

INVISIBLE COMMUNITIES: AMPLIFYING MINORITY VOICES IN PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM THROUGH COMMUNITY RADIO

Miguel Midões

Departamento de Comunicação e Arte, Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Viseu, Portugal/Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Grounded in studies on newsworthiness criteria in traditional media and the invisibility of themes and social groups (Hall, 1997; Traquina, 2000), this study is framed within the discussion of the media's role in constructing social reality and marginalising and non-representing certain social groups.

With the rise of the internet and social media, although new forms of media exclusion have been created through the personalisation of content by algorithms (Noble, 2018; Pariser, 2011; Roberts, 2019), community media have emerged as an alternative to give voice to these marginalised groups through citizen, community, and independent journalism, promoting the long-desired — and promised — greater civic and democratic participation (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Forde, 2011; Radsch, 2016).

This exploratory study focuses on a qualitative analysis of four Portuguese community radio stations: Rádio Sintoniza-T, Rádio Ophelia, Rádio Freguesia de Belém, and Rádio Antecâmara. These are exclusively online, non-profit, and volunteer-run.

The research shows that, despite the efforts of these community broadcasters to fill the gaps left by mainstream journalism, the journalism practised by these radios and their volunteers is still in development. Community engagement remains a challenge, and the stations are more oriented towards cultural and entertainment programmes than towards regular newscasts and news production — a situation justified by their relatively short existence. Nevertheless, the potential of these initiatives is significant, as they may evolve into more structured models of alternative, citizen, and community journalism that meet the informational needs of their communities.

KEYWORDS

citizen journalism, community radio, invisibility, alternative media

COMUNIDADES INVISÍVEIS: VOZES MINORITÁRIAS NO JORNALISMO PROFISSIONAL ALAVANCADAS PELO JORNALISMO COMUNITÁRIO EM RÁDIOS ALTERNATIVAS

RESUMO

Assente em estudos acerca dos critérios de noticiabilidade nos média tradicionais e na invisibilidade de temáticas e grupos sociais (Hall, 1997; Traquina, 2000), este estudo enquadra-se na discussão do papel dos média na construção da realidade social e na marginalização e não representação de determinados grupos sociais.

Com o avanço da internet e das redes sociais, apesar de terem sido criadas formas de exclusão mediática, com a personalização dos conteúdos através dos algoritmos (Noble, 2018; Pariser, 2011; Roberts, 2019), os média comunitários surgem como uma alternativa para dar voz a estes grupos marginalizados, através do jornalismo cidadão, comunitário e independente, promovendo a tão desejada, e prometida, maior participação cívica e democrática (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Forde, 2011; Radsch, 2016).

Este estudo exploratório centra-se na análise qualitativa a quatro rádios comunitárias portuguesas, Rádio Sintoniza-T, Rádio Ophelia, Rádio Freguesia de Belém e Rádio Antecâmara, exclusivamente online, sem fins lucrativos e geridas por voluntários.

A pesquisa evidencia que, apesar dos esforços dessas emissoras comunitárias para preencher as lacunas deixadas pelo jornalismo *mainstream*, o jornalismo praticado por estas rádios e pelos seus voluntários ainda está em desenvolvimento. O envolvimento comunitário é um desafio e as emissoras estão mais voltadas para programas culturais e de entretenimento do que para noticiários regulares e a produção de notícias, justificado pelo seu ainda curto período de existência. Contudo, o potencial dessas iniciativas é significativo, podendo evoluir para modelos mais estruturados de jornalismo alternativo, jornalismo cidadão e jornalismo comunitário, que atendam às necessidades informativas das suas comunidades.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

jornalismo cidadão, rádios comunitárias, invisibilidades, média alternativos

1. THE RE-EMERGENCE OF “INVISIBLE” VOICES IN ALTERNATIVE MEDIA WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

If we go back to the beginning of the millennium, Nelson Traquina (2000), in his work *O Poder do Jornalismo – Análise e Textos da Teoria do Agendamento* (The Power of Journalism – Analysis and Texts of Agenda-Setting Theory), was already addressing invisibility in journalism and the way newsworthiness criteria determine what is covered or omitted, placing certain narratives and groups outside the scope of political, economic, and cultural interests in society. Even earlier, Stuart Hall (1997) warned through his theory of media representation, which highlights the process of reality construction and reinforces social inequalities and power relations. The media create and use stereotypes that

intensify cultural and social differences, associating minorities with negative contexts and social disorder, thus contributing to their marginalisation.

The important point is that stereotypes refer as much to what is imagined in fantasy as to what is perceived as “real”. And, what is visually produced, by the practices of representation, is only half the story. The other half – the deeper meaning – lies in what is not being said, but is being fantasized, what is implied but cannot be shown. (Hall, 1997, p. 263)

With the turn of the millennium and the rise of the internet, digital technologies, and social media, the issue of invisibility in the media has become even more complex. On the one hand, the internet and the digital era have enabled greater diversity of voices and a broader democratisation of information (in fact, this is the field in which the study presented here is situated). On the other hand, they have amplified exclusionary mechanisms. These new forms of invisibility create information bubbles, caused, for example, by algorithmic personalisation, which limits access to diverse content and aligns individuals with their pre-existing interests, rendering some topics invisible (Noble, 2018; Pariser, 2011; Roberts, 2019).

However, it is within this ambiguous context that community media emerge as a means to fill the gap left by mainstream and “algorithmic” media. Independent platforms enable excluded groups to create and share their own content, allow social movements to mobilise, and even gain global visibility — sometimes entering the media agenda itself, as in the cases of Black Lives Matter or #MeToo.

The effort to fill these gaps in media invisibility often leads, in various cases analysed within the field of community media, to greater citizen participation, representing an alternative political and cultural response from society (Atton & Hamilton, 2008). This citizen participation in the process of news production with journalistic practice is referred to by different terms, including “public journalism” (Forde, 2011), “citizen journalism” (Papacharissi, 2015), “alternative journalism” (Atton, 2009), and “community journalism” (Reader & Hatcher, 2012). These terms are frequently used interchangeably to express similar ideas. Nevertheless, the following paragraphs will attempt to outline the main similarities and differences among these concepts.

The authors mentioned above show that when citizens do not feel represented and do not see their issues addressed — or when they perceive bias in how those issues are treated — they seek alternative spaces for discussion. It is within this gap that alternative media and, consequently, alternative journalism emerge, which Atton (2003) defines as a journalistic practice “radically different from those of the mainstream” (p. 267). By “radically different”, the author refers to the social responsibility of these media, their focus on commitment to finding solutions to local problems rather than on objectivity, their collective and horizontal organisation, and community involvement in content production — all of which challenge the professionalised and institutionalised practices of conventional and professional media.

Although the author notes that a systematic survey of professionals in this alternative journalism sector remains to be conducted, she points out that some alternative media organisations combine experienced professionals with volunteers who lack formal training in the field. This reality differs from what we find in Portugal within the community radio sector. For instance, in another study (Midões, 2024), we demonstrate that in Portuguese community radios, this form of alternative journalism — although weak and not very expressive — is primarily carried out by volunteer citizens who lack current or past connections to journalism and professional journalists in the community media sector.

Still, Atton (2003) reminds us that the principles of alternative journalism can easily be confused with those of public journalism, which is usually practised by conventional media when they seek to be closer to communities and include their audiences as sources of information.

In the same vein, Forde (2011) argues that these alternatives to conventional journalism arise as a response to the failures of mainstream media — particularly their focus on political issues, lack of diversity in the selection of information sources, and relentless pursuit of profit at the expense of information quality. The author connects alternative journalism with public journalism, as this alternative form involves public participation in news production. However, despite their overlaps, these two concepts are essentially distinct.

Atton (2009) further adds that, in addition to challenging the institutionalisation of conventional journalism and often operating without funding or with limited resources and sustainability issues, these alternative projects are frequently dedicated to themes framed by social inequality, such as the under-representation of women, ethnic minorities, and marginalised groups. The author emphasises that technology and new media have supported the democratisation of participation, particularly among the most forgotten or underrepresented social groups in mainstream media. However, he acknowledges some constraints to this democratisation, which will be discussed later.

Although both concepts — “alternative journalism” and “public journalism” — criticise the limitations of mainstream journalism, they are grounded in different principles and pursue distinct objectives, maintaining divergent relationships with institutional structures. While alternative journalism emerges outside commercial media frameworks, with strong political and cultural opposition to the mainstream, adopting alternative styles, formats, and counter-hegemonic narratives, public journalism arises within commercial and professional media as a way to enable audiences to participate in the editorial process and to promote more democratic and open practices, yet still professional and aligned with traditional journalistic genres (Abbott, 2017).

Despite the greater attention alternative journalism currently receives — mainly due to information technologies, the development of digital media, and, above all, the internet, which has facilitated public involvement and enabled new forms of distribution and funding — the phenomenon of alternative journalism is not new. It represents a form of active communication that has existed for more than 150 years (Forde, 2011).

In line with this perspective, Radsch (2016) argues that citizen journalism emerges to fill the gap left by professional journalism. It operates outside mainstream or conventional media and frequently utilises social media to disseminate its content.

Although there may be dissonant features between alternative journalism and citizen journalism, the two are closely intertwined. The latter emerged more recently, strengthened by the development of information and communication technologies — particularly the internet — which allows any citizen with internet access or production tools (text, audio, and video) to give visibility, through direct participation and testimony, to specific experiences or events without belonging to a hierarchical organisation (Jenkins, 2006; McChesney & Nichols, 2016). In other words, although citizens may publish information they have collected and edited independently on websites, social media accounts, or blogs, they may also use alternative communication media to do so. Alternative and citizen journalism are not identical, but citizen journalism can exist within alternative media, and thus, the concepts are frequently associated.

Indeed, the concept of “citizen journalism” is not consensual and divides academic opinion. A more sceptical strand views it as far from having a real and meaningful role, considering it a utopian idea difficult to realise fully. Atton and Hamilton (2008), in *Alternative Journalism*, point out that citizen journalism faces structural problems, including a lack of financial resources, as well as issues regarding the credibility and dissemination of the information produced.

Despite the advantages of citizen participation in news production, concerns persist about the credibility and reliability of these sources. The lack of professional training and the absence of rigorous editorial standards may result in reports that do not meet traditional criteria of accuracy and impartiality. This raises questions about the extent to which citizen journalism can be considered a reliable source of information. (Atton & Hamilton, 2008, p. 95)

In the same vein, Papacharissi (2015) argues that citizen journalism creates information bubbles that have little impact on public debate and opinion, rather than democratising information. Additionally, citizen journalism often replicates the patterns of conventional and professional journalism. It does not truly break with the established model, particularly in its dependence on official sources, which limits the availability of alternative perspectives and maintains the pursuit of objectivity that restricts the diversity of voices and narratives, as well as the adoption of conventional structures, such as gatekeeping practices (Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2022).

Finally, it is essential to address the concept of “community journalism”, which also falls within the broader field of participatory and engaged journalism. It describes an informative practice that initially (in the 1950s) focused on smaller geographical areas and on local and community life news, later evolving (in the 21st century) to include digital media, independent and community radio stations, and even hyperlocal websites (Reader & Hatcher, 2012).

According to Reader and Hatcher (2012) in their book *Foundations of Community Journalism*, the main characteristic of community journalism lies in the proximity and connection of journalists to the community, both geographically and emotionally. They emphasise that neither the size of the medium nor the community alone defines community journalism. The valid distinguishing criterion may be community-centred content, with strong community participation in the medium, creating a participatory model.

In community journalism, the audience is often quite involved in the procedure, with much content being suggested, requested, or even submitted by people in the community. Hence the typical publication in community media of check-passing photos, group shots of kindergarteners, reader-submitted essays and opinions, and galleries of pictures of family reunions or deer hunters with their trophies. In that regard, community journalism has long been a forum for so-called “citizen journalism” and interactive in a very real sense, even before the internet came to be. (Reader & Hatcher, 2012, p. 16)

Concomitantly, the four types of journalism outlined above intersect in similar ways and share certain commonalities, although they differ in models, origins, and focal points, as summarised in Table 1.

CRITERION	ALTERNATIVE JOURNALISM	PUBLIC JOURNALISM	CITIZEN JOURNALISM	COMMUNITY JOURNALISM
Leading actors	Activists, social movements, and independent media actors	Journalists working within mainstream media organisations	Non-professional citizens, digital users	Local reporters, regional editors, community volunteers
Focus/content	Counter-information, ideological critique, neglected topics	Civic participation, citizenship, and socio-political issues	Personal experiences, proximity, and emerging topics	Local everyday realities, cultural identity, community dynamics
Type of media	Fanzines, free radios, activist digital platforms	Thematic sections, radio/television programmes, civic projects	Collaborative platforms, social networks, blogs, forums	Local press, community radios, hyperlocal publications
Relation to the mainstream	Opposition to the dominant (economic/editorial) model	Reformist integration into the media system	Coexistence or interdependence with professional media;	Complementary to mainstream media
Editorial organisation	Decentralised, horizontal, collective structures	Conventional newsrooms open to public participation	Informal, spontaneous, collaborative structures	Small local newsrooms with community involvement
Main objective	Socio-political transformation through critical mediation	Restoring trust in institutional journalism	Direct participation in information production and sharing	Strengthening community cohesion and identity
Degree of professionalism	Mixed: professionals and untrained actors	Full professionalisation	Absence of formal professionalisation	Predominantly volunteer-based, with possible professional contributions

Table 1. *Consonances and dissonances among participatory forms of journalism*

Note. Author's own elaboration based on the theoretical contributions of Abbott (2017), Atton (2003, 2009), Atton and Hamilton (2008), Correia (2023), Forde (2011), Mutsavairo and Bebawi (2022), Papacharissi (2015), Radsch (2016), and Reader and Hatcher (2012).

Following the theoretical discussion developed thus far around forms of journalism that create space for citizen participation in the media, the following section analyses four Portuguese community radio stations. These are non-profit initiatives run by citizens who voluntarily participate in designing and producing each station's program schedule, as well as in its internal management. As such, these radios are positioned as alternative and community media open to citizen participation. It is therefore considered that the most relevant concepts to adopt in the subsequent case study and discussion of its findings are "alternative journalism", "citizen journalism", and "community journalism".

2. CASE STUDY OF THE COMMUNITY RADIO STATIONS SINTONIZA-T, OPHELIA, FREGUESIA DE BELÉM AND ANTECÂMARA: METHODOLOGICAL PATHWAY

The study presented here addresses the gap left by mainstream media and conventional journalism, focusing on the current role of alternative media — particularly community radio — in giving voice to groups that are marginalised or relegated to the background by traditional media.

This exploratory case study seeks to understand the motivations behind the creation of these four Portuguese community radio stations, which operate exclusively online, are run by a group of volunteer citizens, have no profit motive, and offer alternative content seldom explored by mainstream radio — features that are intrinsic to community radio and discussed in a previous study (Midões, 2021).

The research focuses on four unregulated Portuguese community radio stations, which form part of a group of 21 that fall outside the legal framework of Portuguese radio law (Law No. 54/2010). These stations are not legal, but neither are they illegal, as they remain unregulated¹.

The stations analysed are: Rádio Sintoniza-T, established in Tapada das Mercês, Sintra, as a multicultural hub; Rádio Ophelia, created in Almada by a group of citizens connected to the arts in general and to music in particular; Rádio Freguesia de Belém, founded in the Lisbon parish of the same name and directed towards this local community; and Rádio Antecâmara, created by the Antecâmara Gallery in Lisbon, focusing on architecture and the architectural community.

The methodological approach adopted is predominantly qualitative, consisting of an analysis of the stations' websites and social media, complemented by interviews with their coordinators, conducted between 2023 and 2025.

This case study aims to understand the underlying reasons for the creation of these radio stations — whether they stem from a perceived invisibility of their communities within traditional media, the types of content produced, their objectives, how they engage citizens, and whether there is scope for them to embody the forms of citizen journalism, alternative journalism, and community journalism discussed earlier.

¹ Of these four stations, only Rádio Freguesia de Belém is registered with the Portuguese Regulatory Authority for the Media as an institutional radio station rather than as a community radio station.

3. EQUALLY COMMUNITY-ORIENTED, DIFFERENT REASONS FOR EXISTENCE, DISTINCT INVISIBILITIES

3.1. RÁDIO SINTONIZA-T

Rádio Sintoniza-T² was launched on 16 December 2021, with funding from the *Bairros Saudáveis* project, in Tapada das Mercês, Sintra, a multicultural neighbourhood with residents of various nationalities and ethnicities. *Bairros Saudáveis* is a Portuguese government initiative “aimed at supporting small communities with various projects that amplify initiatives located in neighbourhoods often considered underdeveloped” (Alexandre Santos, interview, January 9, 2025).

This radio station, established as a community space, is managed by the Islamic Community Association of Tapada das Mercês and Mem-Martins. However, it is not affiliated with any particular ideology or religious belief.

For the past three years, all members have volunteered at Rádio Sintoniza-T — “people who genuinely enjoy radio and like working for the community” — with Alexandre Santos, the current coordinator, serving as a prime example. He explains that, through their experience at the station, citizens acquire technical skills and media literacy they previously lacked. In addition, by striving to create content relevant to their community and thoroughly researching information, they develop values and competencies that help them combat misinformation and fake news.

The station aims to give a voice to the community and cover topics that mainstream media often neglect, focusing on niche issues rather than broad audiences, according to the coordinator. Regarding community participation, Alexandre Santos notes that involvement has been consistent, as the association that initiated the project already existed, and people were already engaged. The radio has been promoted via social media with some success, though it still lacks the number of volunteers and programmes that the coordination team would like.

We want to engage the community (...). We promote ourselves widely on social media; we are a community radio station and an online broadcaster. Through social media, we can share our projects and reach people. For example, sometimes that lady in the corner shop (...) has a life story that many people do not know, and those are the stories we want to highlight. It's about speaking with real people, so to speak. I'm not saying other media don't do this, but the truth is that the focus of major media is now very much on what brings audiences. We don't do that; we focus on the community. We want to give the community a voice. (Alexandre Santos, interview, January 9, 2025)

Centro em Foco (Focus on the Centre) is a programme that has been broadcast on Rádio Sintoniza-T since its inception; it engages with residents and highlights projects of

² Rádio Sintoniza-T's programmes can be listened to at <https://www.sintoniza-t.pt/programas>.

significance for the community. The coordinator also highlights *Minuto Cidadão* (Citizen Minute) as one of the most important programmes the station has produced. Presented by Luís Vaz Fernandes in partnership with the Local Centre of Migrants' Integration Support, it was translated into multiple languages and provided essential information to the community.

Basically, we explained to people how to obtain an access code for the Finanças portal or for Segurança Social Direta — those day-to-day necessities that can be challenging, often due to language barriers (...). We want them to join us, but above all, we don't want them to lose their identity. (Alexandre Santos, interview, January 9, 2025)

The station's main challenge remains securing funding, as daily expenses must be covered, including the purchase of new equipment, upgrading existing resources, and maintaining online servers. Nevertheless, the team aspires to a greater regularity of programmes and future growth in both listeners and community presenters.

At Rádio Sintoniza-T, conventional journalism is still developing. There is an aspiration to establish a news bulletin, which does not yet exist, and to produce news about local events. However, through the programmes currently made, the station brings people from diverse cultures onto the air, giving them a voice and exploring their stories through interviews.

We don't produce traditional journalism, but we do it our way. What we aim to do is get to know people. We study who we are going to interview, learn about the individuals and the projects, so that our listeners and community gain all the necessary information to develop interest and engage with these projects themselves. Ideally, we would have a news segment to provide timely information, because people need that. Certain events often go unnoticed, and there is no clear place to find out what is happening in the community. We want to address this by opening our doors to those with knowledge and professional journalism credentials, aiming to provide the community with good, truthful journalism guided by integrity and committed to its ideals. (Alexandre Santos, interview, January 9, 2025)

Rádio Sintoniza-T has also developed programmes in partnership with the Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation — *Assim Fala a Ciência* (Thus Speaks Science) and *O País que Se Segue* (The Country That Follows) — and with the independent platform *Fumaça*³. Currently, the station seeks “to be more original” and to produce more of its own content, welcoming new presenters, programmes, and ideas, provided they remain focused on the

³ *Fumaça* presents itself as an investigative, alternative, and independent journalism project. In Portugal, Luís Bonixe (2022), after analysing three Portuguese projects in 2022 — *Fumaça*, *Divergente*, and *Setenta e Quatro* — in terms of their objectives, funding models, and content, preferred to label this type of journalism conducted on the margins of mainstream media as “entrepreneurial journalism”.

Tapada das Mercês community. The station offers access to its studio, resources, and the expertise that current volunteers have gained over three years of experience.

3.2. RÁDIO OPHELIA

Rádio Ophelia⁴ emerged in Almada, also in the Lisbon region, in 2018, initially as a pirate radio and personal project, and later as a community radio station. This shift in concept is related to a change in purpose: according to Jesus Crido, the station's founder and creator, who has professional links to a television outlet, it began as a personal endeavour in his own dining room, gradually opening up to the community, and is now housed in an associative space in Cacilhas (Almada).

This was my creative, artistic project, which evolved into the idea that I was really going to create a media outlet. It is my raising the middle finger to that whole machine that taught me how to do things, but does not give me the creative freedom to actually do them. (Jesus Crido, interview, January 7, 2025)

Currently, Crido views himself as having transitioned from founder and creator to general and executive producer. He is now surrounded by more artists from the Ophelia community, while also working to build the community around the radio and ensure its ongoing operation and programming. The main goal is to “create the community that does not exist within the Portuguese music universe”. The executive producer emphasises that Rádio Ophelia follows a classic radio schedule, with regular programmes, but does not broadcast 24 hours a day because there are not yet the human resources to support this, nor is the station interested in becoming merely a collection of podcasts. “Call it whatever you want, but we are a radio station. The programmes are regular; everything is live, with no cuts, no tricks, and nothing else. If you say something wrong, you said it wrong; deal with it” (Jesus Crido, interview, January 7, 2025).

The station focuses on promoting Portuguese artistic work that has been marginalised by mainstream media, primarily emphasising music, but also featuring authorial programmes. “Never, ever, will so-called ‘mainstream’ radio stations be able to do what we do here, what I allow myself to do or what people allow themselves to do here, because it is unthinkable” (Jesus Crido, interview, January 7, 2025).

When the radio still operated from his dining room, there were about 40 participants; currently, the founder estimates nearly 200 individual or band artists ensure three days of broadcasting, four hours and 42 minutes, “without repeating a single track”, all of whom he knows personally.

The involvement of this significant number of volunteer contributors has already resulted in collaborative projects among musicians who met through Rádio Ophelia. “This only makes sense if we are doing meaningful work for the artistic community that

⁴ The online broadcast of Rádio Ophelia can be listened to at <https://radio-ophelia.pt/>.

bridges the gap between the public and the artist, which does not exist [in non-community media]”, says Jesus Crido (interview, January 7, 2025). Rádio Ophelia positions itself as an alternative space for these artists. In professional radio stations, “the public loses out because they are only consuming things that mean nothing to us culturally (...) culturally, we are this void, because we have no identity of our own” (Jesus Crido, interview, January 7, 2025).

Looking ahead, Rádio Ophelia aims to become a “small community media group”, safeguarding the creation of a community through “statutes, ideals, and manifestos” and educating it so that it can preserve the ideal of promoting Portuguese musical culture, which mainstream Portuguese media have marginalised.

Public service is not just about giving me news and broadcasting soap operas; it is about telling me what is happening here [musically]. Please explain to me what is going on in the backyard next door; they must be doing something cool. The Portuguese Taylor Swift? Doesn't she release albums? Doesn't she perform concerts? (Jesus Crido, interview, January 7, 2025)

Currently, financial support is scarce, and there are no State grants. From Crido's perspective, this means there is no recognition for the work undertaken. “The financial support comes from my pocket, me working to keep this running, and the rest of the people helping me” (Jesus Crido, interview, January 7, 2025).

3.3. RÁDIO FREGUESIA DE BELÉM

The Rádio Freguesia de Belém⁵ was inaugurated in a delayed manner due to the COVID-19 context and was formally established as an institutional community radio station on 15 April 2021. The station was established by the Parish Council of Belém to bring the local community together, giving a voice to its residents and institutions, and creating a platform for active participation and informal training for everyone, including those with no prior experience in radio.

Among the 68 programmes created to date, 22 remain active, with highlights including *Olá Vizinho* (Hello Neighbour) and *Hoje É um Bom Dia* (Today is a Good Day). The station gathers a total of 20 individual volunteers and another 30 associated with local institutions. To make these programmes possible — covering areas such as education, health, culture, sport, humour and interviews — volunteers were recruited through an initial training course, which had to be adapted to an online format due to the pandemic, as well as through door-to-door visits made by the station's coordinators to local organisations, presenting the radio and showing their openness to participation and to the creation of new programmes.

⁵ Rádio Freguesia de Belém's programmes can be listened to at <https://radiobelem.jf-belem.pt/programas/>.

In this more information-oriented context, they produce *Magazine Belém* (Belém Magazine) and *Informação da Freguesia* (Parish Information), both of which feature informative content aimed at the residents of Belém.

Regarding community participation, coordinator Maria Cid highlights the children's enthusiasm and their "delight" upon hearing their own voices on air.

Although Rádio Freguesia de Belém does not practise journalism in the traditional sense of the word, it incorporates elements of community and proximity journalism. In producing the two informative programmes mentioned above, the station covers content that informs the population, such as local event coverage, Parish Council projects, public service announcements, and community initiatives. In essence, these broadcasts function as news bulletins, providing factual and up-to-date information and performing an essential journalistic function for the community.

They provide helpful information about services, deadlines, and event dates (...). Radio is a very effective way of reaching people because it creates a different kind of connection compared to social media. People feel closer.
(Maria Cid, interview, December 11, 2023)

In addition to these two programmes, Rádio Freguesia de Belém, in its pursuit of greater democratic transparency, broadcasts the Parish Assembly meetings live to bring citizens closer to local political life and encourage greater civic engagement. "We also started broadcasting the Parish Assembly meetings live, because we believe that this is important content and that people should have access to what is discussed and decided there" (Maria Cid, interview, December 11, 2023).

In the rest of its programming schedule, the station features interviews with residents, institutions, schools, associations, and other local bodies, promoting participatory journalism that enables citizens to become sources and, in some cases, content producers. In fact, in line with this latter idea (content production by parish residents), Rádio Freguesia de Belém regularly trains volunteers without prior experience in radio or journalism to research, interview, produce and present programmes.

Although the focus is not on professional journalism, the station demonstrates concern for truth, the usefulness of information, and public service. It maintains editorial criteria to ensure that programmes have community relevance and align with the project's values. "We do not accept everything. It has to make sense within the logic of the radio, it has to have community interest, relevance, and be in line with what this project represents" (Maria Cid, interview, December 11, 2023).

3.4. RÁDIO ANTECÂMARA

Rádio Antecâmara⁶ was created under the auspices of the Antecâmara Cultural Association and broadcast its first programme on 13 February 2021, marking World Radio

⁶ Rádio Antecâmara's programmes can be listened to at <https://antecamara-galeria.pt/radio/>.

Day. The station brings together architecture, art, and a sense of community. Although it originated as an initiative of Atelier Campos Costa Arquitetos, it soon evolved into an independent non-profit association, aiming to create a space for cultural production and dissemination, open to everyone's participation. Pedro Campos Costa, founder of the project, notes that during the first broadcast, the station reached 26,000 listeners, showing that there was a community interested in a sonic approach to architectural culture: "I never imagined there would be so much engagement from architects, and that even without a frequency we could achieve so much online participation" (Campos Costa, interview, December 11, 2023).

In terms of programming, the guiding rule is that it must be related to architecture and function as a space for cultural and critical curatorship. This curatorial work has so far been led by the founder, who has already begun inviting other figures — usually researchers or friends connected to architecture — to take on the role.

The idea is to appoint an architect who then selects people to create programmes. Each topic will have someone responsible for developing the programme, and we provide technical support. The radio is only interesting if many people make it. (...) I see the future like this, without me always being directly involved, with annual curators who can shape the radio and bring in new perspectives. (Campos Costa, interview, December 11, 2023)

The themes and approaches of Rádio Antecâmara range from more journalistic discussions — such as urban policies and housing — to experimental sound creations. Among its initiatives, a notable example was a residency at the Centro Cultural de Belém, where each week, different guests were interviewed, and each author had complete thematic freedom.

The station has hosted more journalistic and critical programmes, focusing on architectural news and projects that are, somehow, controversial and deserving of deeper investigation — such as housing. However, Campos Costa recognises a certain reluctance among participants to engage publicly in this kind of critical discourse.

To sustain participation and dynamism, the radio also forms partnerships with relevant institutions, such as the Portuguese Association of Architects, with which a series of episodes is planned on practical and structural issues of the profession, as well as with higher education institutions.

There is a group of students from [Universidade] Católica preparing three exhibitions, and the professor suggested we host them. I attended their class to demonstrate that the gallery also features a sound-based component and that they can utilise the radio in this way. I'm sure they will produce things that are not necessarily polemical or political, but very interesting in experimental terms. (Campos Costa, interview, December 11, 2023)

The regularity of programming depends on the gallery's activity, as it doubles as a studio and serves as a stage for live conversations during exhibitions, offering direct audience interaction. The studio (or the part of the gallery that houses it), situated by a large street-facing window, invites passersby to stop and listen, creating a point of contact between the radio and the urban space.

The community dimension is central to the project, though the founder admits it remains fragile. Despite the desire to foster genuine engagement with the local territory and its residents, this goal has been postponed due to logistical and human constraints.

Technical learning among volunteers occurs through trial and error, shared informally among collaborators. Although amateur in institutional terms, Rádio Antecâmara strives for a sound aesthetic defined by the high quality of its content. "If it were broadcast on Antena 3 [a Portuguese public radio station aimed at a younger audience and alternative content], it wouldn't embarrass anyone" (Campos Costa, 2013)

While not a traditional journalistic medium, Rádio Antecâmara aspires to address politically and socially relevant themes. However, it faces hesitation within the professional community, which is often reluctant to engage publicly in politicised debates.

Although the station initially had a more cultural orientation, Pedro Campos Costa has expressed a desire to explore issues — always related to architecture — that carry greater journalistic and social significance, such as housing or controversial urban projects. However, he admits that it is difficult to find those willing to speak out publicly on such topics: "when it comes to politics, the interest disappears; no one wants to step forward" (Campos Costa, interview, December 11, 2023).

4. EVIDENCE AND CONCLUSIONS: COMMUNITY RADIOS THAT FILL GAPS AND GIVE VISIBILITY TO MARGINALISED VOICES IN PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

These Portuguese community radios are examples of alternative media that address themes often overlooked by professional journalism, although journalism itself remains scarcely visible and still in development within them (Table 2). While they apply journalistic techniques such as conducting interviews, writing scripts, reporting within communities and, in particular cases like Rádio Sintoniza-T, some degree of investigation, these radios still lack an organised newsroom, news bulletins, or the regular production of news content.

CRITERION	RÁDIO SINTONIZA-T	RÁDIO OPHELIA	RÁDIO FREGUESIA DE BELÉM	RÁDIO ANTECÂMARA
Promoting entity	Islamic Community of Tapada das Mercês Association	Jesus Crido's personal project, based in an artistic association space	Belém Parish Council	Atelier Campos Costa/ Antecâmara Cultural Association
Main Objective	To give voice to the local multicultural community	To create an artistic and musical community outside the mainstream	To create a platform for community participation and informal learning	To explore architecture, art, and the city from a cultural perspective
Community participation	Local volunteers	Artists and cultural agents (approximately 200 musicians)	Around 50 volunteers (residents and local institutions)	Collaboration with architects, students, and curators
Relationship with the local community	Focused on migrant integration and cultural identity within a geographically based community	Centred on artists and music, with a limited territorial focus	Strong civic connection with parish residents and the local community	Centred on a cultural and architectural community, not geographically bound
SPECIFIC SYSTEMATISATION IN THE FIELD OF JOURNALISM				
Journalistic practice	Still under development, with no regular news service, but prepared interviews	Does not engage in conventional journalism, instead focusing on cultural critique	Produces informative programmes, bulletins, and broadcasts of parish assemblies	Cultural programming with an aspiration to critical journalism, focusing on issues such as housing and urban development
Future perspectives	To establish a community news service and attract more volunteers	To become a community media group with formal statutes and structure	To maintain and expand civic and educational content	To structure curatorial practices and address politicised themes with greater visibility
Journalistic type	Community journalism with elements of citizen journalism	Alternative cultural journalism (non-news oriented)	Proximity-based community journalism and institutional bulletin journalism	Thematic cultural journalism with an aspiration to critical journalism
Journalistic objective	To inform the multicultural community, combat misinformation, and strengthen local citizenship	To give visibility to marginalised culture and music	To inform parish residents, promote transparency, and encourage civic participation	To critically engage with the city, housing, urbanism, and architecture

Table 2. Systematisation of the community radios under analysis

Community radios in Portugal were mapped and characterised in 2021. At the end of this first mapping of the third broadcasting sector (the community one), which, as previously noted, has no legal framework in the Portuguese context, these broadcasters stood out for the pluralism and dynamism of their volunteers in both management and programming — as the four cases analysed here also demonstrate. However, direct participation by community members was considered low, and the journalism practised by these stations remained limited, with most radios focusing primarily on musical and entertainment programmes (Midões, 2021).

Nonetheless, each of these four radios emerged after that first mapping, and their origins may suggest a paradigm shift. Among them, only Rádio Ophelia is primarily music-oriented, seeking through that focus to exercise social expression and intervention. In the other cases, the stations focus on social, political, and cultural content to foster stronger social engagement and fill the gap left by mainstream media and the journalism they practise. These three radios follow similar lines to those of community

radios that emerged under the Radio Active101 project, which privileged the news and interview formats, and to Rádio Escuta, which once operated in Lisbon's Almirante Reis neighbourhood and focused on reports, interviews, and news produced by, about, and with the migrant community. The more recent Rádio Amparo also has its own news service, broadcasting eight bulletins per day and two press reviews.

Rádio Sintoniza-T aims to give voice to the multicultural community of Tapada das Mercês by addressing topics that are absent, or rarely present, in the coverage of mainstream media and professional journalism. While the latter do cover migration, they seldom do so in ways that promote inclusion or provide tools for integration. On the contrary, the dominant approach tends to focus on problems associated with increasing numbers of immigrants, on the political debates surrounding the issue, and on the public services' alleged inability or failure to adapt to this growth. In other words, mainstream journalism tends to highlight problems rather than communicate solutions — a gap this community radio seeks to fill.

Although different, Rádio Ophelia focuses on valuing Portuguese artistic work, which also receives little regular coverage from mainstream media, even if the journalism practised there is not particularly expressive. Rádio Freguesia de Belém, by contrast, addresses a micro-reality often ignored by mainstream and regular media coverage, which typically overlooks neighbourhoods, parishes, and initiatives of small local communities — even within major cities like Lisbon. Commercial media rarely follow local political participation, as this community medium does within Lisbon's Belém parish, nor do they value the development of communication skills outside professional contexts. Indeed, conventional journalism tends to focus on experts, public figures, and official sources, ignoring horizontal and community-based forms of information production and leaving little or no space for experimentation — particularly when this arises outside institutional and academic circuits. For instance, Rádio Freguesia de Belém practises community journalism, even without formally assuming that role, by working with the community on local information, promoting civic participation, and reinforcing citizens' connection with local institutions. By doing so, they become active participants in content production and reflection on their needs. Through educational programmes, the radio not only informs but also empowers its community — going beyond the traditional role of informing, and fostering citizen engagement in and through the media, as advocated by Nico Carpentier (2017).

The same is true of Rádio Antecâmara, which, within the community of architects it targets, democratises media production by hosting and encouraging content creation by community members. Furthermore, this station allows a social group — largely invisible in mainstream media — to express its ideas, narratives, and perspectives. Presenting itself as a laboratory for experimental content, it reflects the potential for alternative and non-hegemonic forms of expression that are characteristic of community and alternative journalism.

These broadcasters exemplify how community media can act as a counterweight to the invisibilities left by professional journalism, serving as alternative platforms for

marginalised voices while simultaneously promoting greater informational diversity in the media landscape. They align with the perspectives of Atton and Hamilton (2008), Forde (2011), and Radsch (2016).

These community radios construct an alternative reality, focusing less on mass audiences and more on niche publics who are not represented in mainstream media. This approach allows citizens to feel recognised and provides a privileged space to address and discuss issues of particular interest. This represents a more active form of citizen participation, showing, as Radsch (2016) argues, that such initiatives can fill the gaps left by professional journalism.

These community broadcasters, which, as we have shown in previous studies (Midões, 2021, 2024 and 2025), have only emerged since the turn of the millennium — fuelled by the development of information and communication technologies, especially the internet — are growing in the Portuguese context, primarily through online broadcasting without FM frequency and operating outside the radio law. These stations are also focused, or at least aspire to concentrate, on increasing the production of informative and journalistic content. They play a significant role in promoting civic participation through the media by covering topics of interest to local communities or groups formed around shared interests, even through amateur journalism. Although they remain relatively few (just over twenty) and volatile — since, between 2021 and now, ten of the projects mapped have been suspended or closed while ten new ones have emerged — these community media initiatives and this alternative form of journalism, though with “little social influence, represent a new challenge for mainstream media, which is facing an even greater challenge linked to the political-economic failure of the industrial journalism model” (Midões, 2021, p. 79).

Machine Translation Post-Editing: Anabela Delgado

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is funded under the multi-annual funding of the Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade 2025-2029, reference UID/00736/2025, by the Foundation for Science and Technology.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Miguel Midões is an adjunct professor at the School of Education of the Polytechnic University of Viseu. He holds a PhD in Communication Sciences from the University of Coimbra, where he conducted the first mapping and characterisation of Portuguese community radio stations. He has a master's degree in Communication Sciences from the University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro and a specialist title in Journalism and Reporting awarded by the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu. He obtained his bachelor's degree in Social Communication from the Polytechnic University of Coimbra in 2004. He is an integrated researcher at the Communication and Society Research Centre of the University of Minho. His research interests focus on community media (particularly radio), local journalism, audio (radio and podcast), and media literacy. He has been a journalist (CPJ 4707A) since 2004 and previously worked for TSF Rádio Notícias.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9492-9918>

Email: mmidoes@esev.ipv.pt

Address: Rua Maximiano Aragão 3504-501 Viseu (Portugal)

Submitted: 06/04/2025 | Accepted: 03/10/2025



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