

Positioning of Brazilian university radio stations towards the public: tensions between the public, institutional and educational dimensions

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Paper received on 27 May 2024 and accepted on 15 October 2024

How to cite:

Bianco, N.R. Del, Pinheiro, E.B., & Lopez, D.C. (2024). Positioning of Brazilian university radio stations towards the public: tensions between the public, institutional and educational dimensions. *Quaderns del CAC*, 50, 85-98. doi:

<https://doi.org/10.60940/qcac50id431856>

Abstract

This article analyses the documentation and websites of AM and FM university radio stations of Brazilian federal educational institutions. Through the documentary analysis of regulations and editorial policies and a categorical content analysis of the "About us" and "Programming" sections of the websites of 26 broadcasters, we seek to understand how these entities align with the principles of the Brazilian Public Broadcasting Service (SRP). The results highlight the predominance of self-identification as an educational service, with a high value on local and regional culture and a dearth of mechanisms for social participation.

Keywords

University radio, educational radio, communication policies, plurality, Brazil, categorical content analysis, documentary analysis.

Resum

Aquest article analitza els documents i els llocs web de ràdios universitàries brasileres d'AM i FM d'institucions d'educació federals. Mitjançant una anàlisi documental de reglaments i polítiques editorials i una de categorial de contingut de les seccions "Qui som" i "Programació" dels llocs web de 26 emissores, busquem entendre com s'alineen amb els principis del Servei de Radiodifusió Pública brasiler. Entre els resultats, destaquem el predomini d'una autoidentificació com a educativa, amb valorització de la cultura local i regional, i la manca de mecanismes de participació social.

Paraules clau

Ràdio universitària, ràdio educativa, polítiques de comunicació, pluralitat, Brasil, anàlisi categorial de contingut, anàlisi documental.

Introduction

University radio stations emerged in the Brazilian media ecosystem in the second half of the 20th century. The first radio station, Radio da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, first aired in 1957 (Mustafá et al., 2017), under a licence that, to legal effects, was commercial. It was not until Decree-Law 236/1967 was implemented that this licence type was redefined as educational. This new category encompasses non-profit-making AM and FM stations overseen by public

and private universities, state and municipal governments, and private foundations whose sole purpose must be for the dissemination of educational and cultural content aimed at reinforcing compulsory and higher education. There are currently 730 educational AM and FM stations in operation, which represent 11% of the country's broadcasters (Ministério das Comunicações, 2022). Informational mapping conducted by Kischinhevsky et al. (2022), shows the presence of 128 university radio stations, affiliated with a total of 118 Higher Education Institutions (IESs).

University broadcasting in Brazil is broad in scope, ranging from stations managed directly by the university Rectorate or entities affiliated with the educational institutions—which are either operated by privately contracted professionals or civil servants—to stations run by university foundations—which may form part of academic divisions, generally faculties of social communication—or even a combination of these models (Kischinhevsky et al., 2019).

Legally, broadcasters under the control of federal public universities (Federal Institutions of Higher Education, IFES) form part of Brazil's Public Broadcasting Service (SRP) (Law 11,652/2008) and are governed by principles that revolve around management (autonomy, independence and social participation) and content production (plurality, diversity, the promotion of national and regional culture and a commitment to education). In addition, since 2009 a public policy has been underway to integrate these stations onto the public stage through their affiliation with the National Public Communication Network (RNCP), managed by the Empresa Brasil de Comunicação (EBC).

This study aims to analyse—from the perspective of communication policies¹ and UNESCO's principles (2002)² for public service broadcasting, how broadcasters under the control of Brazilian federal public universities define themselves to the public. The research is based on a documentary analysis (Moreira, 2008) of regulations and editorial policy, and a categorical content analysis (Sampaio and Lycarião, 2021) of the "about us" and "programming" sections of the institutional websites and social media of 26 AM and FM university radio stations under the control of federal IESs. The objective is to identify: *a*) the extent to which these entities conform to the principles of the Brazilian Public Broadcasting Service in terms of determining their image and programming objectives vis-à-vis the public; and *b*) whether, from an institutional perspective, there is evidence of editorial, financial and administrative autonomy, as well as public participation and social control.

The main conjecture of this research is that Brazilian radio broadcasters form part of the public sphere and are subject to tensions arising from a three-fold identity that encompasses: a cultural/educational dimension inherited from their beginnings; the necessity of providing institutional communication to disseminate the scientific output of its associated educational entities, and of serving as a teaching laboratory; and the principles of the Public Broadcasting Service.

The concept of university radio

The concept of university radio is multi-faceted and varies depending on the authors of the discussion and the national backdrop against which the debate takes place. Differences, for example, may rest in legislation and the funding of broadcasters, which affect the way human resources and content are organised and managed (Vázquez Guerrero, 2021). There is, however, a

degree of common ground, which mainly resides in the aims of the stations. In her study of Ibero-American broadcasters, the above-cited author observed a rise in exchanges between Portugal, Spain and Latin American countries, due to the effervescence and diversity of university broadcasting on the South American continent.

Vázquez Guerrero (2012) argues that these stations have emerged on the media ecosystem as alternatives that seek fair and democratic communication, and it is to this effect that they engage with citizens, producing content that relates directly to their everyday lives, thus affirming their social commitment and fulfilling their function as a public service (Casajús, 2012). In this sense, university radio forms part of a movement to democratise communication (De Deus, 2006; Martín-Pena and Giorgi, 2019)—bringing the public closer to the microphone and pluralism to the world of audio media.

This pluralism is also nurtured by the educational nature of university broadcasters, who train—to name a few professions—journalists, broadcasters, publicity agents and managers. With these diverse job profiles come different ways of integrating communication students into the day-to-day workings of the station, organising activities and funding the stations. For Lopez (2019), training professionals is one of the main challenges and functions of university broadcasters, and a feat achieved by combining theory, practice and the day-to-day lives of both audiences and students (Martín-Pena, Lopez and Freire, 2023). University radio "in essence, combines the formative, experimental and knowledge-transmitting roles inherent to universities and brings to the fore their spirit of reaching society" (Casajús, 2018:98). In doing so, it also reiterates its commitment to society and the personal and professional training of broadcasters.

One of the challenges of managing university radio stations, however, resides precisely with this diversity of features and different sources of origin. However—and particularly as regards the sample analysed in this article—, these are public broadcasters and, most especially, broadcasters of a public nature. Paulo Fernando Lopes and Roberto Sousa (2020) advocate for a better synthesis between professional training, programming and the public interest, which could be achieved through independence, transparency and administrative and financial autonomy.

But what is the reality of Brazilian university radio? As regards management, data from a study by Marcelo Kischinhevsky and Izani Mustafá (2018) shows that half of these Brazilian radio stations are managed institutionally, 18.2% by volunteers and 31.8% through the use of hybrid models. In the latter two categories, the efforts of the students are essential to the day-to-day running of the station. In terms of organisational hierarchy, the authors found broadcasters to be predominantly subordinate to university Rectorates, communications departments and foundations. In addition, only a few stations were observed to have a position within the organisational structure of the University, or be linked to academic departments (especially

communications divisions). Although the authors do point out that most stations are supervised by university professors.

Staffing and funding are sensitive issues for Brazilian university radio stations: in general, there is insufficient staff for them to be able to produce their content. In addition, average wages are low and the allocation of budgeting is unclear. Kischinhevsky and Mustafá (2018) report challenges regarding the human, financial and infrastructural resources of the broadcasters. This results in low production capacity, lower innovative potential and a prevalence of management lacking strategic planning, although the efforts of the broadcasters to keep the stations running and fulfil their community relations, cultural and citizenship commitments are notable.

The educational legacy of Brazilian university radio

Understanding the current operational context and contemporary challenges of Brazilian university radio stations necessitates a reflection on the context in which they initially emerged. To this effect, there is an educational legacy that has conditioned the creation and development of university broadcasters, comprised of three dimensions: the historical, the cultural and the normative/regulatory. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive and have not had a linear effect on the constitution process of radio stations linked to higher education institutions, but yet in some way, they are still the source of tensions as regards how they continue to operate.

Regarding the historical dimension, there are two significant variables that stand out: the first regards the influence of Edgar Roquette-Pinto upon founding the Rádio Sociedade do Rio de Janeiro in 1923, in the interests of education and science and with the goal of “valorising elitist/erudite educational and cultural content of a formative and instructive nature” and “reinforcing scientific dissemination with a view to sociocultural development”, while also diffusing the “nationalist ideals” (Pinheiro, 2019:59), advocated by the governments of the time. The second variable lies in the fact that these interests were embraced by the Brazilian government, which received Rádio Sociedade do Rio de Janeiro as a donation in 1936 —which it then renamed Rádio MEC (Ministry of Education and Culture Radio) —in a clear manifestation of how Roquette-Pinto also “contributed to the establishment of the state broadcasting system.” From 1930 to 1970, the government looked beyond the scope of educational media as a mere means of reducing illiteracy rates, to also see it as a means for “economic growth, strengthening communications, reducing temporospatial distances, disseminating ideologies (such as that of the military dictatorship in place at the time) and reinforcing the construction of a national identity.” (Bianco and Pinheiro, 2017:15).

As Zuculoto (2012:198) points out, “from the roots laid down by Roquette-Pinto”, various “radio schools” then began to spread through Brazil. Some examples of the stations, services and projects aimed “exclusively at instruction by way

of the radio waves” included: the programmes and stations of the MEB (Compulsory Education Movement), Universidade no Ar, SAR (Serviço de Assistência Rural), SIRENA (Sistema Rádio Educativo Nacional) and the Minerva Project —the latter of which was underpinned by “the military dictatorship’s policy guidelines for developing communications and distance education by radio as a means of national integration and the dissemination of its ideology” (Zuculoto, 2012:234). Minerva, therefore, was a project “in line with the dictatorship’s response to the popular education activity that preceded it, such as the MEB, the Compulsory Education Movement of the Catholic Church.” (Pinheiro, 2019:106).

This synthesis of the historical dimension hitherto discussed allows for a more contextualised understanding of the influence of this educational legacy on the second dimension of Brazilian university radio stations —the cultural. Broadly speaking, this dimension rests on two aspects: a) a unique organisational culture that transitioned from altruism and volunteering to the establishment of public service stability —which reached its crux during the period when Rádio Sociedade do Rio de Janeiro was in operation and the formative years of Rádio MEC respectively; and b) a series of tendencies in production processes, notable among which were the creation and transmission of non-dialogical content and the dissemination of programmes of a predominantly elitist/erudite nature, such as talks, lectures, classes, concerts etc.

As Bianco and Pinheiro (2017:17) point out, this cultural dimension can also be observed in five other aspects: a) the idealistic aspect, which relates to the aspirations of figures such as Edgar Roquette-Pinto and Enrique Morize for radio to in fact be a school for the poorest members of society; b) the developmentalist aspect, as reflected by the desire for economic growth and the recovery of a national (ideological) identity, as touted by the rulers of the Brazilian federal government who witnessed the institutional inception of radio broadcasting; c) the *amateur* aspect, exemplified not only through improvisation, the adaptation of content and professional training, but also by the nascent technological issues, with equipment, working and transmission conditions that were often inadequate; d) the organisational aspect, whereby we can appreciate the reverberations of the different organisational and structural approaches of these educational broadcasters —firstly as “societies” or “clubs” in which there was a prevalence of a certain degree of altruism in management practices, and even financial sustainability, and then with the focus shifted to the stability of the public service —which historically is a space often permeated by political proselytism, partisan mandates and interventions of special interest to the ruling governments; e) the negotiating aspect, evidenced by the subordinate status assigned by different governments to the educational broadcasting sector, in favour of the commercial sector.

These aspects pave the way for now addressing the normative/regulatory dimension, especially as concerns the regulatory framework (1937-2015) that decentralised the shaping of the

Educational Broadcasting Service in Brazil, “with subsidies managed by the Ministry of Education at the federal level, and at state—and eventually municipal— level, by state governments, mayors and public universities.” (Bianco and Pinheiro, 2017:20). It is important to note that, except for broadcasters run by private foundations, a significant proportion of stations in this sector depend mainly on state funding, which in most cases is deemed to be inadequate.

Furthermore, although this framework was mainly concerned with defining the purpose of the Educational Broadcasting Service for the transmission of educational and cultural programmes, it was repeatedly subjected to the rationale of patrimonialism and clientelism, for example, with the handing over of countless educational stations to private foundations affiliated with politicians. These “bequests” ended up creating discord between the different approaches of the educational and state/governmental service, as regards the diverse objectives and principles that each of them should comply with.

A significant step towards overhauling this scenario was made with the publication of Decree No. 256 from the Ministry of Communications, dated July 6, 2011 (now repealed). This law established criteria for guiding the analysis of grant requests for operating educational broadcasting services, which in article 4, gave preference “first, to federal universities; second, to the states; third, to state universities; fourth, to municipalities, and fifth, to municipal universities.” (Brazil, 2011).

Decree No. 4335/2015/SEI-MC, dated September 17, 2015, which “provides for permission and licensing procedures for the execution of FM sound broadcasting services and of sounds and images, for exclusively educational purposes” (Brazil, 2015) constituted a further, more significant development, by revising the concepts of educational and cultural programmes, listing their principles and objectives, and redefining the priorities for granting public licences for the Educational Broadcasting Service.

Brazilian university broadcasters and the public sphere

Having conducted an analytical reflection of the three dimensions (historical, cultural and normative/regulatory) that have influenced the educational heritage of university radio stations in the country, we must now reflect on what constitutes the public sphere, and how this dimension impacts and challenges the work of university stations. Article 223 of the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution designates the public sector as complementary to the private and state broadcasting systems. Although this article remains unregulated, it was clarified to a certain extent with the approval of Law No. 11.652, which “establishes the principles and objectives of public broadcasting services operated by the Executive Power or granted to entities under its indirect administration” and which “authorizes the Executive Power to create Empresa Brasil de Comunicação – EBC” (Brazil, 2008). According to the legislation, the public

sphere includes non-commercial, educational, cultural and university-state broadcasters.

Furthermore, incorporation into this sphere has been encouraged through the policy of integrating these stations into the National Communication Network, which is provided for in Article 8 of the aforementioned law and which is precisely one of the EBC’s functions: “Art. 8 – The EBC is responsible for (...) III – establishing cooperation and collaboration with public or private entities that operate communication or public broadcasting services, using agreements or other arrangements, to form the National Public Communication Network” (Brazil, 2008). The third paragraph of the same article establishes that in order to be part of the network, the programming of public and private entities must comply with the principles and objectives of the SRP, for example, by acting as a complement to the private and state systems; promoting a plurality of sources for the production and distribution of content, a diversity of topics and formats, national culture, and respect for ethical and social values; fostering the construction of citizenship and the consolidation of democracy and participation in society, guaranteeing the right to information, free expression of thought, creation and communication (Brazil, 2008).

Although they must be guided by these principles and objectives, university radio stations have their particular traits that stem from their affiliation with institutional management bodies, the internal and external community and, of course, the students and researchers for whom radio is a space for developing skills and competencies in the vast domain of communication and its related areas. To these particularities, we must also add the challenges of meeting the responsibilities imposed by the National Standard of the Public Communication/Radio Network – NOR 402 (EBC, 2021, p. 2), such as broadcasting four hours of programming produced by affiliates.

President Lula’s government (2023-2026) has promoted the growth of this network by signing cooperation agreements between the EBC and public universities, hoping to operate radio and television channels. This is a two-way partnership: universities must broadcast local content and retransmit some of the EBC’s productions (from TV Brasil, Rádio Nacional and Rádio MEC). In return, the EBC offers assistance in license-granting procedures, technical support and training, and greater visibility to regional content through national broadcasting. In 2023, the RNCP had enlisted 39 radio stations operated by universities, 12 of which were identified as being affiliated with federal universities. 35 new agreements were signed with IFESs in 2023-2024, with network managers aiming to have 109 FM stations in operation by next year (EBC, 2024b).

Methodology

This article is based on the premise that institutional communication reveals the identity and image of university

radio stations, as well as reflecting their activities, values, standards and the image they wish to project to the public. The research was carried out with a documentary analysis (Moreira, 2008) of regulations and editorial policy, and a categorical content analysis (Sampaio and Lycarião, 2021) of the “about us”, “programming” and “social engagement” sections of the institutional websites and social networks (Facebook, Instagram and YouTube) of Brazilian federal university broadcasters.

For this research, “institutional communication” is understood as a form of virtual public expression that reveals the identity and image of broadcasters, as well as reflects their actions, values, standards and public positioning. It is a form of strategic expression (Kunsch, 2009) that aims to construct, maintain and improve the organisation’s image and reputation in line with its objectives and values, and which encompasses both internal communication —aimed at employees and collaborators— and external communication, aimed at the general public. The term refers to how the organisation presents itself and how it is perceived by the public.

Two methods of analysis were carried out to understand how the broadcasters analysed are represented in institutional spaces, and how this representation is connected to the principles of the Brazilian Public Broadcasting Service: one documentary and one of categorical content.

The categorical content analysis was conducted using conventional methodology. The first stage involved reading the texts to identify potential emerging themes. Sections of the texts considered relevant to the research aims were then identified, coded, and labelled. Drawing from Sampaio and Lycarião (2021), two coding approaches were used: *a*) deductive coding (a priori categories) based on the principles of UNESCO and the Public Broadcasting System, who define the features of public broadcasters; and *b*) inductive coding (emerging categories identified during the process of reading and analysing the data). The a priori categories observed based on the review of literature on public radio and television were: educational, cultural, public, plurality, diversity, differentiation and citizenship. The categories that emerged when reading the texts were: reach, institutional, information, journalism, scientific dissemination, alternative, quality, pedagogical laboratory, regional culture, and local culture.

The codes were identified in two stages. Firstly, manual categorisation is achieved by observing significant extracts of the texts. Secondly, with the help of the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti, codes in the text were identified and their meaning ascertained from the perspective of the social and cultural backdrops of the public university and Brazilian media ecosystem. The codes were grouped into two dimensions: *a*) how radio stations define themselves; and *b*) how radio stations define their programming based on the three-dimensional triad of music, news and journalism. Similar codes can be observed in both dimensions, although they are used with different meanings.

The corpus for analysis was compiled by cross-referencing information mapped by Kischinhevsky et al. (2022), the study on public radio by Nísio Teixeira and Rafael Medeiros (2019), and the interactive map provided by the National Public Communication Network (EBC, 2024a). We identified 26 AM and FM stations operated by federal public universities, 12 of which are members of the National Public Communication Network (Table 1).

From this analysis, we acknowledged the predominance of precarious websites that lacked complete information, were outdated and without a shared vision. This created a challenge for the study, which aimed to analyse the place of institutional communication in the construction of the broadcasters’ identities. A significant observation is that 73% of these broadcasters have their own website, which creates an informative space for listeners to view the programming and interact with the station. The rest of the broadcasters exist as pages within the university or foundation that sponsors the station, that offer institutional information and are not designed as a space for interacting with the audience. The same poor quality is also reflected in social networks, with five of the broadcasters having no social media profile. Among those that do, we observed that only half frequently update it and the rest only sporadically and without a regular pattern (Table 2).

Regarding the documentary analysis, documents such as editorial policy guidelines and internal regulations were examined, in order to identify the station’s profile and programming ethos. A literature search for these documents resulted in a small sample of materials for analysis sourced from broadcasters’ websites. These documents offered, for example, further details on their editorial policy, public positioning and commitment to the principles of public communication. During the search, only six broadcasters published their editorial policies on their website: Rádio Universidade 800 AM, Rádio Universitária FM 107.9, Rádio Universitária UFG 870 AM, Rádio Paulo Freire 820 AM, UniFM 107.9 and Universidade FM 106.9.

To identify evidence of mechanisms for audience participation in the management of the broadcasters, a search was conducted for documents that formalise this practice, for example, by way of a board of directors or editorial and programming committee. UNESCO (2001) recommends participation mechanisms of this type as a means of ensuring that the community in which the broadcasters are located can have a say in the programming.

No documents or indications were identified to suggest that the corpus of stations researched engages in social participation through these traditional mechanisms. Instead, the stations analysed use public calls for proposals as a means of approaching society. This action allows for the inclusion of productions by individuals, associations, student groups and community radio stations, with or without the support of incentives. Three stations were found to provide guidance documents for creating public calls: Rádio Federal FM de Pelotas, Rádio Paulo Freire and Rádio UFSCar.

Table 1. Broadcasters included in the research corpus

Radio	University	Province	Membership RNCP
1. Rádio Universitária 107.9 FM	Universidade Federal do Ceará	Ceará	Yes
2. Rádio Universitária 96.9 FM UNIFAP	Universidade Federal do Amapá	Amapá	Yes
3. Rádio UFS FM 92.1	Universidade Federal de Sergipe	Sergipe	Yes
4. Universidade FM 106.9	Universidade Federal do Maranhão	Maranhão	No
5. Rádio Universitária 88.9 FM	Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte	Rio Grande do Norte	No
6. Universitária FM. 107.5	Universidade Federal de Uberlândia	Minas Gerais	No
7. Rádio Universitária 100.7 FM	Universidade Federal de Viçosa	Minas Gerais	No
8. Rádio Federal FM 101.3	Universidade Federal de Alfenas	Minas Gerais	No
9. Rádio UFMG Educativa 104,5 FM	Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais	Minas Gerais	Yes
10. Rádio Federal FM 107.9	Universidade Federal de Pelotas	Rio Grande do Sul	No
11. Rádio Educativa UFMS 99.9 FM	Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul	Mato Grosso do Sul	Yes
12. Rádio UFSCAR 95.3	Universidade Federal de São Carlos	São Paulo	No
13. FURG FM 106.7	Universidade Federal do Rio Grande	Rio Grande do Sul	Yes
14. Rádio UFOP Mariana 103.5 FM	Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto	Minas Gerais	Yes
15. Rádio FM Universitária 96.7	Universidade Federal do Piauí	Piauí	Yes
16. Rádio Universitária FM 95.9	Universidade Federal de Roraima	Roraima	Yes
17. Rádio UFT 96.9 FM	Universidade Federal do Tocantins	Tocantins	Yes
18. UNIFM 94.5	Universidade Federal do Paraná	Paraná	No
19. UniFM 107.9	Universidade Federal de Santa Maria	Rio Grande do Sul	Yes
20. Rádio da Universidade 1080 AM	Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul	Rio Grande do Sul	No
21. Rádio Paulo Freire AM 820	Universidade Federal de Pernambuco	Pernambuco	No
22. Rádio Universitária UFG 870 AM	Universidade Federal de Goiás	Goiás	Yes
23. Rádio Universitária AM 1570	Universidade Federal Itajubá	Minas Gerais	No
24. Rádio Universitária 105.7 FM	Universidade Federal de Lavras	Minas Gerais	No
25. Rádio Universidade AM 800	Universidade Federal de Santa Maria	Santa Maria RS	No
26. Rádio Universitária 99.7 FM	Universidade Federal dos Vales do Jequitinhonha e Mucuri	Minas Gerais	No

Source: own work.

Table 2. Radio stations researched with their respective websites and social media networks

Rádios	Own sites	Other institutional website	Social media
Rádio Universitária 107.9 FM	https://bit.ly/4ezYb6W		Instagram @radiouniversitariafm
Rádio Universitária 96.9 FM UNIFAP	https://bit.ly/4dHT2su		facebook.com/radiounifapoficial Instagram @radiounifapoficial/
Rádio UFS FM 92.1		https://bit.ly/3YbB8d1	facebook.com/radioufs Instagram @radioufs
Universidade FM 106.9	https://bit.ly/3Nhd159		facebook.com/universidadefm106
Rádio Universitária 88.9 FM	https://bit.ly/4gTVL4M		facebook.com/fmuniversitari natal/ Instagram @universitariaf mnatal
Universitária FM 107.5		https://bit.ly/3BD3zYC	
Rádio Universitária 100.7 FM	https://bit.ly/3YiNTCB		
Rádio Federal FM 101.3		https://bit.ly/4eEAKD	facebook.com/groups/radiofederal
Rádio UFMG Educativa 104.5 FM	https://bit.ly/4dSI0kh		facebook.com/ufmgeducativa Instagram @ufmgeducativa
Rádio Federal FM 107.9	https://bit.ly/4dZwjbz		facebook.com/RadioFederalFmUfpel
Rádio Educativa UFMS 99.9 FM	https://bit.ly/3ZY9ZLN		
Rádio UFSCAR 95.3	https://bit.ly/3NtyUPP		facebook.com/escutediferente Instagram @radioufscar
FURG FM – 106.7		https://bit.ly/4eL2tZy	
Rádio UFOP Mariana 103.5. FM	https://radio.ufop.br		Instagram @radioufop
Rádio FM Universitária 96.7	https://bit.ly/3Y5PwC6		facebook.com/RadioFmUniversitaria967
Rádio Universitária FM 95.9	https://bit.ly/3Y0IH61		Instagram @rtv.ufr
Rádio UFT 96.9 FM		https://bit.ly/4eL9Gsn	Instagram @uftfm
UNIFM 94.5	https://bit.ly/4f0HukO		Instagram @unifm94.5
UniFM 107.9		https://bit.ly/4h3K0Og	facebook.com/UFSMradios
Rádio da Universidade 1080 AM	https://bit.ly/4fjrWcr		facebook.com/radioufrgs Instagram @radioufrgs
Rádio Paulo Freire AM 820	https://bit.ly/3zX7iQg		facebook.com/radiouniversitariapaulofreire Instagram @radiopaulofreire
Rádio Universitária UFG 870 AM	https://bit.ly/3NpYRjv		Instagram @radioufg/ facebook.com/radioufg/
Rádio Universitária AM 1570	https://bit.ly/3U2wECY		
Rádio Universitária 105.7 FM	https://bit.ly/3YkQzdz		facebook.com/universitaria105fm Instagram @universitaria105fm
Rádio Universidade AM 800		https://bit.ly/4h3K0Og	facebook.com/UFSMradios Instagram @radiosufsm
Rádio Universitária 99.7 FM	https://bit.ly/3YkSd4I		facebook.com/UnicentroFM

Source: own work.

Public image building

University radio stations mainly project themselves to the public as educational—a feature present in the descriptions of 17 of the 26 stations analysed. This term relates in part to the type of non-profit licence under which the public universities operate, while also referring to the production and dissemination of educational programmes aimed at promoting scientific knowledge and stimulating critical thought.

The second predominant identifying feature is the cultural dimension that comes with the broadcasters' educational character: the promotion and appreciation of local and regional culture, as well as the dissemination of musical genres not commonly aired on commercial radio stations, are keystones of these stations when building their public-facing image.

Third comes the institutional dimension: broadcasters cast themselves as institutional communication channels that make public the research, teaching and outreach activities of universities. This institutional aspect stems from the strategy for scientific dissemination and the diffusion of scientific knowledge developed by institutions. A significant portion of these channels position themselves as the university's official conduit for dissemination.

The fourth dimension relates to the aim of being a teaching laboratory for students—especially those undertaking communications and journalism degrees—in offering students the opportunity to practice and develop professional skills in an authentic radio production environment, involving them in the practical activities of producing the station's content and, in some cases, in the regular production of programmes derived exclusively from this teaching activity.

Finally, university radio stations are notable for their activity based on an ethos of a plurality of voices and cultural diversity. The broadcasters claim to be open to different opinions and forms of artistic expression, hence ensuring programming that reflects the multiplicity of the segments of society. This status is evidenced through the promotion of quality public debates and the advocacy of human rights, gender issues and racial diversity. This is a dimension often associated with the role of a public broadcaster, although of the 12 federal IES stations linked to the RNCP, only five are observed to be defined as public, four of which happen to operate under licences granted by the EBC.

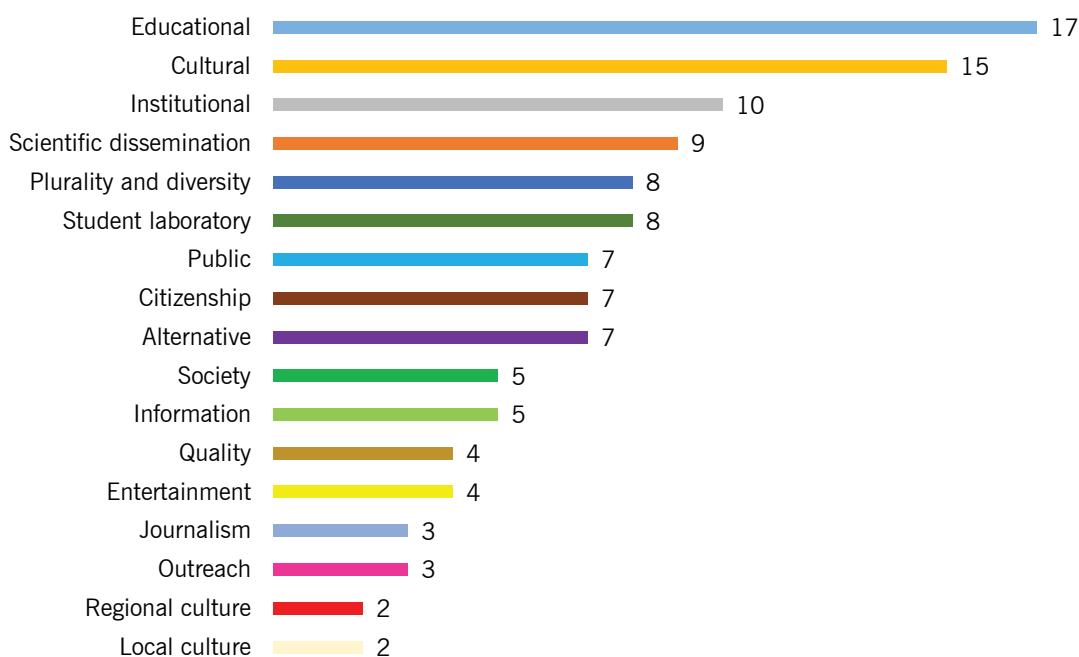
Defining the public programming

The public positioning of university radio stations is based on their configuration and shaped by the area in which they are located. The categorical content analysis of the programming sections of the broadcasters' websites and social media revealed qualifying elements on the one hand, and an emphasis on programme genres on the other.

The qualifying elements observed included: programmes aimed at promoting local and regional culture, with an emphasis on artists and musical genres that reflect the cultural identity of the area; the adoption of the principles of diversity and plurality of voices in journalism; a commitment to education and nurturing critical thought among the public, and the positioning as an alternative to traditional media in terms of the diversity of topics covered and the quality of productions.

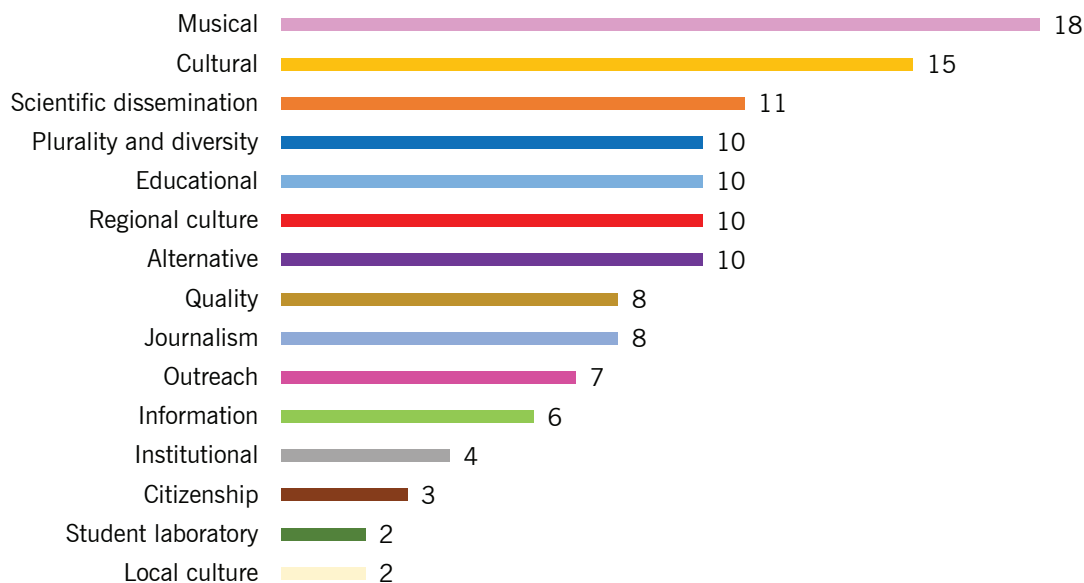
In terms of genre, most broadcasters organise their programming around the triad of music, news and journalism.

Figure 1. Features that define university radio stations in the eyes of the public



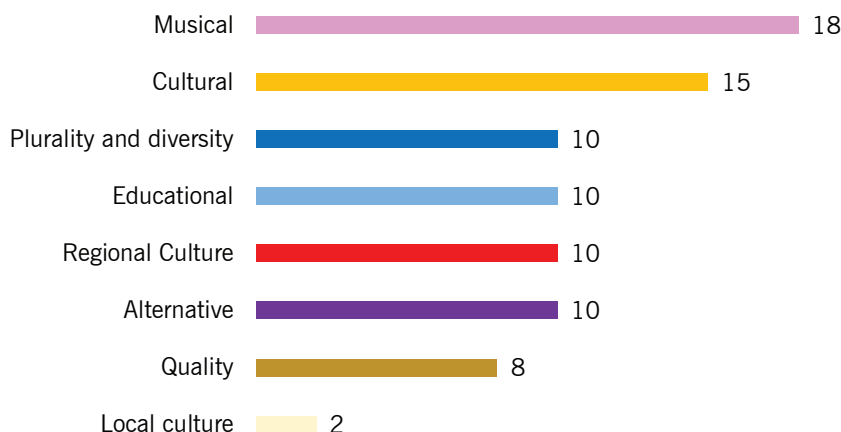
Source: own work with atlas.ti.

Figure 2. Features that define university radio programmes



Source: own work with atlas.ti.

Figure 3. Features that define the musical programming of university radio stations



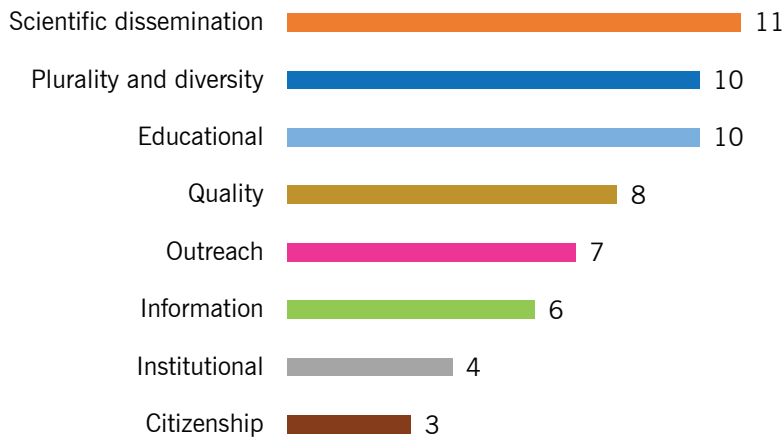
Source: own work with atlas.ti.

Each of these genres brings with it its own qualifying elements that, when combined, give each programming branch its own characteristics.

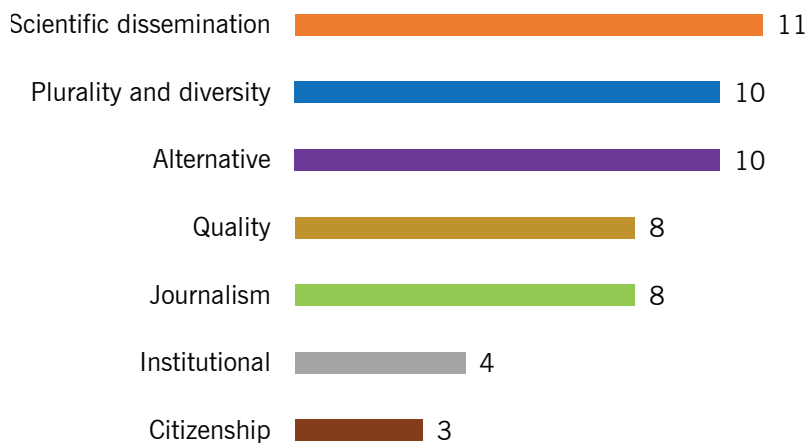
In terms of musical programming, all the stations analysed claim to promote regional and local sounds. Their programming includes genres rarely played on commercial stations, such as ethnic, regional and local music. There is a clear desire to demonstrate that they offer a space for alternative music from independent artists not affiliated with major record labels. Within this branch, educational music programmes also prevail, which feature information about genres and artists to encourage an appreciation of music. The stations aim to carefully select a musical repertoire guided by quality and the principles of

plurality with a diversity of voices and styles, from rock to jazz, blues, chorinho, samba and pop.

The news branch encompasses programmes aimed at disseminating the research, teaching and outreach activities that make the scientific knowledge produced in universities accessible. This includes programmes to promote widening participation, the affirmation of citizenship and social rights, as well as content that encourages social and community participation. It also includes institutional broadcasts relating to university events, achievements and activities. The radio stations claim that their news programmes stand out for the quality of their content and the multiplicity of sources, formats and topics.

Figure 4. Features that define university radio news

Source: own work with atlas.ti.

Figure 5. Features that define the journalistic programming of university radio stations

Source: own work with atlas.ti.

The news programming of the stations analysed is comprehensive, of quality and varied in terms of the choice of topics. The stations emphasise that they offer up-to-date news, debate programmes and analyses of social and political events. They are acutely aware that this type of content is a means of stimulating awareness and civic engagement. Some of the stations also count institutional communication and scientific dissemination as part of their journalistic activity, and they present themselves to the public as being set apart from traditional media, either through their approach that favours a plurality of sources or through their selection of subject matter. The educational aspect also permeates this dimension, with broadcasters claiming to produce programmes aimed at understanding relevant social and political issues, contributing to the education of civic society.

Participation and social control in management of the stations

The public system differs from other communication models in that it is a space managed by principles of transparency, democracy, participation and social control, which requires broadcasters with managerial autonomy and diverse funding sources to be effective. However, most university radio stations are funded exclusively with public resources from the institution itself. Although some operate under the auspices of non-profit foundations controlled by the university, this does not mean they are managed independently and immune to institutional pressures—and even less so that they enjoy financial autonomy.

In this vein, none of the stations analysed has a board of directors or an editorial and programming committee in

place.³ Although the principles of Brazilian public broadcasting envision collaboration between civil society and broadcasters, the radio stations analysed did not have councils to this effect. The closest initiative identified was by Rádio Federal FM from the Federal University de Pelotas, which is currently forming a programming council, with proposals for the creation of such being analysed by the *Advocacia-Geral da União* (Advocacy General of the Union).

As researcher Edna Miola (2009) observes, the role of civil society in public broadcasting through social participation models constitutes part of the process of validating the broadcasters and legitimising institutional and editorial decisions. Miola points out that few public broadcasters have established mechanisms for regulation and participation, with these existing mainly in more established groups, such as the Father Anchieta Foundation, the TV Minas Cultural and Educational Foundation and the *Empresa Brasil de Comunicação*.⁴ (2009:102).

The mechanism the broadcasters use to approach society is the public call for proposals, aimed at sourcing potential partners interested in the independent production and co-production of programmes using the criteria and procedures established in the calls. This action is a way of including productions by individuals, associations, student groups and community radio stations —with or without the support of incentives— as a strategy for diversifying content by including points of view and perspectives derived from different experiences in society.

Of the 26 stations analysed, only three were identified for whom public calls are a regular practice: Rádio Federal FM de Pelotas, Rádio Paulo Freire and Rádio UFSCar. Interestingly, none of these are affiliated with the RNCP. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, other stations had experimented with making public calls, such as Rádio Universitária UFG and Rádio UFOP.

Although in general broadcasters express their public commitment through the provision of diverse, ethical and citizen-oriented programming geared towards social transformation and democracy, few associate their work with a public broadcasting management model in the sense advocated by UNESCO (2001) and the SRP, based on the principles of autonomy and social control. Here lies a permanent contradiction in the country's media ecosystem: broadcasters claim to be public in terms of their programme content but are incapable of being fully integral by assuming the other requirements of the concept.

Conclusions

University radio in Brazil is a broad and dynamic concept comprising dimensions linked to its educational licence type and objectives based on promoting education, culture and citizenship. Because of these factors, these broadcasters can predominately be defined as educational/cultural stations that disseminate cultural and artistic content, promote cultural diversity, offer a space for local and regional expression, and encourage social debate —giving voice to minorities and

underrepresented groups. This reality of the broadcasters is strongly related to the identity of the university itself, and its commitment to the community in which it operates. Public and professional education and training, the recognition of and respect for cultural diversity, actions to promote citizenship and reflections on the world constitute the basis of the university triad of teaching + research + reach. University radio stations do not adhere to just one of these three axes but rather encompass them all. They are linked to social intervention, the construction and dissemination of knowledge, training and social development. The identity of these stations, based on the characterisation of the university itself and the space they occupy, is directly related to this educational/cultural dimension, not only due to their content but also because of the aspects and processes involved.

This educational/cultural dimension is complemented by other facets such as: the notion of the quality alternative radio station, diverse in terms of its topics, formats, genres and range of voices; the institutional radio station that serves as a conduit for disseminating the activities and values of the university and includes the promotion of academic events, research, courses and —most especially— scientific diffusion; and the radio station that promotes citizenship by disseminating information that can contribute to improving the quality of life of the population. Here, we can observe the origins of radio —close to the public and active— in dialogue with the principles of diversity and the dissemination of knowledge applied to everyday, local life. These actions also encompass the human development of the students, who engage in dialogue with the regional community and create content aligned with local demand, and professional training, built upon the variety of content and formats produced and the quest to adapt to a specific editorial profile. This training is often hindered by the lack of infrastructure and human or financial resources required for professional development, undertaking special productions or ensuring the close supervision of students. Radio as a space for quality information —a shared principle of both universities and public radio— also appears as a marker of self-identification for the stations analysed.

Although there is a public policy to integrate university radio stations under the command of federal IESS into the Public Broadcasting Service through the RNCP, for these to be recognised as public stations in a broader sense beyond the features of their programming —which may include dimensions such as financial independence, social participation and control in their management— is still a future feat that depends on a greater understanding of the logic of a truly complementary system.

In part, this dearth of understanding stems from the structural and historical factors that have conditioned the formation of the Brazilian media system: since the 1930s, market logic has predominantly been driven by political and business interests, which have strengthened the commercial radio model. Public radio service is a newcomer to the country's media ecosystem,

and although it was provided for in the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, it was not until 2008 that the principles and objectives of the Public Broadcasting Service were defined and the first public communications company was created. The EBC has only conditional autonomy because it depends on the public budget for its operation, and its directors are appointed by the federal government. During the period from 2016-2022, under the tenure of conservative presidents Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro, the company suffered severe operational intervention, and social participation and managerial autonomy were restricted. The policies for bringing university radio stations closer to the public sphere were also halted during this period, and are currently being revived due to the centre-left government's interest in broadening its political visibility base.

Overcoming the challenge of integrating university broadcasters into the public sphere depends on the consolidation of the institutional mechanisms that underpin the Public Broadcasting Service in all its dimensions, whether in the management of the system, the construction of effective public policies or on behalf of the universities that manage the channels —and this is something which implies broadening the understanding of these broadcasters' activities beyond the scope of institutional dissemination, and linking this comprehension to the principles of autonomy, participation and social control.

One of the challenges of researching Brazilian university broadcasting is understanding the place of decision-making and public participation systems in its organisation. Any analysis of this, however, must be undertaken while accounting for the diverse aspects of these stations —whether their financial management, the recognition of their place within the university structure, their affiliation with student training processes or their freedom about their editorial and programming decisions. Observing the forms of civil society participation in Brazilian university broadcasting requires an understanding of its place in public communication and the impact of shifts in political systems on its development.

Funding

This research has been carried out within the framework of the call for proposals of the Programa Pós-Graduação em Comunicação of the Universidade de Brasília n.03/2024, financed by the Brazilian development agency Capes - Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior.

Notes

1. "Communication policy" is seen as a "flow of public decisions aimed at maintaining social balance or introducing imbalances that tend to modify that reality." From Saravia's more objective and operational perspective, public policies can be understood as a system of public decisions oriented towards preventive or corrective actions or omissions, intended to maintain or modify the reality of one or more sectors of social life, through the definition of objectives and action strategies and the allocation of the necessary resources to achieve the established objectives (Saravia, 2006: 29).
2. UNESCO defines public broadcasting as neither commercial nor controlled by the State. "The only reason for public broadcasting is to provide a public service. And the public broadcasting organisation is the voice that reaches all citizens. Public broadcasting organisations enable access to and participation in public life. They develop knowledge, broaden horizons and enable people to better understand themselves by improving their knowledge of others and the world." (Unesco, 2001, p. 7). UNESCO considers that the service should be guided by the principles of: a) universality, public broadcasting aimed at all; b) diversity, which complements the idea of the first principle and emphasises the importance of plurality in terms of programme genres, topics covered and audiences of interest; c) independence, which is based on the circulation of a variety of ideas and opinions, free from the limitations of private, political and commercial interests; and d) differentiation, which points to the need to produce, disseminate and create plural content that covers a variety of genres and formats.
3. Article 15 of Law 11,652, in which the Public Broadcasting Service and Empresa Brasil de Comunicação are constituted, establishes the obligation for the formation of an editorial and programming committee – a technical body for the institutionalised participation of society in the EBC, of a consultative and deliberative nature, composed of eleven members appointed by entities representing society, by means of a triple list, and designated by the President of the Republic.
4. It is not possible to guarantee stability and permanence in the work of councils. In the specific case of Empresa Brasil de Comunicação, a surge of political disputes and instability led to the dissolution of the Board of Directors in September 2016, followed by a series of interventions in the EBC's activities, which led to its inclusion in the National Privatisation Programme in 2021 (Nitahara and Rego Monteiro da Luz, 2021). EBC resumed the debate on civil society participation with the regulation of the Editorial and Programming Committee through the implementation of Decree 12,005 of April 2024 and by publishing calls for forming the Social Participation, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and the Editorial and Programming Committee in October 2024.

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