

Adaptation of the *Irscom* social profitability indicator to the context of community radio in Colombia

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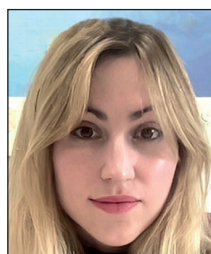
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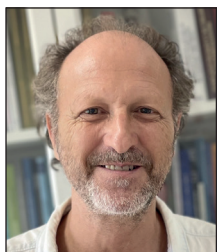
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Abstract

The main objective of this research action is to highlight the process of adaptation, validation, and administration of the *Indicator of social profitability in communication (Irscom, Indicador de rentabilidad social en comunicación)* for the community and indigenous radio sector of Colombia, a country with over 700 community radio stations nationwide, and the first in Latin America/Abya Yala to legalize them. The *Irscom*, a registered trademark, was created by the *LabCom-Andalucía* group of the *University of Malaga* in 2012. Employing six categories and 33 variables, it reflects the working practice and dynamics of radio stations to achieve their objectives, awarding points subject to weightings and criteria linked to pertinence. A compendium of quantitative (questionnaire, weighting, and rankings) and qualitative methods (focus groups and semi-structured interviews) were applied in its development and administration. The sample for this pilot project (from the *Ministry of Culture of Colombia*, the *Faculty of Communications of the University Minuto de Dios*, Bogotá, and *LabComAndalucía*) consisted of 11 community radio stations, an indigenous community radio station declared to be of public interest, and four community radio networks within the country. The results confirmed that *Irscom* is an organic tool that, without substantial modifications to the original framework, and although designed for Spain, can be adapted to other international contexts so that different broadcasters may appreciate their strengths and weaknesses. It contributes to holistic reflection on the social profitability of these media within their broadcasting areas. In the short term, *Irscom* may be extended to other community radio stations in the country. In the medium term, this indicator can help the community and the indigenous sound sector to improve their social profitability and validate their activities with government and institutional agencies to defend their important work of social cohesion and the need for solid sources of financing. It can also contribute to better collective organization by joining interests, with the awarding of the *Irscom* seal of quality as an endorsement of its implementation and improvements.



Keywords

Irscom; Indicator of social profitability in communication; Radio; Community radios; Indigenous radio stations; Afro-radio stations; Sound sector; Communication for the common good; Indicators; Research-action; Citizen radio stations; Proximity communication; Public radio stations; Colombia.

1. Theoretical–methodological background

The global impact of the not-for-profit community radio sector has been felt throughout various countries and lands for over five decades, employing different terminologies and a variety of approaches. There are some early models that date back to the 1940s and the early 1950s in Colombia (Sutatenza) and Bolivia (mining community radios). Terms such as radio schools (**Gutiérrez-Riaño**, 1957), alternative media (**Atton**, 2001), free radio (**Prado**, 1983), associated broadcasters (**Cheval**, 2007), citizens radio (**Rodríguez**, 2001), indigenous radio (**Chan-Concha**, 2000), radical radio (**Downing**, 2001), and the third sector radio (**Chaparro-Escudero**, 2005) demonstrate the terminological diversity with which they are known or have been known over time. On this point, **Peppino-Barale** (2010) completed one of the most important studies of this varied typology. Over and above the differentiating aspects, all these typologies have a series of characteristics that infuses each one with idiosyncratic aspects and a reason to be. They are, in general, self-managed and not-for-profit projects that offer local programming close to the community, which promote social participation and show a marked public-service nature, as well as being converted into agents for democratization (**Lewis; Mitchell**, 2014, p. 253).

This investigation is an approach to the study of community radio in Colombia, where community communications media and processes are of great social transcendence. This striking extension of community radio-processes (**Unriza-Puin**, 2016) and the legal framework available to them have meant that different ministerial departments have steadily been working to study the sector from perspectives that give it greater visibility, promote it, improve its working conditions, and increase the quality of the broadcasting available to society, among other aspects. Hence, under those circumstances, the *Ministry of Culture of Colombia*, through the *Directorate of Audiovisual, Film and Interactive Media*, expressed interest in the *Indicador de rentabilidad social en comunicación (Irscom)* [Indicator of social profitability in communication]. This tool, with a registered trademark, was created by the *LabComAndalucía* group of *University of Malaga* in 2012. It seeks a response to the value that communication-information should have for the public, beyond mere economic profitability for a radio station. *Irscom* has been applied (to local public radio) in the Autonomous Regions of Andalusia, Murcia, and Castilla-La Mancha. At present, its adaptation and replication are underway for generalist networks of private radios that broadcast in France, Portugal, and Colombia. Specific studies have also been conducted in the case of community radio in Andalusia (**El-Mohammadiane-Tarbift; Espinar-Medina**, 2019), as well as both public and private generalist television channels (**Espinar-Medina; López-Gómez; Peralta-García**, 2023).

The *Irscom* tool builds a picture of the functioning and the internal dynamics of radio stations under six categories of analysis:

- management,
- social capital,
- interface with the locality,
- interface with the people,
- programming,
- exploitation of digital technologies, and infrastructures.

These six categories are in turn subdivided into 33 variables. Formatted as a questionnaire that can be answered in person or over the telephone, the tool is generally administered to managers of the radio stations, whose responses have to be validated through the submission of supporting documentation or evidence. The information collected in that way must be visible and up to date on the radio station website so that the public can access it, as the web is the principal source of verification. After a weighting process based on criteria of belonging and importance, *Irscom* generates numerical results in graphic form on how each radio station fares in relation to the different variables of the study. This presentation of results means that the radio station can easily observe both the strengths and the weaknesses that, in the former case, help it to identify good practice, and in the latter case, facilitate work on improvements. Applied in a general way across the sector, it builds up an overall view and comparative approximations. On the basis of this consideration, it is turned into a guide of working recommendations that can in turn be adopted by the media in its different fields and management models: community, public, and commercial. The principal objective of the indicator is to contribute to visualizing social profitability and raising awareness of the need for support that might range from the Public Administration to the economic sustainability of resources that play an essential role in the construction of good citizenship and public empowerment, and that incentivize good practice within the audiovisual media industry.

1.1. The concept of social profitability

It is worth remarking on the concept of “social profitability” at this point, which constitutes the principal theoretical framework underpinning the present study. In this case, social profitability goes beyond the economist-centered view of community radio; it inquires into its capacity to be effective within the locality, in terms of social responsibility, ma-

king use of a shared resource, electromagnetic radio waves. The profitability of the radio must therefore have an effect on social benefits. This concept must not be confused with the concept of “sustainability”, which only impacts on the financing mechanisms, in an attempt to define the way in which the radios can support themselves from an economic point of view. However, an optimal indicator of social profitability can impact on economic sustainability. Neither social profitability, nor sustainability have to be understood under the concept of “development” when this is converted into a synonym of the speculative economic-centered model, which has only served to deepen social inequality and inequity, favoring oligopolies advancing a single argumentative line on development (**Rocha-Torres**, 2016, p. 59; **Escobar**, 2007; **Escobar**; **Chaparro-Escudero**, 2020; **Chaparro-Escudero**, 2009; 2015).

We assume that social profitability is the road towards achieving a non-developmental-centered evolution of communication, a profitability that contributes to the common good, to positive social, cultural, and political attitudes towards the communications media that leads to their sustainability. Social profitability, as *Irscom* envisages it, is understood as ethical, participative, and transparent practice in the management of radio, sufficient human resources that are diverse, differentiated, and participative, an effective interface with the locality, quality programming, that is close at hand and varied, effective use of digital technologies, and sufficient equipment and premises for the activities to unfold. This operative framework is connected with what has been called “communication of commonness”, a radical insistence on decoupling both the value of change that pins a mercantile value to the space and the place, and the ownership of the means of production of symbolic contents, characteristics of mass-media practice, and daily social interactions molded by neoliberal reasoning (**Cerbino-Arturoi**, 2018, p. 117). The conceptualization of social profitability might therefore be associated with a process of horizontal management reinforced through networks of exchange, with contents that promote social and political participation (**Carpentier**; **Scifo**, 2010), with collective groups that self-manage their own activities (**McQuail**; **Van-Cuilenburg**, 1983), and media that construct democratic links with their social and geographical environment strengthened by networks of exchange (**Chaparro-Escudero**, 2012).

We add our voice to the criticism of the obsolete idea of persisting with communication for development (that is deterministic, functionalistic, and that commercializes life). As **Torrico-Villanueva** (2013) said: “we need a communication to leave development behind”, we also understand that the message is the land and that the land is dignified and reconquered through the practice of the common good and community administration of common goods, among which is communication and its technologies, as a part of a reparative, decolonialized, fertile “circular communication”, which collectively creates, restores, and nourishes the land (**De-Andrés-Del-Campo**; **Chaparro-Escudero**, 2022).

1.2. Objectives and methodology

From this proposal, the principal objective of the research-action reported in this paper is to explain the adaptation and validation process of *Irscom* for its evaluation of the community radio sector in Colombia. The first country of Abya Yala to apply it with a scientific methodology. The specific objectives point to three investigative questions:

- What sort of adaptations will the tool require to evaluate its role as influencer in harmony with the context?
- Up to what point has *Irscom* been recognized and validated as a useful tool among community and indigenous radio broadcasters in Colombia and why?
- What benefits could the sector obtain from widespread application of the indicator.

Our starting hypothesis was an assumption that *Irscom* is an organic tool capable of being adapted to other international socio-cultural contexts without varying the constructivist strategy of the initial rankings and weightings, but incorporating specific variables to reflect the realities of each country, as is to be demonstrated.

The methodology used to adapt *Irscom Spain* to the Colombian context and for its validation was based on a research-action process in which the community and indigenous radio stations analyzed and defined the indicators of social profitability in relation to their contexts and needs, sharing items of information that –over the three days of workshops and six previous online working sessions– were used to contextualize the variables that the indicator suggested according to the original model. Communication in this methodology, as is well illustrated in the book by **Rocha-Torres** (2016), *La investigación-acción participativa* [Participatory action research], is understood as a collective construction of sense and meaning. It implies that communication is constructed from inter-subjectivity, dialogue, and interactivity. It develops as a process of collective construction and not only as an expressive action. As the author said:

“Participatory action research [...] is assumed to be dialogical, problematizing, procedural, and under continuous construction” (**Rocha-Torres**, 2016, p. 58).

The methodological design begins with the need for collective construction linked to communication for social transformation and it combines both the quantitative focus, –arising from the administration of *Irscom* and its weighted results– and the qualitative focus –unfolding from focal groups and semi-structured interviews. This last approach was fundamental for the need to visibilize the design of a flexible and participative working method, to account for and to interpret the coordination between communities-radios and the reciprocal links between social organization and the production modes of radio-related content (**Miles**; **Huberman**, 1994), questions that are well reflected in the final design of *Irscom Colombian Communities* (*Irscom CC*).

Given that a process of adaptation is an implicit part of the present research-action, due to the existence of different social-media and cultural contexts, the following paragraphs are intended to offer contextual information that will lead to a better comparison between evolving processes and the social impact of community radios in Spain and Colombia, while highlighting the principal studies from the review of the literature.

2. Community radios in Colombia and in Spain: a comparative view

Community radio stations have followed particular paths in the different socio-cultural contexts in which they have been developing and despite sharing common characteristics, they also offer unique features. If in Latin America/Abya Yala, they were turned into centres of radio communication during and because of the struggles of communities of peasants, workers students, miners, women, indigenous people, and people of African descendancy (**Cerbino-Arturoi**, 2018, p. 126), in Europe they went hand in hand with political revindications for democratization initially against public monopolies, and subsequently through artistic and cultural expression (**Lewis; Both**, 1992; **Chaparro-Escudero**, 1996).

Thus, they were initially considered as a tool in Colombia for developmentalist propaganda, driven by *Usaid* (*United States Agency for International Development*), the *World Bank*, and other instances of international cooperation. Following the educational achievements of the historic *Radio Sutatenza* (1947), the community radios within Colombia received State subsidies. Andina radio was turned into a focal point for the improvement of agricultural and livestock production, health, and education through the model of radio schools (**Beltrán-Salmón**, 2015). The idea of community radio as radios rooted in the community, which broadcast social demands, paying special attention to the needs of impoverished social classes, has persisted up until our days. Struggles, in some way, against the ideals of wellbeing that are sold as generic in developed society, when in reality development practices are excluding and deepening the inequality gap. In Colombia, radio has also been attributed the capability to strengthen democracy with the promotion of venues for public participation, especially since the signing of the *Final Peace Agreement* between the national Government and the *Frente de Liberación Revolucionario Colombiano-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP)* [*Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army*] (**Zúñiga; Grattan**, 2017).

In quantitative terms, the community radio sector also presents disparity from one land to another, as in the comparative case between Spain and Colombia with which we are concerned. While no more than one hundred community radios with no permits are counted on the Spanish map of radio broadcasters, this type encompasses over 700, in Colombia, with their licenses assigned, according to the geo-referencing portal on radio broadcasting services in Colombia¹ on the *MinTic* (*Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies*) website. Nevertheless, this data can be compared with information on radio stations with active broadcasts and in operation, as according to the study of *Cartografías de la Información de la Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP)* [*Cartographs of Information of the Press Freedom Foundation*] the country had 658 community radios in 2010; falling to 626 in the year 2020 (*FLIP*, 2020). Despite both the quantitative and qualitative variations between the level of social impact of one country or another, one region or another, or one municipal council or another, they represent an alternative to private commercial media concentrated in oligopolistic structures (**Chaparro-Escudero**, 1997; 1998; 2002; 2015).

The differentiating features affect other areas. Thus, in Spain, the *General law on audiovisual communication 7/2010* implied an inflexion point in the recognition of community radio and its legal consolidation. But, as **Díaz-Muriana** and **Meda-González** pointed out (2014), despite the legal requirements, this law developed no specific regulations, nor assigned radio frequency bands that might have permitted the concession of new licenses. Neither does this basic commitment exist in the new *Law on audiovisual communication*, approved in 2022, which maintains the same situation of uncertainty (**Chaparro-Escudero; Espinar-Medina; López-Gómez**, 2022). The legal framework for the operation of community radio in Spain is still unregulated. Even though the right to broadcast is recognized, the radio stations have no other option but to broadcast on band lengths with no administrative authorization, leaving them liable to fines and closures. The situation in Spain is very different from other European countries such as France, Great Britain, Ireland, Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands; and the same may be said of others within Latin America, such as Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and even Colombia itself (**Chaparro-Escudero; Escorcía-López**, 2014) where the sector is fully regulated in law.

In the case of Colombia, it is the *Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies (MinTIC)* that grants the licenses and exercises control and supervision over the community radios. The capacity of community radio to promote public expression and peaceful co-existence is recognized in the regulations, so as to facilitate the exercise of the right to information and communication, to drive pluralist participation in matters of public interest, and for the recognition of cultural diversity, among others. It all has the purpose of contributing to the enlargement of democracy and the construction of “human development” within the country (2008) (*MinTIC*, 2015).

The vitality that covers the sector, unlike the Spanish scenario, has been reinforced in a recent Draft Law that seeks to “democratize” the radio system, strengthening community media. This initiative that was presented by *Congressional Members of the Historic Pact for Colombia* –in the coalition of the President Gustavo Petro–pursued the “progressive re-assignment of the radio spectrum” occupied by AM, FM, and television broadcasters, in order to assign bandwidths to community radio, until they occupied 33.3% of all frequency bands. In turn, they would receive support through, on the

one hand, an existing fund (*Fontic*), financed with a new tax imposed on audiovisual Internet streaming services (10% of their total income) such as *Netflix*, *HBO*, *Max*, and others (*Observacom*, 2022).

In relation with the use of advertising (revenue) –colloquially known as “*la pauta*” [the norm]– there are also differences, it being such a sensitive topic as much as a question of not-for-profit radios that nevertheless seek a form of sustainability that governments hardly favor. In the case of Spain, the community radios, up until the approval of *General Law 13/2022 on Audiovisual Communication (España, 2022)*, were unable to advertise any type of publicity. With the new law, they can broadcast commercial advertisements from the local area and institutional campaigns. Advertising was contemplated at the start in Colombia, although its scope was restricted: and it was not without its conflicts and contradictions.² As Fajardo-Rojas *et al.* pointed out, attracting advertising for self-financing has on occasions led to the demise of the communicative project, in other words, its mission, converting the community radio into a radio with wide frequency bands transmitting music at the service of the recording industry, in the style of commercial radio, and sending out messages that are in contradiction with their principles and values (Fajardo-Rojas *et al.*, 2010, p. 32). Nevertheless, the new Draft Law that seeks the amendment of *Law 1341 of 2009* and of *Law 1978 of 2019*, states that a relevant part of institutional advertising expenditure be allocated to community and alternative media –whether it is radio, press, television, or any other digital channel–, obliging the State to assign 33.3% of all advertising revenue to them.

The community radios in Colombia also cover the distinct populational focus of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities by responding to the cultural and linguistic variety of the country. The process of assigning licenses to community radios with a distinct ethnic focus began for the first time in 2009. The communities that finished the process and had their channels up and running were therefore able to join the 624 community radios already in existence in that country.

There are moreover processes and means of communication related to radio that are well-recognized at national and international levels, such as those of the indigenous Wayúu, Nasa, and Misak peoples. Likewise, the development of public policies in Colombia within this sector, especially referring to community-indigenous communication, are an example at a continental level, thanks to the actions that have been developed in the country to strengthen them. Especially on the basis of such milestones as the:

- Declaration in 2010 of the *First Continental Summit of Indigenous Communication of Abya Yala* held at Cauca,
- the celebration of the *International Year of Indigenous Communication (2012)*, and
- the launch of the *Primera Asamblea de Comunicación Indígena de los Pueblos Originarios de Colombia (Acoic)* [*First Assembly of Indigenous Communication of People Originating from Colombia*] in that same year, in the indigenous reserve of Muellamués, municipality of Guachucal, department of Nariño.³

Investigations such as the work of González-Tanco have centered on indigenous organizations within the country, their spaces and their communication processes. The construction of their communication system has been analyzed through specific aspects such as identity and empowerment to “liberate the word” (González-Tanco, 2016) or the “*minga*” of thought⁴ as a methodology for the collective construction of knowledge within the framework of *buen vivir* (good living) and eco-social discourses (González-Tanco, 2018). Salazar-Torres (2016) understands that communication is structured around political-cultural processes linked to mobilizing actions of a symbolic, territorial, family-related, and political-organizational nature.

3. The state of the art

The study of community radios both in Spain and in Colombia is a consolidated tradition. One of the pioneering Spanish studies was the book *Radio pública local* (Chaparro-Escudero, 1998). Although it refers to community appropriations managed through municipal radio stations and the right of access as a model of public management, it places the emphasis on community radios, the right to local communication, democratic duty, and the need for the radio stations to be governed by actions that guarantee their transparency, establishing comparisons between alternative-alterative models within Europe. Account is also taken of how the first free radios that appeared in Spain at the end of the seventies were transformed into public radio stations as from around 1979, turning to the local administrations for a legal protection and in an open attitude of confrontation with the State government, which in this way saw the birth of municipal radio. Public collectives that wished to set up independent radio stations turned to municipal legislation in search of legal support. As is said in the text:

“In Spain, the so-called free radio played a merely testimonial role; among other things, because while these radios enjoyed the sympathy and support of a social and an economic majority wishing to see an end to the situation of anarchic monopoly in France and in Italy, only a particular socio-cultural segment of the population in Spain provided the radio stations with resolute support, but it was of little weight” (Chaparro-Escudero, 1998, p. 35).

This situation may be explained because private commercial radio, unlike in Europe, already co-existed in Spain, although the informative monopoly belonged to the public radio of the dictatorship up until 1978. In Europe, there have been calls for an end to public monopolies, in the interests of both private commercial radio stations and not-for-profit associations.

The experiences related in *Radiotelevisión pública local y alternativa [Public, local and alternative radio-television]* (Chaparro-Escudero, 1997) also constituted an interesting viewpoint on this incipient panorama in Spain, which has gradually been consolidated over time, not always as successfully as expected. Recent reviews of interest have been Díaz-Muriana and Meda-González (2014); Ramos-Martín, Morais and Barranquero-Carretero (2018).

In the Colombian scenario, there are in turn numerous publications and much interest within the sector. It is all highlighted in such studies as “*Para entender la radio comunitaria hoy [Understanding community radio today]*” (Gómez-Mejía; Quintero-Velásquez, 2001), where the principal milestones in the legalization process of the community radio in Colombia go back as far as the *McBride report* (McBride, 1993). The authors reviewed the conceptual lines that guided the designers and institutional managers of this broadcasting service –grounded in the notions of communication, culture, and development that were advanced in the seminal papers of Martín-Barbero (1981) and García-Canclini (1995). As these authors affirmed:

“communication was understood as a powerful instrument to strengthen social organization and the achievement of improvements to the quality of life within traditionally marginalized sectors” (Gómez-Mejía; Quintero-Velásquez, 2001, p. 143).

Pereira-González (2001, p. 113) contributed to a definition of the experiences of local community radio and television as forms of public expression in Colombia. The author pointed out that the majority of community radios in 2001 were still in a process of consolidation as true local and community communication projects with strong links to social and cultural projects that were true expressions of grassroots citizenship.

In 2009, the report of Cadavid-Bringe and Moreno-Martínez, “*Qualitative evaluation of the radio: audiences for peace in the Magdalena Medio province of Colombia*” proposed the evaluation and analysis of stories and drawings to inquire into the imagination and mentality of people with regard to moments, memories, events or experiences that were related with the community radios of their municipalities. To do so, they systematized and evaluated the work of the *Aredmag* network, setting down information on the role it had played in the processes that *Aredmag*, according to the *Rockefeller Foundation*, referred to as social change. However, their purpose was to demonstrate that the community radio acted as a mediator in conflicts and strife within Magdalena Medio (Cadavid-Bringe; Moreno-Martínez, 2009, p. 282).⁵ In reality, the social change proposed by RF, has only existed since the perspective of developmentalist economics, but beyond that hardly minor conceptual controversy, the observation on the important role of participation as a factor in individual and collective empowerment in decision-making for the common good is worth noting.

Likewise, from a qualitative perspective, Osses-Rivera (2020) and his research team at the *Universidad Central* (Bogotá) proposed a model for the study of radio reception on the basis of three characteristics:

- adaptability, in other words, it can be implemented by any radio in accordance with its context, long-term aims, and particular practices;
- sustainability, or that it can be converted into a process that is integrated in the management of radio in a periodic way; relying on its capabilities and resources; and
- scalability, so that it may be replicated.

The sample, which entailed working with five community radios, led to the production of some multimedia flashcards for the use of radio stations interested in knowing their audience and its needs.

In turn, Uribe-Jongbloed and Peña-Sarmiento (2009, p. 365) made evident the problems of indigenous radio in relation to the scarcity of linguistic frameworks for the prioritization of their autochthonous languages, so as to give greater exposure to the language in its programming. A debate was proposed on the way in which the programs for the promotion of minority cultures and languages in Colombia were designed and set up, also throwing some light on good practice:

“The case of San Andrés radios reflects how the radio can be converted into an obvious vehicle of linguistic identity for one population, and how this identity can even overcome the lack of a more appropriate space, and the quality of the technical teams” (Uribe-Jongbloed; Peña-Sarmiento, 2009, p. 365).

It is worth recalling in relation to the investigation into the administration of *Irscm* to the radio channels, that transparent accounting practice has for decades been considered as the distinctive seal of government (Bovens, 2010; Day; Klein, 1997). In the case of journalism businesses, transparent accounting is a widely defended idea to offer and to support a public service, regardless of whether the company is governmental, social, or private (Bertrand, 2000; McQuail, 2003; Bardoel; D’Haenens, 2004). The number of investigations for the definition of indicators has greatly increased over the past decade, with a predominance in its administration to radio stations and television channels (Chaparro-Escudero; Olmedo-Salar; Gabilondo-García del Barco, 2016; Valencia-Bermúdez; Campos-Freire, 2016; Fernández-Lombao, 2018; Sánchez-Hernández; Chaparro-Escudero, 2019; El-Mohammadiane-Tarbift; Espinar-Medina, 2019); as well as the digital domain (Rodríguez-Martínez; Codina; Pedraza-Jiménez, 2012; Galletero-Campos; Saiz-Echezarreta, 2018; Romero-Rodríguez; De-Casas-Moreno; Torres-Toukomidis, 2016; Peralta-García; Sanz-Hernando; Álvarez-Peralta, 2022a; 2022b). Other variants of interest are the indicators used for studying the dynamics and the management of internal and external communication that is at the heart of not-for-profit associations and within the scope of eco-social transitions (Peralta-García; Chaparro-Escudero; Espinar-Medina, 2021). Reflecting on the principal studies of indicators shows evidence of a disparity of analysis with no standardized items, although there are indeed common denominators.⁶

4. Administration and functional operation of *Irscom*

Irscom reflects the internal dynamics and functioning of a radio station through quantitative and qualitative values, awarding points subject to weightings and membership criteria. In total, it contains 33 items evaluated with a points system (max. 120 points) distributed into the different areas (management, social capital, people/locality interface, programming, exploitation of digital technologies and infrastructure). The weighting establishes that sufficiency must at least be reached above the minimum values in three areas to obtain a positive outcome (Tables 1 and 2), the most relevant in points being management and programming. The quantitative weight of the categories is unequal, because good programming is, for example, thought more important than good infrastructural support. It is estimated in that way because, the idea that the infrastructure is able to have some influence on radio journalism is, in practice, not credible, as may be observed in the field work, where radio stations with many technical resources lack interesting programs and radios with weaker technical infrastructure offer better programming. Creativity and ingenuity have been decisive elements when resolving technical mishaps, as well as a high levels of participation and social capital, another of the well-valued and decisive aspects for the final result. The same happens with Internet activity and presence; although this digitalization gains more importance, we are looking at radio stations that transmit through the radio-wave spectrum and the ethernet should therefore be complementary. The contrary might imply ceding a bandwidth frequency that cost so much to achieve in compliance with the law on communication. These arguments were debated at length with the radio stations themselves in participative processes.

Table 1. *Irscom* points system by categories

Category	Maximum value	Minimum value
Management	25	15
Social capital	26	15
Interface, People-locality	10	6
Programming	40	26
Internet activity	7	5
Infrastructure	12	7
Total	120	74

Source: Chaparro-Escudero; Olmedo-Salar; Gabilondo-García-del-Barco, 2016.

Table 2. *Irscom* points system

Maximum 100-120	High 90-99	Medium 74-89	Low 60-73	Very low 0-56
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Source: Chaparro-Escudero; Olmedo-Salar; Gabilondo-García-del-Barco, 2016.

The “management” section defines the transparency of the radio it publishes. A radio is transparent if it publishes, preferably through electronic channels (web), its economic balance sheet, the annual reports, minutes of meetings, and the plurality of its advisory bodies and sponsors. The information must always be accessible to any one person. The second of the sections, “social capital”, lists the number of people working at the radio station –with special attention given to women and vulnerable groups–, public participation in the management and the creation of content, as well as the work of mobilizing communities to which the radio station is committed, to attract listeners to media activity. A radio with high participation implies significant reinforcement and value in the face of possible pressures for editorial staff. In turn, the “interface People-locality” measures the relation with other radios for collaboration in networks of contents, exchange of information and practice. The fourth category is the “programming”, the different items of which value diversity of content, the weight of informative channels and press releases prepared by organizations and civil society. “Internet presence or activity” reflects the functioning of the radio website, if streaming enables data merging, downloadable podcast content and interaction across virtual social media. Finally, the technical infrastructure is evaluated and the availability of spaces to perform their daily work, as well as for the organization of meetings and training activities.

The application of *Irscom* entails the following phases:

Data collection

A questionnaire was administered for data collection consisting of 33 questions with closed answers (Table 3). The questionnaire can be answered in printed format (in person or through a telephone conversation by the field work operative) or online, through a *Google Forms* document. We recommended the printed format, because the personal conversation permits information and qualitative nuances to be collected, of great utility when contextualizing the framework in which the activities of the community radios are developed. The questionnaire respondents had to be knowledgeable of the daily functioning of the radio station.

Weighting of the data

As has been explained, the six fields under analysis are not assigned the same weight in the final *Irscom* points system. The equilibrium that is established is through the weighting of different fields, so that good practice in some of them will yield optimal points, despite serious failings within other areas.

The 33 questions that composed the questionnaire underwent a weighting process, in other words, assignation of points as a function of the importance attached to each response. This process of weighting can be done manually, with a simple process of summing, or with the help of the *Excel* template that is available in the *Irscom* installation package (user instructions, questionnaire, explanatory table of each questionnaire item, an explanatory rubric of the points system, *Excel* template for data merging and graphic presentations. See Table 4 for an example of the *Irscom* installation package).⁷

Table 3. *Irscom* questionnaire (only one category example is shown). Source: *Irscom*

PROGRAMMING		
18.- Local reporting organized? <input type="checkbox"/> Daily <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/> Not prepared	19.- How many hours of local content do they broadcast a week (including the time for local news)? <input type="checkbox"/> 0-to-5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6-to-8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9-to-12 <input type="checkbox"/> 13-to-15 <input type="checkbox"/> 16-to-19 <input type="checkbox"/> 20-or-over	20.- Typology of programs/short formats that the radio station broadcast a week (including the time for local news)? P SF <input type="checkbox"/> Current affairs <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture, livestock, and fishing <input type="checkbox"/> Art and culture <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict and victims <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual diversity <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific dissemination, ancestral/traditional knowledge. <input type="checkbox"/> Dramatization (radio-theatre, radio story-telling, others) <input type="checkbox"/> Ecology and environment <input type="checkbox"/> Economy <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Sports <input type="checkbox"/> Human Rights <input type="checkbox"/> Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Collective Memory and History <input type="checkbox"/> Infancy and youth <input type="checkbox"/> Interculturality <input type="checkbox"/> Musical <input type="checkbox"/> Health and traditional medicine <input type="checkbox"/> Others _____
21.- They have programs exclusively for local music <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	22.- Is your radio station broadcasting programs from some other radio network? Does your radio station contribute its own programmes to a radio network? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, it does <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, it does <input type="checkbox"/> No, it doesn't <input type="checkbox"/> No, it doesn't	
23.- They do street radio, making social, cultural and current affairs programs and covering current affairs and events. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	24.- Is there any content in local or autochthonous language? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
25.- Does your station have programmes focusing on differential focuses. In case of an affirmative response, select the approaches represented in its programming.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Women _____ Indigenous _____ NARP _____ Rrom _____ LGBTQ+ Community _____ People living with disability _____ Others _____	

All pathways lead to the same outcome. The person doing the field work has to do nothing other than apply the *Irscom* weighting that can be set to default settings in our instruction *pack*. Each question has a maximum attainable number of points and each chosen response has a different number of points awarded in accordance with the pertinence of the response to what is asked, or simply whether or not the information is facilitated. The radio station must also report a source with which to verify the declarations they issue. The maximum grade that can be reached is 120 points and minimum for a pass is 74 points. The *Irscom* tables of final gradings are the following: maximum: 100-120; high: 90-99; pass: 74-89; low: 60-73; very low: 0-59 (Table 2).

Irscom also offers a range of maximums and minimums for each category (see Tables 1 and 2). Setting independent points systems by category means that both the weak and strong points of the radio station may be observed. For example: a radio can have a very high total *Irscom* grading, but can obtain a low grade under social capital, which indicates that it should focus on improving that specific field.

Table 4. Explanatory table of *Irscom* points system (only one category example is shown). Source: *Irscom*

CATEGORY OF ANALYSES	QUESTIONNAIRE	SCORE	VERIFICATION SOURCES	EXPLANATORY RUBRIC
MANAGEMENT Maximun score: 25 Minimum score: 15	1.- Does it have a style manual that is publicly accessible? - Yes - No	MAXIMUM: 7 points - Yes = 7 - No = 0	The style manual of the radio: bring it with you or say where it can be consulted.	A legally constituted community radio broadcaster is presumed to be in possession of the Founding Charter, registered at the Chamber of Commerce. In addition, it is obliged to present financial statements and management reports. It is all publicly registered in the ESAL (Registro de Entidades Sin Ánimo de Lucro) [Registry of Not-for-Profit Organizations]
	2.- Does it issue an annual report and publicly accessible accounts? - Yes - No	MAXIMUM: 8 points - Yes = 8 - No = 0	Annual reports and accounts, contributing the most recent information or where they may be consulted.	It is not sufficient for the report to exist to obtain the maximum score, it must also be publicly accessible, with a view to the transparent management of the radio. The score is 0, if there is no access to this document.
	3.- Is there a publicly accessible active Programming Committee? - No - Yes, 1-3 groups - Yes, 4-6 groups - Yes, 7-9 groups - Yes, 10 or over From these groups, to which of the following social sectors do they belong?:	MAXIMUM: 5 points - No = 0 - 1 -3 = 1 - 4-6 = 2 - 7-9 = 3 - 10 or more = 4 - Plus diversity = +1	Composition of the Programming Committee: list of constituent people and groups. The source of verification can be: a) act of Constitution, b) periodic minutes of meetings.	Whether the Programming Committee or advisory council is constituted by a range of people with commitments towards radio and not exclusively by the people in executive positions. The composition of the meeting must likewise be public, represent various sectors, and be accessible for its consultation.
	4.- Does it have ongoing agreements with local associations? With how many? - None - 1-2 - 3-5 - 6 or more	MAXIMUM: 3 points - None = 0 - 1-2 = 1 - 3-5 = 2 - 6 or more = 3	Agreements signed. If this is not possible, at least the names of the associations of the territory with which said agreements are signed	Collaboration agreements with cultural or other associations are an indicator that this station is linked to the territory. In order for this indicator to receive a score, those agreements or agreements signed with other instances must be in force. The greater the number of current agreements, the higher the score. Here you can include meeting minutes where there is a record of the station's participation in various local/regional planning/development scenarios

tions. It was likewise ensured in the selection that all the different areas of the locality where community-radio worked or had coverage were represented, as detailed in Table 6.⁸

Validation of the procedure

Validation of the tool: application of the *Irscom* questionnaire and implementation of focus group for results validation and perceptions of the tool. Given that four working groups were formed with different teams as part of the process of administering the questionnaire, a style guide and an explanatory table for each of the questions were prepared, with the objective of ensuring that each team would apply the same criteria when explaining the gist of the questions. Moreover, each radio station was asked to verify its responses through the delivery of documents or other types of online material, something that had previously been requested at the meeting. The following materials were among those needed for verification:

- the style manual (or statutes);
- the annual report and accounts;
- members of the Programming Committee (or advisory council);
- signed agreements of collaboration with organizations in the territory;
- documentation relating to the number of people employed;
- the programme time-table (a very useful item and source of verification);
- specific names of the networks to which they belong;
- collectives with which they collaborate;
- eaflets;
- photographs and podcast links.

The questionnaire was administered by the research and working groups that are detailed in Table 6. All the teams registered the sound of both processes. The questionnaires, that were manually administered, were scanned and the recordings were transcribed, for filing and data verification. The process of administering the *Irscom* questionnaire with one of the working groups is shown in Image 1.



Image 1. Administration of the *Irscom* questionnaire.
Source: authors, with express permission.

6. Results

6.1. Adaptation of *Irscom* to the context of Colombian community and indigenous radio

1) The adaptations introduced were mainly terminological and contextual, but never affected the essence and operativity of the tool. In the first case, changing the title “statutes” that *Irscom* uses in Spanish for “style manual” which remains a different title of the same charter of obligations and rights which the radio legally enjoys in the case of Colombia. In the same way, the “advisory council” in Spain was understood as the “Program Committee”; the communications media with which they collaborate were given the name of media partnerships and the “*pauta*” [norm] was the term used to refer to broadcasting advertising.

2) In relation with the Programme Committee (advisory council), not only was the need noted to include whether or not one existed, as it was a requisite, but also the number of members that constitute it and how many social areas they represent, in order in this way to note the social groupings that recommend or impact upon the type of programming and the functions of the radio station. In this sense, *Irscom* adopted the typology of sectors that can form part of the Program Committee established by the *Ministerio de Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones*.⁹

3) The need was noted among the contextual adaptations to introduce variables, which were used under different categories, so that the indicator took into account the set of radios with a focus on NARP [acronym in Spanish for Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, and Palenquero peoples] sectors of the population, as well the community radios and the public interest assigned to indigenous communities. The latter are governed in Colombia by a different statute, as the indigenous communities are considered to be of public interest.

4) Two questions that related to public participation were repositioned, because they appeared reiterative, as they had been included under another only very slightly different field.

5) A topic for debate in the organization of the focal group was its inclusion or otherwise in the *Irscom* indicator of a variable that reflected how the radio was financed. It was therefore highlighted that while the community radios in Spain are unable to broadcast advertising, it is a fundamental source of revenue for their survival in Colombia. However, it was noted that a positive evaluation of the management and social capital sections in both countries was linked with optimal financing instruments with no need to resort to channeling effort into attracting advertising as the sole resource. What is more, this fact was observed as an inconvenience, because it concentrated great effort that was not directed at other more creative activities and of benefit to programming.

The experience demonstrated that the most successful radios in Colombia, such as *Radio Esquina*, have maintained themselves on the margin of the advertising “*pauta*” and have concentrated their efforts on the development and presentation of projects to public competitions. The director Milton S. Álvarez expressed it as follows:

“we have a project design team that is in a continuous search for grants and competitions on offer from the *Ministry of Culture*, the Mayor’s Office and Government, as well as different prizes. It all requires an effort because on average one application out of every ten presented is successful, yet it is all worth doing. It has meant that we have maintained a radio with 16 people on the staff with only five minutes of “*pauta*” a day, something which fully distinguishes us from the commercial radios” (2022).

6.2. In relation with the validation, utility and perception of *Irscom*

6.2.1. The radio stations are reflected in the *Irscom*-generated results

In the first place, the radio stations held a common understanding that *Irscom* was a tool that generates a visual “X-ray”, in the form of a grid plot and tables, of strengths and weaknesses. In this sense, Aidis Magaly Angulo, representative of *Oriente Estéreo* (Cali), a radio with an Afro-Colombian ethnic focus, fully identified with the *Irscom*-generated results in relation with all variables. Thus, in this case, the category of human capital and talent rose to very high levels, as it was a radio that a group of eight women were coordinating, obtaining numerous extra points, because parity is considered in many categories. However, the administration of *Irscom* at this radio highlighted two fundamental shortcomings:

- very limited human resources, and
- the inexistence of stable employment contracts associated with the work of paid personnel.

Effectively, the two women with the longest service life at the radio station worked in a voluntary capacity, like the rest of the staff, having to rely on other paid activities to earn a living. Aidis Magaly commented that these results left her with a feeling of “tastelessness”, because she could see her failings reflected, despite the immense effort spent on keeping the radio afloat.

On the other hand, the indigenous *Radio Payumat* scored highly in the equipment category, contributing to the improvement of its indicator. The reason was that the Colombian state, having recognized indigenous radios as communications media of public interest, has assigned funds for equipping these radio station projects with technical equipment, at high funding-levels over the last four years. This policy of support and accompaniment in communication policies has yet to happen in the case of the varied scope of Afro-Colombian radio stations.

Vokaribe Radio (Barranquilla), a radio speaking for the Colombian Caribbean coast, had the lowest number of points for infrastructure. This situation was explainable for Milton Patiño, a member of the radio station coordinating team, because *Vokaribe Radio* was created by a religious community that offered the project a very small space, only for studying radio. The interesting thing was to see that the radio station had never analyzed this fact in terms of a weakness or problematic situation. The absence of space to conduct other activities was detected following the administration of *Irscom*.

In turn, *La Brújula*, a radio station located in Bucaramanga (Santander) had few points under social capital, in other words, ways to involve oneself, and collectives and associations in the radio project. César Hernández, representative of this radio station, understood that it was more difficult to create that close link with the radio in urban contexts. Quite unlike the explanation of Mabel Quinto from the Nasa peoples of North Cauca and representative of the indigenous *Radio Payumat*, who highlighted the importance of the “*mingas*” or collective work within the indigenous community as a method of interfacing with the community. She laid out a notable feature of radio in the following terms:

“When the community is going to organize a minga, as communicators we’re not only going to do the interview, but we work with the community on the minga; if we’re to cook, if it’s weeding, loading wood, we’ll be there; and at the end, when we are on a break, a sharing moment, then we do the interview. So, we have the immediate feeling of being part of our community and we are not simply going to ‘gather material’; neither do we do radio over a distance; we’re not calling out from the radio booth asking people to inform us about what they’ve been doing. I mean, we’re alive, involved and we report” (Mabel Quinto, *Radio Payumat*).

Leonardo Amaya, of *San Vicente Stéreo*, a community city radio, saw through the indicator the need to include people from Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, thereby improving integration and public participation that is evaluated under the categories of social capital, programming, and differential diversity.

Charalá Estéreo is directed by Camila Manrique, a young women who is proud to qualify it as a country radio. Camila starts each day of its programming at four in the morning, because its principal audience, the community of *campesinos* or rural peasant laborers from the locality of the same name listen to it as they go to work the land. *Charalá Estéreo*, however, had a low grade for interface with the locality-people, due to the fact that the programming is solely her own work in the company of a small work team. It was a detected weakness that they had not taken into account, to which a solution was necessary. She expressed it like this:

“It is curious, but I thought that we had a very complete program, and *Irscom* has made me aware of the importance of broadcasting the programs of other radio stations or other networks; from other places. We also lack scientific dissemination, speaking about sport, gender, interculturality, the conflict and the victims” (Camila Manrique, *Charalá Estéreo*).

Once administered, *Irscom* awakened great interest and curiosity among the radio stations, knowing the details of those radios that had remained in higher positions. One example, *La Esquina Radio*, was the only radio to have 16 people on its staff with employment contracts, among which five were for LGBTQ+ people, another was for Afro-Colombian groups, another for more indigenous ones, and another for people living with disabilities, receiving good grades for this necessary integrative focus. On the other hand, the programming is not only rich and diverse, but it motivates the interface people-locality. For one participant in the coordinating team of the radio station, Milton S. Álvarez:

“...it is not enough to make radio programs; you have to work on the processes and the projects with the communities and with the collectives, it is from them that the radio programs arise and that is how we keep in contact with the local area” (Milton S. Álvarez, *La Esquina Radio*).

This radio also has a team, as mentioned earlier, in a process of constant creation of projects, searching for grants and project funding, with which they maintain part of the staff. They also carry out annual planning, reviewing questions such as the vision and the mission, and involving the Program Committee in all the decisions over changes and reforms. *La Esquina Radio* has not been “set up” to compete with the commercial radios of Medellín and no commercial music such as reggaeton is on their programme list. The quality of its programs, local information, and the fact of “making a community” means that the confidence of the audience has been won over and it is today a reference, not only for Medellín, but for all community radio stations.

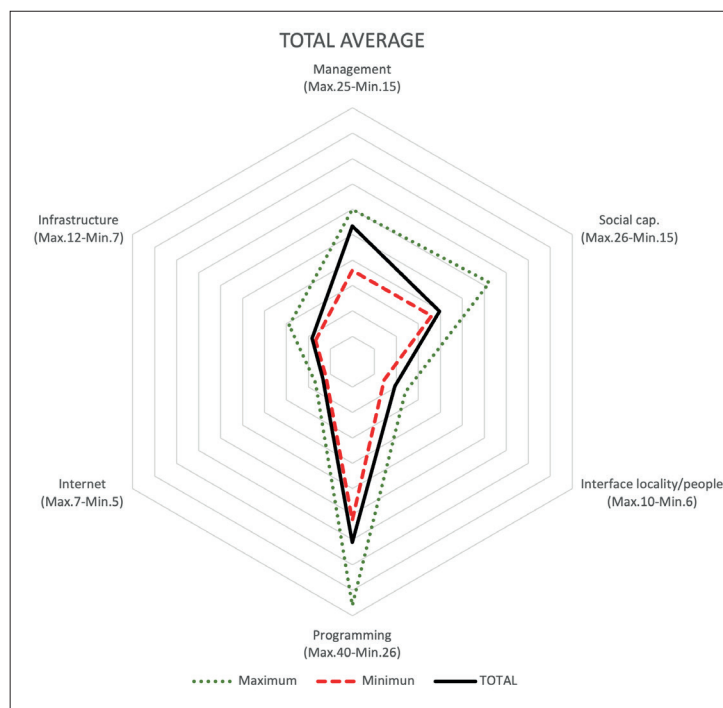
6.2.2. Initial misgivings over the external evaluation

One topic of interest that occurred with the implementation of the different methods was the misgivings of the radio stations over feeling “evaluated” by a questionnaire, especially in relation with other radio stations from the same province or belonging to the same network of radio stations, due to comparative grievance. This appreciation is reasonable, but work on communicating that *Irscom* is not a punitive, fiscal, or evaluative tool continues. Rather than an evaluation, *Irscom* shows the need for self-criticism and honesty when answering the questionnaire, so that it can be fully valid. Insistence was placed on the idea that today it is a weakness, tomorrow it might be turned into a strength and if the responses are not honest, then the indicator will be less accurate, and that documental sources of validation should be produced to verify the data. In this sense, the radio stations acknowledged the qualitative step taken to address the administration of *Irscom*.

6.3. The potential of *Irscom* as tool for participative reflection and the achievement of improvements

6.3.1. Positive results that confirm the hypothesis of the ‘mirror’ radios

Altogether, the 12 radio stations achieved quite high values in each category, concordant with the fact of having been selected as quality references, because the final objective was to reflect the validation of the tool by the radio stations and not so much in an internal evaluation of each station. In other words, to validate the common denominator between radio stations with good service records and to verify the margins for improvement. Both Table 7 and Graph 1 illustrate the global results obtained in different formats. As may be seen, only one radio, *Radio Mogotes*, was below the threshold of 75, the lowest grading for a radio to be ranked in a quality position. *Radio Esquina* and *Oriente Estéreo* were consolidated as quality references, reaching 104 and 103 points, respectively, out of the total of 120. As shown in Graph 1, the dashed line of green points (the external) ideal to be reached; the dashed red line (the internal), the minimum to “pass”; and the uninterrupted black line (the middle one), the values achieved”, the lower results were associated with social capital and infrastructure/equipment.



Graph 1. Average results of administering *Irscom* to the control group of community and indigenous radio stations within Colombia

Table 7. Global results (by categories) of administering *Irscom* to the control group of community and indigenous radio stations in Colombia

	Ethnic		Capital city			Municipal communities						
	Payumat	Oriente	Vokaribe	Brijula	Esquina	Charalá	Los Andes	Guada- lupe	Mogotes	San Vicente	Brisa	Impact
Management	10	25	25	24	25	23	25	22	23	17	24	24
Social capital	14	25	19	14	22	17	15	12	7	15	17	21
Interface locality-people	10	8	10	10	10	5	10	6	4	6	9	9
Programming	40	37	31	25	36	23	26	23	21	31	31	32
Internet activity	6	7	7	4	7	7	7	4	2	2	7	7
Infrastructure	12	5	3	11	3	12	11	9	5	9	9	3
Total	92	107	95	88	103	87	94	76	62	80	97	96

Note. Red and blue cells indicate values below the minimum and maximum valuation, respectively.

6.3.2. Principal future strengthening actions

Irscom highlighted the need for almost all the radio stations to continue strengthening the processes of social collective involvement in the community radio projects, because this factor arises as one of the identifying traits of these radio stations. In this sense, many radio stations had noted the challenge implied in this activity. Some radios were following interesting pathways. Thus, *Brisa FM* managed to capture the loyalty of its listeners and audience, awarding them a loyal listener ID card, promoted through games, raffles, and even discounts at local commercial outlets. One of its youth-focused programs is associated with ludic-physical and educational activities leading to the award of points, once having surmounted the challenges that the radio programming faced.

6.3.3. Participation in networks of exchange as a strength

The *Irscom* analysis also revealed evidence of the need to strengthen the proactive role of the radio networks when calling for greater involvement of associated radio stations. Normally the radios receive these scarce few and rather unvaried programs, due to weak input on the part of their associates. In addition, few radios were associated with international networks of community radio stations such as *Asociación Mundial de Radios Comunitarias (Amarc)* [*Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires*] and *Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica (ALER)* [*Latin American Association for Radio Broadcasting Education*]. Membership of the regional or national networks predominated, but in many of these examples they were found in a state of lethargy, without promoting meetings or interfaces, so that their potential to share quality programming or training/recruitment programs is underused. On the one hand, the organization of the sector into proactive networks could attach a greater weight to the sector when self-organizing in a collective way, as if it had been done, for example, in the cultural sector of industry, achieving greater recognition, institutional support, and public impact. An illustrative example is the existence of various film and community video festivals in various geographical regions of the country.¹⁰

6.3.4. Labor stability against an excess of volunteerism

One of the great challenges made apparent following the administration of *Irscom* was the need to consolidate the sector on the basis of contracting stable personnel, in their different modalities. Many of these radios are still found in the hands of a volunteer, unpaid workforce, something that turns them into a very vulnerable sector, because the people in charge perform their duties out of a “love for radio”, but have to combine it with other activities and paid work. The idea that the not-for-profit community radio has to forgo the payment of salaries is a false idea, as the voluntary work of those who are in front, normally leads to weakened media outlets, subjected to a continuous crisis of identity.

6.4. The potential of *Irscom* CC and the future benefits drawn from its administration

Once the *Irscom* survey results had been validated, a post-validation phase ensued consisting of a draft plan of action to guide the actions channeled towards making *Irscom* known in Colombia. To do so, it was agreed to:

- Apply the indicator of changes as agreed with the steering committee.
- Make the indicator available to the highest possible number of radio stations in the land of Colombia, taking as a reference the different networks of community radio that exist in the country in the case of the community radios, and extend the invitation to attend the *Comisión Nacional de Comunicación de Los Pueblos Indígenas (Concip)* [*National Indigenous Organization of Colombia*]. The report on the pilot project will be presented to the *Network of University Radios*, a process of national organization that involves 74 university radios that represent 57 universities, both private and public, located in 20 capital cities and 12 municipalities.
- Granting the *Irscom* seal of quality (registered trademark), on the part of the research groups responsible for the representation of their universities. The seal of quality seeks to be recognized by official bodies when adopting criteria in processes of economic incentives, approval of projects and public tenders, among others. In fact, among the

suggestions that the sound narrative department of the *Ministry of Culture* reviewed, was that the process could be understood as a reference for coordination to the sound sector (community, university, and indigenous) and could encourage the review and up-dating of document *Conpes 3506* for the inclusion of *Irscom CC* in plans and programs leading to the strengthening of the sound sector.

- Promoting the administration of *Irscom* through the radio station networks. The presence of community radio at the workshop had the objective of imparting training in the *Irscom* methodology, so as to facilitate its replication at associate radio stations. The *Aredmag* network committed itself to administering *Irscom* to eight radio stations with which it has links within the framework of the project financed by the private energy generation and distribution firm, *Isagen*. The *Aredmag* work team, under the accompaniment of the *Minister of Culture*, sent the information gathered and all the verifiable sources to the research group (Andalusia-Colombia), responsible for validating the information and awarding the final points. The experience showed the need to clarify some protocols, so that they were not left to free interpretation and to avoid confusion during the data-collection process.
- Present the results at a national event, with the participation of such organizations as *Unesco*, *FLIP*, *FNPI*, *FES Colombia*, *Amarc*, academies, representatives of community radio networks, and radio stations participating in the pilot project, with a view to consolidating the coverage of *Irscom CC*.

7. Discussion and conclusions

The ease of administration and simplicity with data interpretation of the *Irscom Colombia Comunitarias (Irscom CC)* tool has been demonstrated. In the particular case of Colombia, numerous manuals have been promoted by various institutions to offer practical tools in the management and the running of community radio. Among them, *La radio comunitaria, una empresa social sustentable: herramientas para la gestión [Community radio, a sustainable social firm: management tools]* (Fajardo-Rojas et al, 2010), promoted by the *Ministry of Technologies of Information and Communications*, the *Ministry of Culture*, and *Vive Digital*. This manual offers a list of measurement indicators on the functioning of the radio stations. However, the total quantity of proposed variables –with 65 items in total– turn it into a tool that is hardly aligned towards implementation.¹¹ On the other hand, the high level of specification required in some variables means that they are certainly very dense when seeking evidence that validates the responses. For example, the radio stations were asked to measure their audience “participation” in response to the following questions:

- number of listener calls/month;
- guests/by month of programming;
- sources consulted by month;
- volunteers by month linked to the radio broadcast program;
- new programs/year included in the programming;
- associated communication collectives/year of programming of the radio station;
- programs evaluated/year;
- social sector communications received/month;
- acknowledgment calls from audiences received/month.

The indicators required agility and criteria in the selection of the elements of analysis to facilitate the study, periodic reevaluation and the comparisons between the resources that are analyzed. The opinion of the radio stations and participant networks was very favorable for *Irscom CC*.

An unavoidable reference is found in various reports of the *National Programme for the Development of Communication* at *Unesco*. On the one hand, “Indicators for Media Development: framework to evaluate the development of social communication measures” (*Unesco*, 2008); on the other, “Quality indicators in the public radio stations: contemporary evaluation” (Bucci; Chiaretti; Fiorini, 2012). Both stress the need to lobby for indicator-based management that proposes transparent practice and quality programming.¹² Their weak spot is that they represent a catalogue of measures that should be met, but with no weighted criteria between the most important and basic and those of lesser volume (or not so decisive), in such a way that complying with more than 50% of the criteria is not in itself necessarily a reflection of good practice. The weighted points system of *Irscom* is, on the contrary, thought out to evaluate the balanced performance of the resources in different areas, in the concrete contexts in which such processes are framed.

In this sense, the *Irscom* indicator has benefitted from the experience of the process of adaptation in a country where emphasis must necessarily be placed on the communication processes to understand the complexity of an intervention of social utility and where the collaborative work with teams of investigation, institutions and the radio stations across the land has proved fundamental. One contribution of a community radio is often its emphasis on interculturality. It involves processes that are advanced and supported among ethnic minorities (first peoples, Afro-descendancy) and social groups (women, rural land workers,...). The need to include these variables that emphasize and refer to both the ethnic and the cultural uniqueness of the land, means unprecedented considerations without affecting the common criteria with which they can continue drawing comparisons.

It has been demonstrated that *Irscom* is an organic tool that may be adapted to geographic and cultural contexts that are different from those in which it was created, confirming our working hypothesis. Colombia represents the first country in

Latin America/Abya Yala in which scientific methodology has been implemented. It credits the great potential of *Irscom* for continued administration throughout other lands and contexts on an international scale.

Both in Spain and in Colombia, there is a tendency within the political and business imaginary to relate economic profitability with the success or the failure of a project, without attending to funding opportunities or economic support and incentives, for people exercising the right to communication according to the criteria of social profitability. In this debate, it is of interest to recall that *Irscom* awards a quality seal and is a registered trademark in Spain, in reference to public policies, as its definition has been written into *Ley 10/2018, de 9 de octubre, Audiovisual de Andalucía* [Act 20/2018, of 9th October, *Andalusia Audiovisual*], in the following terms:

“These indicators evaluate good practice on the basis of certain basic vectors, such as management, transparency, social capital, interface with locality/people, labor relations, gender equality, programming, public participation in contents and management, radio literacy, Internet presence, and infrastructures, among others” (*Andalucía*, 2018, art. 3.1c).

Also contemplated in *Irscom* is article 19c on the growth of the audiovisual sector when it recommends

“the inclusion of the social profitability indicators of the audiovisual communication as criteria for the concession of incentives in these services” (*Andalucía*, 2018).

Likewise, the indicators of social profitability have also been considered in the *LGCA 13/2022* (art.151.1d) for evaluating the functioning of the audiovisual media and the concession of grants.

Irscom has been perceived by the community and indigenous radio stations participating in the mirror sample as a tool for self-reflection and self-criticism, with a capacity to show strengths and weaknesses, thereby revealing paths towards improvement. The implementation of *Irscom* has been considered as a stimulus to rework a radio station, at an individual level, with no punitive intention, except self-awareness. Open publication of the *Irscom* results contribute to public conscientization of the listeners, which contributes to more critical consumption and demands for social profitability in relation to common goods.

On the one hand, there are arguments to assume that the implementation of *Irscom* at a national scale might mobilize all community radios to organize themselves as a sector, exploiting their strengths and working together for the improvement of shortcomings, with one representative voice. These actions would grant the sector a higher level of dialogue when defending its rights and needs. Finally, it is worth noting that its numerical results greatly ease comparisons between radio stations in a learner-friendly way, thereby incorporating the best of each experience for the general benefit.

8. Notes

1. Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications (2022)

<https://www.mintic.gov.co/portal/maparadio/631/w3-channel.html>

2. Advertising cannot exceed 15 minutes per hour of programming

3. The meeting had the participation of delegations from the villages of: Pastos, Quillasingas, Ingas, Emberas, Nasa, Awá, Kokonucos, Misak, Cofan, Salibas, Huitotos, and Eperara Siaperara, among others.

<https://www.servindi.org/actualidad/73820>

4. The “Minga” is an ancestral practice that has transcended frontiers and temporary spaces, positioning itself as a political and social reference and constituting itself as a useful, practical, and credible tool for stimulating community work and the values immersed in the experience (**Obando-Obando**, 2015).

5. Role of community radios in consolidating the peace process in Colombia:

https://www.javeriana.edu.co/unesco/humanidadesDigitales/ponencias/IV_24.html

6. Among others, some of the research groups that worked on the indicators: *LabComAndalucía* (*Universidad de Málaga*), directed by Manuel Chaparro-Escudero; *Journalism and Communications Laboratory for Plural Citizenship* of the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*, directed by Amparo Moreno; *Grupo Novos Medios* of the *Universidade de Santiago de Compostela*, led by Francisco Campos-Freire and Miguel Túnñez-López; *Gisocom* of the *Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha*, directed by Ana-María López-Cepeda, who has adopted the *UMA Irscom* model.

7. People interested in accessing the whole methodological pack can contact the research team *LabComandalucía* (*Universidad de Málaga*):

<http://www.labcomandalucia.uma.es>

8. Four of the radios invited in the first instance were unable to attend the event for reasons connected with regional idiosyncrasies and the complex political and situational dynamics that were reverberating across the country with the presidential elections held on 29 May 2022 at the door. There were four radio stations (*Playamar Estéreo*, *Tayrona Estéreo*, *Teurama Estéreo* and *Santa Rosa Estéreo*) that were affected by the situation of unemployment (or armed rebellion), a sort of siege mentality promoted by the *Bacrim* (criminal drug-trafficking gangs), mainly the one called the *Gulf Clan*, that subdue the population, without letting them leave their land. It even took place after the extradition on

Wednesday, 4 of May, 2022, to the USA of Dairo Antonio Úsuga, alias 'Otoniel', godfather of the Gulf Clan, at the behest of the Colombian government. This set of radios were replaced by another three. In the case of *Radio Payumat*; its director Dora Muñoz, could not attend due to the assassination some days before of her partner, an indigenous leader, by paramilitary forces.

9. Agricultural, culture, science and technology, telecommunications, human rights and humanitarian international Law, community development and voluntary work, state education, ecological and environmental, economy and employment, education, emergencies and disasters, gender, social infrastructure and housing, road infrastructure, cooperative, citizenship participation, recreation and sport, health and nutrition, basic cleanliness, public services, transport, tourism, older adults, people living with a disability, pensioners, youth and young children, displaced people and special treatment for social and marginalized or minority groups such as: sex workers, inmates, homeless, drug addicts, and alcoholics.

10. Among which: *National festival of cinema and video of District Community of Aguablanca* at Cali and the *International alternative and community festival ojo al sancocho* in Bogota, Colombia

11. In this proposal the indicators are divided into the following categories:

- from the production of the feelings (pertinence, coherence, participation, planning, contents);
- from esthetic viewpoints (radio formats, technical quality, radio broadcasting language, continuous dialogue, permanent relations with other social actors, generation of opinions, mobilizing the public);
- in terms of sustainability (mission-oriented, organizational, and financial).

12. These indicators are centered on transparency, cultural diversity, offer of platforms, journalism in the public sector, independence, public nature of funding, degree of audience satisfaction, language innovation, and technical standards, among other variables

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