522 of Audiovisual Communication Services in Argentina*. Available at: <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/155000-159999/158649/norma.htm>.
- UNESCO (2008) *Media development indicators: a framework for assessing media development*. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/media-development-indicators-a-framework-for-assessing-media-development/>.
- UNESCO (2015a) *Indicators to Assess Media Viability, International Programme for the Development of Communication*. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/IPDC/ipdc_IndicadoresViabilidadMedios.pdf.
- UNESCO (2015b) *Community Radio Sustainability Policies and Funding. Background paper*. International seminar, 14-15 September, Paris: UNESCO. Available at: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/Events/cms_sept15_background_paper_en.pdf.
- UNESCO (2017) *Community Media Sustainability Policy Series*, Paris: UNESCO. Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/community-media-sustainability/policy-series/>.

Notes

- 1 Since 2002, the Centre for Radio Productions has been working in the field of community radio, conducting research and developing radio content, along with radio stations from across Latin America. More on the work of the CPR at: <https://cpr.org.ar/category/investigaciones/>
- 2 This is in the chapter titled *V. Políticas Públicas*.
- 3 All interviews, available in complete, at: <https://cpr.org.ar/category/proyectos/como-sea/entrevistas/>.
- 4 Competitive Development Fund for Audiovisual Media (FOMECA), is a main source of funding for community media, especially for radios, which has been operating in Argentina since 2013 – with an uneven functioning and not free of problems – analysed in depth in at *V. Políticas Públicas - A. Fondos de Fomento* in Binder, Fisher and Godinez Galay (2017).
- 5 Analysed in-depth in Binder, Fisher, Godinez Galay (2017), *V. Políticas Públicas B. Publicidad Oficial*.
- 6 Law 9,612 of Community Broadcasting, Brazil, 1998 and Law 20,433 of Community and Citizen Broadcasting, Chile, 2010.
- 7 'A community media outlet is a space for the construction of new social relationships to empower communities and strengthen local culture, achievable exclusively with the active participation and protagonism of each and every citizen of the area in which the outlet is based. For this reason, we say they belong to those who have never had a voice and this constitutes a project driven by the state, which bases its policy in socialist principles.' In: <http://www.conatel.gob.ve/medios-comunitarios-3/> (last updated: 11/5/2017).