

COMMUNITY RADIO: A TOOL FOR IMPROVING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

Community radio enables citizen participation, since it aims to influence the decision-making of institutional actors, contributing to the improvement of management and the quality of life of local residents, as well as favouring the improvement processes of the locality, in this sense, the objective of this research is to analyse how community radio plays a role in improving citizen participation, based on the collection of information through surveys applied to community communicators, The result is that it is a powerful tool that supports local government governance and citizen participation, generating a link between the population and the institution, developing a personal interest in prioritising local issues, addressing problems and providing dialogue and proposals for solutions.

Keywords: Community Communication, Community Participation, Society, Community Radio, Social Space, Democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, citizen participation has been considered a key instrument for improving governance, which is why it is increasingly promoted as a way to involve the population in public affairs, especially at the local level, and thus reduce the problems present in the community (Cernadas et al., 2017).

Likewise, a community is established and produced by a community communication system, which includes community media as tools for the performance of roles and the use of resources to respond to the communication needs of the people and institutions within society (Sala, 2017). Communication is the exchange of ideas that seek a common good, involving the exercise of human rights, encompassing participation (Mullo et al., 2019). Participation is a key concept when it comes to community media, becoming one of the distinguishing characteristics of local media (Kimani, 2019).

Community, alternative or citizen media arise from the need to democratise the word in search of a fairer society, so they are critical tools for social control and citizen empowerment, as well as active participation in the public sphere. Thus, the medium becomes involved in the social context to transmit a local reality on air, opening up to an increasingly connected world, in which, within the various typologies of alternative media, radio stands out as an ideal space for communication, through the oral participation of social actors (Ramos, 2018; Mullo et al., 2019).

As García (2017) details, community media do not serve the people, on the contrary, they serve the people; becoming the first to take the step to create links that empower the

cooperation and commitment of the community, recovering the protagonism of the citizens in the communicative process, including in the elaboration of contents and the management of the media itself. This type of communication is also called alternative, participatory, developmental, horizontal and transformative, seeking to strengthen the social space, recognising the importance of local identity (Martínez, 2018).

In this sense, community radio is generated to establish the participation of a broad representation of the different socio-economic levels, made up of organisations and minority groups that exist within the community, whose purpose is to facilitate the free circulation of information, highlighting freedom of thought, the generation of questioning and dialogue within the locality (UNESCO, 1999).

Community radio is presented as a proposal to open up a dialogue of knowledge from a perspective that involves the community and favours development processes (Lizondo, 2018), as well as an initiative that is born in the locality itself, as a means of counteracting the dominant media and creating radios that meet the needs of freedom of expression and participatory democracy (Galarza & Culqui, 2017).

At the Latin American level, the first community radio stations emerged in the mid-1980s, this scenario was the opening of democracy for the region, starting with the two countries hardest hit by the military dictatorship: Chile and Argentina, and from the 1990s onwards, community radio stations began to proliferate throughout Latin America (Galarza & Culqui, 2017).

In the Andean region, there was a great need for support for community media, which for years had been relegated from the national and international context, in order to constitute a representation of all those sectors that manifest a diversity of multicultural and multiethnic peoples (Galarza & Culqui, 2017, Coque et al., 2020).

So, the objective of this research is to analyse how community radio stations play a role in improving citizen participation, specifically studying the case of the peri-urban areas of the district of Ayacucho. This is based on the collection of information through surveys and the planning of the production of community radio stations in the area, with a detailed programme oriented towards citizen participation and local development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Citizen participation

Citizen participation, as specified by Navarro (2004) (cited in Montecinos & Contreras, 2019) is a right and an opportunity, of an individual or collective nature, enjoyed by citizens to express their interests and demands, in order to influence the decision-making of institutional actors at different levels, thus contributing to the improvement of management and the quality of life of local people.

As Contreras and Montecinos (2019) detail, the origin of citizen participation can be traced back to democracy, which since ancient Greece considers the citizen as the

possessor of civic virtues at the disposal of the common good, where his or her involvement in public affairs is essential for the development of participation in the community.

Likewise, the World Bank (2019) notes that citizens play a critical role in institutions, enabling them to be transparent, accountable and effective, while providing innovative solutions to complex development challenges.

2.2. Citizen participation in community radio

Social participation is the fundamental key to the construction of a community radio, where citizen participation in community radio should be seen in the analysis of public space as the capacity and possibility of people to influence the transformation of the condition of the community that affect their own lives (Martínez et al., 2018).

In the same sense, participation allows to dynamise communication within a given group and also from the group towards society, prevailing the interaction between the sender and the receiver mediated through the radio medium, the characteristic feature of this modality is the participatory nature of this and the community (Galarza & Culqui, 2017).

Serrano (2015) (cited in Coque et al., 2020), specifies that citizenship has a direct intervention in public affairs, with the responsibility to decide and guide, characterised by direct citizen participation in spaces where they can be heard.

2.3. Community radio

Community radios favour development processes in communities, whose orientation is the satisfaction of communication needs between local actors and institutions, to facilitate the participation of their inhabitants, who become the protagonists of the radio programmes, thereby promoting local development, values, the construction of citizenship and the strengthening of cultural and social identities (de la Noval, 2018).

Lopez (1997), an important theoretician and promoter of the community radio movement, lists four criteria that define them, as follows: the first is to contribute to development, following the communicative line and its role as a space for dialogue; the second criterion is to broaden democracy, followed by the defence of human rights and, finally, the protection of cultural diversity.

Next, Galarza and Amador (2018) detail specific characteristics of community radio, where they point out that it belongs to a defined social group with common qualities, who administer and direct it, while it is the community who manages the medium, empowering it, strengthening social relations, The population is also present before, during and after the radio broadcast, respecting the veracity of the information provided, contrasting sources, as well as functioning as a development tool for the solution of the community's problems.

It details that community radio is a non-profit service, which is owned and managed by a particular community through a local trust or foundation with the aim of helping through its programming (Pinargote et al., 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Type of research

The research was qualitative, since the reality was studied in its natural context and as it happens, extracting and interpreting the data according to the stated objective, so it was based on a systematic, active and rigorous process (Ortega, 2018).

3.2. Research design

The nature of the present study was non-experimental, showing the population evaluated in their natural environment, without changing their posture, and at the same time, the variables that are part of the research are not altered (Arias, 2021).

3.3. Population and sample

The province of Huamanga has a population of 282 194 inhabitants, according to the last population and housing census 2017 conducted by INEI (2017), where the sample was based on the technique of non-probabilistic sampling by convenience, which allowed the selection of those who agreed to be included (Otzen & Manterola, 2017), being composed of community communicators, leaders of communal neighbourhood boards and workers of the provincial municipality.

3.4. Instruments and data collection

For the collection of information, the technique used was the interview, which is a formal conversation that has a specific objective, where it has involved adequate planning and training, enabling the collection of detailed information, where the person who informs shares orally with the researcher what concerns a specific topic (Fernández, 2018).

3.5. Data analysis

The collection of information was systematised taking into account two variables: firstly, the elements of horizontal communication made up of access, dialogue and participation, and as a second variable, participation, the application of the Microsoft Excel 2019 programme enabled the analysis and processing of the data.

3.6. Ethical aspects

For the development of the research, a letter of consent was provided by the interviewees, which specified methodological aspects, the use of the research, as well as the objectives of the research, detailing their voluntary participation in the present study.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Results of the interviews on community radio

4.1.1. Institutional vision of community radio – neighbourhood voice

They point out that civil servants must understand that the community radio-neighbourhood voice is a powerful tool that supports the governance of local government, as well as citizen participation, generating an institutional link with the population, so that the beneficiary population is assisted in improving their capacities and giving greater sustainability to this meeting space between the population and the municipal authorities.

4.1.2. Successes of community radio implementation

With the implementation of the community radio station, the authorities of the provincial municipality have come closer to the population that benefits from their services, converting part of the administration into a space where neighbours can get closer, improving communication. In this way, by expressing their demands and needs of their locality, the neighbours are able to transform the community radio into a space for dialogue and communication, improving the relationship between authorities and neighbours.

4.1.3. Community interest and the leadership interest of community communicators

They considered that the community communicators have their own agenda, where they show leadership by hosting or moderating radio programmes, so that their personal interest was related to their personal commitment to the community. As far as community interest is concerned, having a motivation to deal with local issues shows the need to prioritise community issues and include the community in public management.

4.1.4. Community radio – neighbourhood voice and the relationship of neighbours with council officials and workers

The relationship of neighbours with officials and workers is vertical; however, this panorama has been reduced by the presence of community radio, as this communal space has allowed its officials and workers to receive an overview of the reality, through complaints and demands regarding the activities. Likewise, the fact that villagers have a space to express their opinions on local government activities maximised their possibilities to exercise their right to citizen oversight and participation by seeking out guests who could be interviewed on community radio to respond on the service provided by the local government.

4.1.5. Community communicators and their right to participate

By speaking on community radio, the community communicator exercises his or her right to participate, becoming a community leader, as well as having representative powers. At the same time, by putting issues of interest to the locality, it is a form of active

participation, which, by having the presence of local authorities, manages to establish a relationship with the community.

4.1.6. Communication before community radio

Loudspeakers summoned the population or summons delivered to their homes, and in 5 some cases, notice was given through the mass media. Regarding the nature of the meeting, priority was given to issues that were not understood by the authorities, with the government's authoritarian and top-down attitude towards the population taking precedence, with no democratic spirit.

4.2. Community radio production

The collection of information through the interviews made it possible to detect the situation, as well as to follow up on the achievement of the objective, so the planning of the cycle of activities for the production of the community radio station continued, consisting of pre-production, production and post-production.

4.2.1. Pre - production

The pre-production stage is divided into four activities, consisting of community radio installation, activity management, coordination and script development, each of which is detailed in Table 1.

Pre - production

Table 1: Activities carried out in the Pre – production stage

| Activities | Features |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Installing of community radios | The local government specifies to the community the installation of a community radio station, which would have the function of a loudspeaker, serving to promote citizen participation. |
| Management of activities | The communication specialist is in charge of communicating to local authorities and other actors about the activities that can be carried out and executed, in order to achieve the strengthening of participation. It consists of two types of coordination: internal and external. Internal coordination: This is carried out with the heads of each area, addressing the activities that can be carried out or promoted in the community radio stations, as well as addressing local problems. External coordination: This is done with individuals, representatives of non-profit organisations who can disseminate prevention promotion activities. |
| Coordination | Meeting between community communicators and the communication specialist to determine the agenda and script to be written to be read in the community radio programmes. The meeting is run horizontally, where opinions are gathered from community communicators based on the proposal developed and covering the needs of the locality. The regularity is once a month and the agendas go out for the four weeks. |

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Script development | <p>The script is prepared on the basis of the observations made previously in the coordination section, divided into the following sections: Presentation, First segment, Second segment and Third segment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation: covers information related to the programme, and community communicators are willing to indicate the objectives of community radio and the content of the programme. - First segment: contains information on different news items of international, national, regional and local relevance. - Second segment: An open dialogue takes place, with the participation of local and institutional actors, on issues of relevance and interest to the community. |
|--------------------|--|

4.2.2. Production

Development of the programme according to the script, elaborated in the previous stage, where the community communicator executes the programme in the space of one hour in the community radio, while the communication specialist monitors the activities of the production.

The first phase consists of the presentation, which is usually carried out without any setbacks; the community communicator introduces himself and explains the objectives of the community radio, the content of the topic to be covered and the guests to be interviewed.

The second phase is the first segment of the programme, reading out the script and communicating the content of the day's news, and providing commentary.

The third phase is the second segment, where there is an open dialogue, with the participation of local and institutional actors, touching on issues of relevance and interest to the community, addressing the problems and providing dialogue and proposals for solutions, until a consensus is reached and alternative solutions are found. Finally, the third segment focuses on messages or announcements that should be known by the community.

4.2.3. Post - production

At this stage, the implementation of consensual activities takes place, where the actions of each agreement and decision taken in the community radio programmes must be guaranteed.

4.3. Selected radio programmes

Table 2 shows the five community radio stations located in the peri-urban areas of the district, detailing the participants involved in each programme broadcast, as well as the topic to be covered, each one contributing to the collection of opinions from local actors, to strengthen their participation, to community development and to the solution of their problems and/or needs.

Table 2: List of community radios to apply the planning of the production cycle of activities

| Community radio | Participants | Topics |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Pilacucho | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - President of the community neighbourhood council. - Community communicator. - - Neighbourhood Community Communicator | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint activities with the Sub-management of Neighbourhood Participation. - Change of the neighbourhood organisation recommended by the sub management of neighbourhood participation. |
| | Representative of the Deputy Directorate for Education, Culture and Sport <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - President of the JVC and Community Communicator - Community Communicator | Call for Workshops for Youth Day and other joint activities coordinated with the Provincial Municipality. |
| | President of the JVC, community communicator. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secretary for Children and Adolescents | Call for community public clean-up in the community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Malnutrition and the environment |
| Río Seco | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Communicator - Deputy Manager of Serenazgo - President of JVC | Call for neighbours to participate in Community Radio on Citizen Security issues. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community communicator | Road traffic accidents and measures to be taken by neighbours to avoid them |
| San Juan de La Picota | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Communicator - Communication Specialist of the Sub-management of Neighbourhood Participation - Environmental specialist of the solid waste unit. | Coordination of actions and measures with the environment and solid waste management unit. |
| | Solid waste unit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Communicator - President of the JVC | Solid waste collection campaign |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Communicator - Councillor | Solution to the demand of the neighbours regarding the pollution generated by the passing of the solid waste collection carts. |
| Señor de La Picota | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Communicator - Local residents | Call to the public to participate in community radio programmes |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Communicator - Deputy Manager for Youth, Education and Sport | Information on the activities of the Community Listening and Reception Centre |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Communicator - President of the JVC | Balance of the clean-up campaign carried out by neighbours together with the municipality |
| Pueblo Libre | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication specialist Sub-management for Neighbourhood Participation - Community Communicator - - Local resident | Call to the neighbours for the communal work with representatives of the municipality |

5. DISCUSISION OF RESULTS

Community radio implies recovering the protagonism of the population in the communicative process, where their involvement includes the elaboration of the content and the management of the medium itself, in which the appropriation of the communication process is a vehicle for social change, based on the active participation of the people and the democratisation of the word (Tornay, 2021).

In this sense, the results of the interviews show that community radio generates an institutional-community link, where the beneficiary population is served by addressing issues of interest to them. This correlates with Chahuán and Requis (2021), who in their study on how community radio contributes to local development, gathered interviews with the actors involved and systematised the radio programmes, obtaining that 50% of the sample considered that the neighbourhood radio did contribute to the solution of the problems affecting their locality, 7% said no, and the rest (42.90%) said sometimes. 10% said no, and the rest (42.90%) said sometimes.

However, as Mullo et al. (2019) in their research, whose aim was to promote social progress through the promotion of participatory processes that guarantee the empowerment of the community through the creation of community radio, they faced economic and training difficulties, as well as a lack of participation and commitment from the community in the radio, specifically in the administrative and communicational areas, where equitable involvement was not achieved, which is why they specify that community leaders must create horizontal communication strategies that enable them to involve citizens in the dialogue.

Martínez and Ortega, 2018) point out that the perception of the definition of a community radio station shows a paradox, described as a place that includes social and cultural aspects, but which, at the same time, excludes the participation of the community, but at the same time serves to communicate the facts of community life as their own and close to reality, which is why they affirm that the organizations and managers of community radio stations do not promote the participation of citizens in their programming, nor do they lead social activities.

In other ideas, Darretxe et al. (2020) point out that the implementation of radio communication tools are ideal projects for the promotion of citizen involvement and the visualisation of the inclusive purposes that are developed in the community.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Community radio stations ensure the right to communication, while at the same time protecting the construction of social realities, which is why they are so important, as they allow citizens to participate and feel that they can express their opinions and listen to those of others, as well as raise their problems and alternative solutions.

The community radio-neighbourhood voice is a meeting place between neighbours and local government representatives, providing information to the community based on local

events, limiting its functions to convening, communicating and promoting meetings and dialogues between stakeholders. This tool managed to overcome the limitations of communication between representatives of local authorities and neighbourhood councils, converting community radio into a space for horizontal meetings between locals and authorities, reaching mutual commitments towards action to meet citizens' demands on existing problems in the community, while serving as a means of information and clarifying doubts about their participation in the development of activities. Likewise, the present study presents a value for the authorities of the institutional organisations, in order to understand the benefits of communication in favour of local development while empowering social and communicational processes, while the research is an impulse to broaden the analysis of community radio, considering its effectiveness in terms of participation of the population and turning them into actors.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is not conflict of interest.

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