

Cultural Programming on Full-Service Public Radio: Catalunya Ràdio, COMRàdio and Ràdio 4

Maria Gutiérrez
Amparo Huertas

Presentation

The media is a true source of information and entertainment for the public, making it necessary to study the content transmitted. Not in vain, the analysis of this aspect is a solid research specialisation in the area of communication. This article is part of this, but it focuses on two of the less commonly analysed areas: radio and culture.

Specifically, this text sets out the main conclusions to an exhaustive study on the cultural programming offered by the three full-service public radio stations in Catalonia (Catalunya Ràdio, COMRàdio and Ràdio 4) over the 2003-2004 season, funded by the Catalonia Broadcasting Council. The study analysed the radio products with established schedules and regular air times that dealt with a creative process in the areas of the plastic arts, architecture, music, literature and essays, theatre, dance, circus, the audiovisual sphere and research. It also considered spaces that dealt with manifestations of popular traditions.

The studied sample was eventually divided into three types of broadcasts:

- a) Programmes devoted entirely to culture.
- b) Specialist section broadcasts within infotainment programmes.
- c) Fixed sections within news programmes.

To complement the research, we interviewed the directors responsible for programming during the 2003-04 season: Jordi Català, from Catalunya Ràdio; Josep M. Francino,

Maria Gutiérrez
Amparo Huertas

*Professors of the Audiovisual Communication Department
of the Autonomous University of Barcelona*

from COMRàdio, and Manuel Arranz, from Ràdio 4.

Finally, we should say that Catalunya Ràdio has a specialist station, Catalunya Cultura, which began in early 1999. According to Jordi Català, many of Catalunya Ràdio's culture programmes have moved to this specialist station. This was taken into account when it came to interpreting the ideas and figures that appear in this article.

1. Predominance of Music Content

All the stations included in their programming schedules spaces defined as 'cultural' and specialist sections (within some infotainment shows and on particular news programmes) but, in all cases, the dominant theme was music. With regard to cultural programmes, the percentage of presence with regard the weekly offer changed from one station to another, but all dedicated it more than 10%. At Catalunya Ràdio music took up nearly one-fifth (19.3%) of programming time. It was lower than this at COMRàdio (14.9%) and higher at Ràdio 4 (29.5%). We should remember that these types of shows are also affected by the broadcasting policy that each station applies, which undoubtedly impacts the final percentages. In the case of COMRàdio, 4.9% of its weekly offer corresponded to the broadcasting of cultural programmes. At Catalunya Ràdio the following of this strategy was practically insignificant (0.5%), while Ràdio 4 came somewhere in-between (2.7%).

The analysis allowed us to establish two types of programmes: music programmes (MPs) and non-music programme (NMPs). A look at the figures shows that MPs always exceeded 10% of total programming, while NMPs barely reached 5%. It is necessary to make this distinction because the two spaces are structured differently. NMPs usually use journalistic formats (interviews or stories, for

Table 1. Cultural Programming (2003-04)
Full-Service Catalan Radio (% of total programming)

Cultural Programming (2003-04)			
Full-Service Catalan Radio			
	Music content	Non-music content	Total
Catalunya Ràdio	16.6	2.7	19.3
COMRàdio	10.2	4.7	14.9
Ràdio 4	24.5	5	29.5

Source: Authors' own work

example), while MPs commonly feature music being played in detriment of oral information.

The primacy of music was also obvious in the cultural sections of infotainment shows. From the overall viewpoint, the total number of musical entries was one of the most significant pieces of data (15). If we look at the particular offer of each station, Catalunya Ràdio had the most music sections per week (8), followed by COMRàdio (5) and Ràdio 4 (2). The reduced number of music sections on Ràdio 4 infotainment shows could be due to its high percentage of music programmes (24.5% of weekly broadcasting).

Finally, music was also one of the most regular themes in the fixed sections of news shows. Although their content depended mostly on current events with solid marketing strategies (concerts, promotions, tributes, etc.) that led to a high presence of commercial events, there was some manifestation of divergence. Such was the case, for example, of *BCN Informatiu* (COMRàdio). Its Friday broadcast includes a "Theatre and Music What's On Guide" featuring recommendations on non-commercial shows. With regard to the way of presenting the music, there was a curious example. *Catalunya Vespre* (Catalunya Ràdio) always closed its news reports with a "Cultural What's On" that ended with a piece of music chosen because it celebrated a particular date (the singer's birthday, the first publication of the record, etc.).

Despite the high presence of music programming (MP) on the radio overall, its impact drops as a result of its

scheduling time, as most transmissions were concentrated in the small hours of the morning. On the other hand, and despite the reduced percentage of NMP on full-service public radio, it was more important because it was mostly provided during daytime hours.

This general trend did not stop each station from applying different tactics with regards NMP. Catalunya Ràdio concentrated it on workdays, with the daily broadcast of *El món s'acaba* from 12 to 1 p.m. Ràdio 4 had the most distribution over the week. Except for Saturday, it aired at least one non-music cultural programme each day and showed a certain preference for early afternoon (*Nautilus* airs weekdays from 3 to 4 p.m.). Finally, at COMRàdio the non-music cultural offer was particularly prevalent on the weekends. In fact, it was the only station to offer it on a Saturday. This option with regard to cultural programming often changed when sports broadcasts went to air. If the affected programme was a daily show that was rebroadcast in the early hours, the station found a way to stop the culture percentage from falling significantly. When a sports broadcast eliminated the daytime broadcasting of a cultural programme, the early-morning edition was upheld, Josep M. Francino said. The problem is that this means the cultural offer is largely relegated to audience-unfriendly times.

With regard to music programming, the early-morning concentration was particularly noticeable on weekdays: Catalunya Ràdio aired *Entre sons* from 3 to 6 a.m.; COMRàdio rebroadcast between 3 and 4 a.m. musical

spaces that were listened to during the daytime outside of Barcelona, coinciding with the breakout of *BCN Informatiu*. For its part, Ràdio 4, as well as following the same strategy, also aired music programming in the afternoons on workdays (*Material sensible*, from 2 to 5 p.m.) and distributed its music offer over 24 hours each weekend day. This trend shows the use of music as a continuity resource, something which can also be seen with some local broadcasters.

2. Reduced Presence of Catalan Music

All the stations were concerned with promoting Catalan music and music programmes that specialise in Catalan works, although the presence indices were fairly insignificant and the programmes were often aired outside peak listening times. At Ràdio 4, Catalan music made up 3.8% of the offer; at Catalunya Ràdio it was less than 3% and at COMRàdio it only made up 1%.

Depending on the goal, we can see two types of broadcasts: those aimed at the projection of new values, independently of the style followed, and those that specialised in traditional and popular music.

With regard to the former, they could become organizers or even work as collaborators for events aimed at facilitating and disseminating the work of new artists. All three stations featured spaces that met these characteristics: *Catacrac* (Catalunya Ràdio) supported the Sona 9 event, *Catalunya Express* (Ràdio 4) collaborated with the Catalan Album of the Year awards, *L'altaveu* (COMRàdio) was particularly interesting, as it did a live broadcast of the Sant Boi de Llobregat Altaveu Festival and Altaveu Frontera and organised the Tutto Awards, a classical music competition. Furthermore, there were also specialised sections on the infotainment shows. For example, the presenter of *Catacrac* took part in the Catalunya Ràdio weekend show, *El pont de les formigues*, presenting new records, while, on Ràdio 4, the afternoon infotainment show *Amb molt de gust* included a section on Catalan music every week.

Broadcasts that featured traditional music were particularly likely to focus on sardanas. Sardanas were the main content of Catalunya Ràdio's *Rotllana Oberta*, while *Amunt i avall* (Sunday edition) on Ràdio 4 took a broader view of Catalan

folk music. With regard to the specialist sections on infotainment shows, we should particularly mention *Mil paraules* (COMRàdio), where a live band (La Banda Fuig or La Mone) played songs by popular artists each fortnight.

Aside from this homogeneity, and despite the high percentage of non-specialist spaces, each station showed a music profile that could be defined on the basis of programme style:

- Catalunya Ràdio was devoted to already consolidated modern styles
- Ràdio 4 featured more contemporary music
- COMRàdio offered very particular styles exclusively

3. Popular Traditions and Film: The Areas with the Most Presence.

All three stations featured programmes about cultural current affairs and with quite similar percentage values. However, when we analysed cultural content and that of the other content analysed in the study, we reached the following conclusion: the subjects that received the most attention were popular culture and film. In other words, full-service public radio was concerned with meeting the needs of most traditional types of culture and could not afford to ignore an industry like film.

Although only COMRàdio and Ràdio 4 had programmes devoted entirely to popular culture, which aired on the weekends (the Saturday edition of *Amunt i avall* and *Plaça Castellera* on COMRàdio and *Fes ta festa* on Ràdio 4), Catalunya Ràdio also adhered to this strategy in the same period but with a different format. On the infotainment show *El pont de les formigues*, traditional culture was reflected by the monitoring of activities involving groups of *castellers* (human towers), *gegants*, *esbarts* and popular fairs.

In terms of film, although only Ràdio 4 had a specific programme (*Va de cine*), the number of fixed specialist sections on infotainment shows and news shows was abundant among all the full-service public stations. Furthermore, film was a recurrent theme within general cultural current-affairs shows.

At the other extreme was comedy, which only had one programme on COMRàdio (*Més enllà de la vinyeta*), and all those areas that only appeared on programme sections,

Table 2. Music Programme Classification (2003-04)
Full-Service Catalan Radio (% of total programming)

Music Programme Classification (2003-04)			
Full-Service Catalan Radio			
	Catalunya Ràdio	COMRàdio	Ràdio 4
Blues/Jazz	1	1	2.1
Catalana	2.8	1	3.8
Classical	-	0.6	1.5
Chill-out	-	-	1
Electronic	-	-	2.1
Ethnic	-	-	1.7
French	-	0.6	-
House/Dance	2.4	-	-
Rock	1.7	-	-
Tangos	-	0.6	-
Various styles	8.7	6.4	12.3
TOTAL	16.6	10.2	24.5

Source: Authors' own work.

which could be classified into three types, depending on the presence on the broadcasting offer of the 2003-04 season:

- **Subjects only aired within fixed sections: literature and theatre.** There was no programme devoted entirely to literary works or the theatre. However, the specialist sections were generally the ones with the most exposure, around 20 minutes. We should add that, as could be expected, theatre and literature featured on current-affairs programmes (mainly news broadcasts or cultural spaces) when an event that was significant from the journalistic point of view took place (mainly opening nights and award ceremonies).
- **Emerging subjects.** Cultural programming usually included the internet as a support of related content. There were news programmes that specialised in new technologies, and sections of infotainment shows not dedicated entirely to this issue, aimed at recommending websites chosen because of the usefulness of the information they contained. Secondly, television programming could also be defined as an emerging subject, although it was not always related with the

cultural side of things. Among sections found on lengthy morning, afternoon or weekend infotainment shows, there were often banal comments about reality shows. Even if it tended to be critical in nature, this type of media feedback ended up reaffirming if nothing else a curiosity for the characters that appeared on these types of TV shows. It was on the programmes devoted to general current affairs where television was treated more seriously. The most common example was recommendations for TV shows featuring issues of social interest or quality films. However, sometimes there was also a type of product promotion for TV stations related to the radio station.

- **Subjects with the least presence.** Art, architecture and dance only appeared occasionally and almost exclusively on news programmes, both those that specialised in culture and the main news services. These subjects' close relationship with images probably had something to do with this, but that does not justify their limited presence.

Table 3. Non Music Programming Classification (2003-04)
Full-Service Catalan Radio (% of total programming)

Non Music Programming Classification (2003-04)			
Full-Service Catalan Radio			
	Catalunya Ràdio	COMRàdio	Ràdio 4
General current affairs	2.7	2.1	2.7
Film	-	-	1.7
Comedy	-	1.1	-
Popular culture	-	1.5	0.6
TOTAL	2.7	4.7	5

Source: Authors' own work.

Table 4. Classification and situation of cultural sections (2003-04)
Full-Service Catalan Radio (% of total programming)

Classification and situation of cultural sections (2003-04)									
Full-Service Catalan Radio									
	Catalunya Ràdio			COMRàdio			Ràdio 4		
	DFM	DFT	CS	DFM	DFT	CS	DFM	DFT	CS
Current affairs				1				5	2
Film	1	1	4	1	2	3		1	2
Radio history					1			1	
Internet							5		
Literature	1	1		1	2	2		1	
Music	1	1	6		2	3		2	
Poetry			3						
Theatre	1	1	2			2			
Television		1			1	1	2		

Source: Authors' own work.

WDM: weekday mornings - **WDA:** weekday afternoons - **W:** Weekend day

4. The Force of the Cultural Industries

In general, radio content is noticeably marked by the principle of current affairs, something which also affects cultural content. Thus, cultural current affairs are mainly synonymous with new records and literary works, music

events, festivals (particularly film festivals) and film or theatre openings. In fact, we saw that proximity to the weekend led to a rise in information on leisure activities, and this information often mixed culture with leisure. From that perspective, we could say that the so-called cultural industries, with consolidated marketing strategies,

define the media agenda.

However, this is not true when we look at cultural programming globally. Some of the spaces tried to publicise less commercial sides of culture. The heads of some sections chose the issues for their commentaries bearing in mind aspects related to cultural interest (quality, historical importance, etc.) and did so with criteria, as mostly they were true specialists (there were sections commissioned to writers and musicians). In fact, broadcasters take care when it comes to choosing their collaborators, aware that they will also contribute to the construction of the station's image, as a number of the directors we interviewed said.

5. What's On: The Most Common Journalistic Genre

With regard to the journalistic genres most commonly used, the leading format was the What's On Guide, a list of activities featuring the most essential information (date, time and place). However, there were certain differences according to the type of broadcast:

- **Programmes devoted entirely to culture.** Interviews and news stories with sound bites were very common. On the other hand, there were very few reports. This could be a result of budget constraints, which meant there were not the human resources needed.
- **Specialised sections aired within infotainment shows.** Commentaries, with recommendations included, was the most common type of information on these shows. In most cases, the subject was part of a fairly colloquial conversation between the section head and the programme presenter. The tendency was thus to avoid a monologue reading.
- **Fixed sections on main news services.** Although they dominated the agenda, they usually took the form of a small number of events that were handled journalistically through strict news stories, news stories with a sound bite and specialist commentaries.

In relation to the location of cultural content, it was mostly situated in Catalonia and particularly in Barcelona City. This strong informative centralism was only obviously broken on programmes about popular culture. The activities they promoted referred to the whole of Catalonia.

6. Cultural Programming for Teenagers and Children

It is true that the stations analysed were full-service stations and so their programmes were mainly addressed at the general public. However, their duty to offer products for all social sectors meant there were spaces that tried to appeal to specific segments. In that regard, we only found cultural contents aimed at teenagers and children. However, there were not enough of them for different reasons.

The teenage programming examples mainly corresponded to music content. The only exception was at COMRàdio, with the programme *Scratch*, an infotainment show aired on Saturday afternoons and which, as well as providing music information, also discussed other questions specific to this audience segment: university courses, art festivals, etc. One positive aspect was the trend among the teenage spaces to create a website which included information about the programme and different recommendations, as well as discussion forums. However, in order to assess these tools, we would need to analyse the use the listeners make of them.

With regard to children's programming, this is a segment that is truly neglected. We only found one example: the "Dies de nens" section of the weekend COMRàdio infotainment show *Dies de ràdio*. Lasting 30 minutes, it was devoted mainly to literature. Advertising sponsors had a strong presence, something which provided the section with a certain level of stability.

7. Audience Participation

Listeners are an important element in the development of some programmes and infotainment show sections, as they usually have different forms of participation available. The increasingly popular use of websites and, in particular, email, is shoring up this trend. Audience collaboration is reflected in different ways: listeners can be critics, sources of information or contestants, and can suggest issues and even recommend activities.

From this perspective, it is important to mention two spaces that stood apart from the global offer because of the way their listeners acquired significant visibility. They were

Milongueando and *Boulevard*, both on COMRàdio. The former, which specialises in tangos, was really more than a music show. It was presented by Roberto Daus, a member of the National Tango Academy of Argentina, and telephone participation took up a large part of the programme. These phone calls, which in principle involved people ringing in to request particular tracks, very often turned into conversations in which the caller discussed records from Argentina or talked about their childhood, as most of the listeners were Argentines or Catalans who had some link with Argentina.

In the case of *Boulevard*, which specialised in French music, there was a type of relationship with the audience that went beyond airing the programme. Listeners could participate by phone and email but (and this is what made it peculiar) the show also organised trips outside Catalonia to visit exhibitions relating to French song.

8. Propositions and Recommendations

Although it is true that Catalan full-service public radio offers cultural content, there are matters that need improving to correct some of the values of the current offer. For example, culture ends up becoming a good, or the role it can develop within the leisure sphere is emphasised. However, culture is more than that and it is from this perspective that future proposals and recommendations should be made in order to build a broad and diverse cultural offer.

In the sphere of what is on offer, the strong imbalance between music and non-music programming should be broken, because the presence of the latter is very low. Secondly, special attention should be given to quality events of an alternative nature, which are produced on the margins of the commercial circuits. As they are not usually shored up by marketing strategies, they run the risk of falling off the media agenda. In short, it is necessary to promote the diversity of cultural expressions and the plurality of sources of origin.

With regard to production and realisation, it is necessary to develop well-prepared and attractive journalistic genres. This search for new languages no doubt requires a sufficient budgetary injection to invest in human resources.

In relation to audiences, it is necessary to promote programming aimed at teenagers and children. The goal should be to move beyond information and the contribution of knowledge tools to try to stimulate their creative abilities.