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Basque Country as Alternative Media laboratory. Compilation of the most interesting experiences for the last 30 years

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Abstract: This work is an overview of the general situation of Alternative Media in the Basque Country, concentrating on a specific communication project: the pirate radio *Hala Bedi Irratia*, a tolerated but not completely legal radio station, which in 2008 celebrated its 25th anniversary. The station has thousands of listeners daily and it broadcasts 24 hours a day. It survives thanks to the voluntary work of dozens of social communicators. They have never included a paid advertisement on their air waves, nor have they asked for a grant from the State. Nevertheless, the project is very much alive. The station is based on a very wide social network which supports it, and on a very intelligent use of new technologies.

Keywords: Alternative media; Communication for social change; Basque Country; Hala Bedi Irratia; pirate radio.

Summary [1]: 1. Introduction. 2. Hypothesis and methodology. 3. Theoretical framework: Alternative Media today. 4. Direct observation: Basque Country as Alternative Media Laboratory. 4.1. Old and new order. 4.2. Sudden eruption. 4.3. Reasons for a decrease. 4.4. Reasons for an increase. 5. The particularity of Gasteiz. 5.1. Hala Bedi Irratia. 6. Conclusions. 7. Bibliography. 8. Notes.

1. Introducción

Throughout the last 30 years, Alternative Media has gone through many changes in the Basque Country. The decade of the 80s bore witness to important experiences. At that time, numerous pirate radio stations, community radios, non-conformist newspapers and magazines and alternative fanzines were born. The turbulent social and political situation of the country at that time, the social vigour of the left-wing and the force emanating from the Basque identity were the ideal breeding ground which favoured the growth of these projects. Many of those have disappeared. The few which survive have many difficulties.

2. Hypothesis and methodology

The present work starts from the following Research Questions:

RQ1.: Which causes have contributed to the increase and posterior decrease of Alternative Media in the Basque Country throughout the last 30 years?

RQ2.: Which factors have made possible the maintenance of a project such as Hala Bedi Irratia station during the last 26 years, a pirate radio which has never included a paid advertisement on their air waves, nor have they asked for a grant from the State?

The hypothesis that tries to illuminate the previous research questions is the following: The specific socio-political environment that took place in the decade of the 80s in the Basque Country was determinant both in the explosion of Alternative Media as much as in the continuity of a project like Hala Bedi Irratia station.

In order to check our hypothesis during this work we have developed a methodology based on a qualitative method of analysis by doing direct observation (Anderson 1987, Lindlof 1987, 1991, Wimmer & Dominick 1996) of our subject matter. That means the compilation of different works done around this research line and their contrast with the current reality. The direct observation method has historically been used to get basic contextualized information in order to insert the hypothesis or to isolate dependent and independent variables. Apart from that, we have used figures provided by official audience rates in order to interpret correctly the real importance of the radio under research. We have completed our method with an in depth semi-structured interview with the two people who are nowadays in charge of the radio: Gaizka Amondarain and Joseba Ullibari.

3. Theoretical framework: Alternative Media today

 [2]

In harmony with the alter-globalization hope that has sprung up in the latest social forums, the present article analyzes the underlying experience of the Basque Country in Alternative Media.

But first of all, I would like to begin by compiling three of the most useful definitions that I've found about Alternative Media. According to Atton and Couldry (2003:580), Alternative Media are *Media produced outside mainstream media institutions and networks*.

Judith Purkarthofer, Brigitta Busch and Judith Purkarthofer offer (2008) more details about the concept [3]: "in opposition to public and private-commercial media, alternative media are characterized by their different view of the communication processes as well as the producers and recipients involved. (...) Alternative media adhere to a concept of producer and consumer roles that sees these roles as intertwined activities and aims at broad involvement of the audience. According to their view, open access and negotiation of relevant topics is to be made available to a high number of different people. Finally Raul Trejo Delarbre defines this kind of media [4] (1998) as a response to the difficulties faced by several social groups to get access to the commercial media, and sometimes with the explicit objective to confront them, alternative media - or that claim to be such - have been created on some occasions. Marginal cinema, free radio, alternative press or networks of non-conventional video have been some of the resources used by groups of social or political activists, with very diverse results, and almost always a very ephemeral efficiency."

Let me now analyze the different aspects related to the prevailing communicative model of today, emphasizing some of its most perverse contradictions. The private news oligopolies are spread out across the planet. The main cultural industries are in the hands of giant multinational firms which are the fruit of megamergers like those spearheaded by AOL-Time Warner or Viacom-CBS. Our leisure belongs to them: the vast majority of the films we watch, the albums we buy, the media we watch, and the books we read belong to a small group of multinational firms who are outside the boundaries of any type of political or social control. In such circumstances, from a liberating perspective, it is legitimate and inevitable to wonder: Is there an ounce of hope? Is the power of the media invincible?

The wide and diverse alternative experiences that have been developed throughout the world during the last decades have correctly answered the previous questions. But, unfortunately, from the left wing we are used to investing more energy in stigmatizing the malevolent power of the media than exploring dissident areas that would shine a ray of hope.

Historically, socialist countries didn't know how to create a real alternative model of communication either. It is true that they changed owners, leaders and messages, but fundamentally the same communication scheme remained intact. Private property was substituted by the State, market interests by Party conveniences, and capitalistic persuasion techniques by slogans of the leading bureaucracy. Both models of communication clipped the wings of imagination, cut off creativity, encouraged obedience, scorned participation, and ignored the basic laws of rhetoric. They were models of communication that were decrepit, one-way, hierarchical, authoritarian, and paternalistic, meant to perpetuate a redundant, compact culture that favoured the imposition of the dominant ideology.

The alternative communicative experiences that have achieved their objectives in today's information society have absorbed the most positive aspects of the different left wing trends and movements of the second half of the 20th century and beginning of the third millennium, knowing how to make the most of the contradictions of globalization. All of this has a clear purpose: to stimulate the alter-globalization also in the area of communication.

A model of communication that aspires to be alternative can only be so if it comes from, by, or for civil society. This entails setting aside ideological and economical servitudes imposed by the main streams of thought. In this way, the contributions made by the new social movements during the last three decades have been very interesting. In fact, they have been able to build an *alternative public sphere* based on an area that is growing unstopably, beyond the guidelines imposed by the main streams of opinion emanating from the *mass media*.

The new social movements have found that new technologies –namely the internet– are essential allies in seeking their objectives, having become instruments of social change. New social movements often manage to attract the *mass media's* attention using transgressive formulae that are daring and imaginative. These methods involve overcoming the penalizing treatment that these movements are normally subjected to by the media. The fusion between new technologies and new social movements brings about the birth of the third communication environment, a hybrid space where things of the dominating culture mix with others from the *underground* environment. Alternative Media finds in this fusion the possibility of overcoming marginality, accessing massive audiences.

Looking to the future, social movements have a double challenge: having an impact on mass media broadcasters and cultivating their own means of alternative communication. None of them can be scorned. Both of them are foundations for the progress of the movement.

4. Direct observation: Basque Country as Alternative Media laboratory

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the importance of Alternative Media in the Basque Country throughout the last 30 years. Any observation about this question must start by taking into account the significant changes that happened during the decade of the 80s in Basque society.

4.1. Old and new order

The Spanish dictatorship theoretically finished in 1975 with the death of Francisco Franco. However the changes didn't occur immediately. The old order hadn't completely died and the new order was reluctant to be born. The social and political forces who clandestinely fought against the dictatorship tried to accelerate the changes, especially the Socialist and Communist parties, trade unions and nationalist movements in Galicia, Catalonia and in the Basque Country. The opposition to the dictatorship in the Basque Country was always very vigorous. In the first years of the 80s, a lot of new movements, more or less related with Basque Nationalism, emerged. A wide and rich platform of social and political groups bloomed in that period; some in favour of the Basque identity (especially for the promotion of the Basque

language which was dramatically persecuted by the dictatorship), some in defence of the rights of Basque prisoners.

These and other movements like the ecologist, feminist or internationalist grew very quickly. Protests in the street were very common and confrontation between demonstrators and policemen was very frequent. Everything was under discussion; for example, the model of state or the relationship between the Basque Country and Spain. But not only the streets were at boiling point. As a result of a drastic industrial reconversion, thousands and thousands of workers lost their jobs, especially in key sectors of the economy like the shipyards of Biscay or the industrial sector. The rate of unemployment was one of the highest in Europe (more or less 20%). The highest point was reached in 1993, when unemployment was 24%. Apart from in the streets, social agitation was very evident in the factories.

On the other hand, the affection of young people for the phenomena of BRR or Basque Radical Rock sprang up very quickly. The concerts were full of people. Unfortunately, the addiction to BRR ran as fast as the spread of heroin consumption among Basque young people. As a consequence of that, the number of AIDS cases was one of the highest in Europe [5]. At the same time, very important political events were taking place: the formation of the first autonomous institutions (like the Basque Parliament and Government) and the renaissance of Basque Culture and Identity.

Simultaneously, the activity of ETA was frenetic, the highest in its history. For example from 1978 to 1981 ETA killed 227 people, mainly members of Spanish Security Forces which hadn't been removed after the dictatorship. [6]

Public participation in social and political debates was at its highest. As a result of all these factors, many people, especially young people believed that social revolution was possible. The importance of the left wing nationalist movement was fundamental in that context. In the European elections which took place in June of 1987, HB [7] (left wing nationalist party) obtained its best results with 18.4% of representation and more than a quarter of a million votes. [8]

In that socio-political environment, there was an obvious need for the creation of a variety of media. For example, in 1976, a lot of different newspapers were born. In Spain the most influential newspaper *-El País-* was born. One year later two nationalist newspapers appeared in the Basque Country: *Deia*, close to the PNV, Basque Nationalist Party (the Christian-democrat party which has governed the Basque autonomy throughout the last 30 years) and *Egin*, close to left wing nationalist trend.

4.2. Sudden eruption

According to the research done by Egia and Bayon (1997:108), we could say that 1985 was "the year of counter-information" in the Basque Country. A very important variety of cultural and social experiences had their alternative expressions in that period. Tens of music groups, most of them incarnated in the wave of BRR, were born. Each little village had its own rock group and also its *Gaztetxe* (*Youth Club House* in Basque language), a space created (normally occupied) and managed autonomously by groups of young people who faced the authority of governors. In these places young people organised their concerts, had exhibitions and debated about the political and social situation... and frequently conspired to destroy the established order, an order which was considered repressive and oppressive for Basque young people. Evidently these collectives weren't mute.

They needed to communicate. So beside, around or next to each group, each *Gaztetxe* or each ecological, internationalist, feminist,... movement emerged an expression-organ, an artisanal magazine to spread its activity and to inform their colleagues and non colleagues. The most natural form of expression was the fanzine. In the middle of the decade of the 80s more than a hundred of these magazines were published in the Basque Country. The quality and life of the majority of them was very poor and short. But it didn't matter. At that time, the most important thing was to be on the street, to communicate, to demonstrate that the collective was alive. We are speaking about a Country whose population was less than three million people. In accordance with the data collected by Egia and Bayon (1997: 165-172) at the end of the 20th century, specifically in 1997, Basque social movements had 354 different organs of expression. Most of them were music, local, political and underground fanzines (147) and the rest were a very wide range of magazines as is shown in the following chart:

Expression organs of Basque Social Movements (1997)	
Type	Amount
Music, local, political and underground fanzines	147
<i>Gaztetxe's</i> magazines.	27
Local magazines published in Basque.	27
Anti-militarist organs	25
Ecological organs	23
Magazines in favour of Basque prisoners	17
Trade union magazines	16
Internationalist group organs	15
Different left wing political parties magazines	13
Different youth collectives' magazines	13
Feminist groups' organs	8
Pirate radio*	7
Organs in favour of the Basque language	5
Civic groups organs	5

University students' organs	4
Organs in favour of sexual liberation	3
Magazines in favour of social dialogue to resolve the Basque conflict	2
Magazine about the problems of people affected by drug addiction	1
Expression organ of the Civic Committee against AIDS	1
Total	354

Source Egia and Bayon.

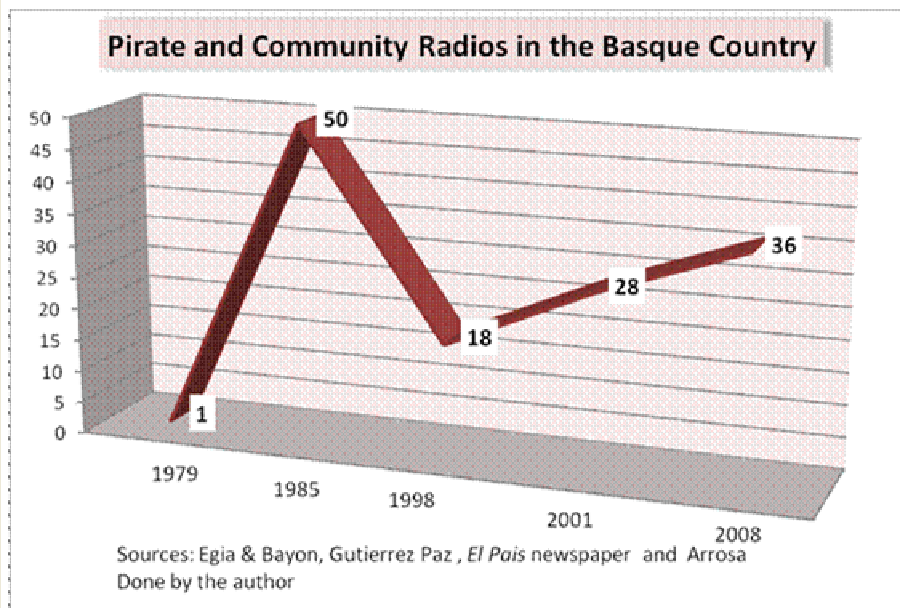
* This data is not exact. According to other sources the number of pirate radios in the Basque Country in 1998 was 18 [9].

The authors of this chart titled this compilation in 1997 "Open list of fanzines, magazines and publications of social movements during the last 15 years". In most of the categories, the anthology made by Egia and Bayon seems very exact, but in other sections this doesn't happen. For example, according to different authors and sources (*El País* newspaper among them) at the end of the 80s around 50 pirate radio stations existed in the Basque Country, but that number decreased quickly until 1998 when it became stabilised at 18 radios.

The first pirate radio created in the Basque Country was *Osina Irratia*. That happened 30 years ago, in 1979 in Amara, a district of Donostia-San Sebastian. Their supporters were a group of antimilitarist and ecologist militants who used that media to spread their ideas.

In the following graph we can see the evolution of the pirate and community radio stations in the Basque Country during the last three decades. We consider pirate radio the station which defends an ideological trend which is against the established order, non profit seeking and manned by voluntary workers. However, community radios are different in that they accept advertising and economic support from public institutions and employ salaried professionals. Nevertheless, they don't belong to big broadcasting companies.

According to the research carried out by the lecturer of the University of the Basque Country, Arantza Gutierrez Paz (2202:97-119), the "golden age" of this kind of radios took place between 1979 and 1988. The crisis came in 1989 and lasted until at least 1995. Since that time, the phenomena has been revived with renewed energy as you can see in the following graph:



Another important factor in understanding the vigour of the pirate and community radio movement is the unique role played by *Egin* newspaper. From its birth in 1979 until its death in 1998 (decided by a judge from Madrid), this daily newspaper was an important catalyst of these media. For some years *Egin* published weekly a page informing about the main news related to this movement. The newspaper that succeeded *Egin* in 1999, *Gara*, has continued this trend up to the present. Most pirate and community radios which work today in the Basque Country are included in Arrosa, the broadcasting centre born in 2001 which gathers 21 of the 36 broadcasting stations which exist in the entire country. [10]

Arrosa is the association which coordinates and defends the interest of these stations. It works without profit in mind. One of its principal functions is to receive programmes elaborated by one of these stations and share them among the

rest which are interested in its broadcast. All programmes which partake in this network are made in Basque, the only condition for it to be shared.

Let me now emphasize the particular role played by the local magazines published in the Basque language [11] during the last three decades. These magazines were created at the end of the 80s, mainly by the impetus of numerous local associations which laboured in favour of the Basque language. The aim of these publications was and is to inform about local news. Normally they have the economic support of local councils and of the Basque Government. Thanks to that, they deliver their magazine free to those subscribers who have previously requested it. They don't have an important budget. They employ a few workers and normally their work conditions are not very good. They are not exactly counter-information magazines because they don't want to change the social order.

Their sole goal is to spread local news in Basque. However, we considerer that this phenomenon has historically played a worthy part in achieving the normalization of the Basque language and so we have included it in this paper. Apart from that, the very existence of this small local magazine network is something remarkable in a world where the power of mega corporations is becoming increasingly evident. As claimed by Topagunea [12] –the federation of local Basque magazines- in 2009 53 publications of this kind exist (41 included in this association and the rest outside). The potential readers of these magazines are more than half a million people.

One of the keys which can help us to interpret these movements –radios and local magazines- is the strength of the social movements on which they are built. These associations didn't emerge from nothing. The voluntary work of tens of supporters and militants was and is behind them, volunteers who defended a wide variety of causes which went, for example, from antimilitarism to the defence of the normalisation of the Basque language. Thanks only to that, it is possible to understand the magnitude of these phenomena.

4.3. Reasons for a decrease

But you cannot tell a book by its cover. And that was what happened with these phenomena at the end of 80s, specifically with all that surrounded the explosion of fanzines and pirate radios (fortunately, the same didn't happen with local Basque magazines, because their features were quite different). The problems began to accumulate one after the other. The capacity of communication of these media was restricted to very closed circles. The capability to charm different sectors began to decrease. Voluntarism normally has an expiry date, also in that kind of movements, especially if renovation gets more and more difficult. The altruism which characterized these associations at the beginning of the 80s collapsed ten years later.

Apart from that, other factors seriously blocked the possibilities of these media. The following reasons contribute to a better understanding of the crisis of the phenomena (Egia & Bayon, 1997: 98-99):

Lack of material and economic resources. There were people prepared to work and communicate but broadcasting processes need important funds, material resources, offices, telephones, etc. We have to take into account that the popularisation of new technologies began some years later, not at the end of the 80s.

Poor quality. Voluntary work wasn't enough to make a good magazine. It was sufficient at the beginning, but people demanded better quality products, and not so chaotic magazines. At that time many counter-informative magazines and pirate radios were very enthusiastic but very bad. In many cases, there were evident signs of chaos: the contents were disordered, the sections changed every issue and the quality of images was deficient. The main philosophy was: DIY (Do It Yourself). Perfect, but how? Voluntary work and brilliant imagination achieved important successes in that period, but that wasn't sufficient to create miracles.

Bad delivery. That was one of the most important obstacles. To communicate efficiently means to be present at many points of distribution, something crucial for publishers, but that was and is today too expensive for these collectives. A good delivery system needs important resources and energies. That wasn't assumable for fanzine publishers. Don't forget that we are still in the middle of 80s, when Internet was a pipe dream, an impossible notion.

However, delivery was not a problem for pirate and community radios. They easily got their booster stations. They put their antennas in discreet places to go unnoticed, and if they were able to occupy a site on the dial which didn't provoke problems for the commercial radio stations, then the possibilities to broadcast in good conditions were high. Their difficulties were others: to get a broadcasting licence from the authorities, for example.

Different frequency. The majority of fanzines had a simulated frequency. That irregularity generated a lack of confidence and gave the impression of an evident lack of seriousness.

Internal problems. The endemic problems which have historically featured in left wing collectives and parties appeared here too: organizational weakness, typical troubles caused by the assembly function, dogmatism, sectarianism, lack of confidence among groups, absence of coordination...

Social changes. At the end of the previous century, the world became more individualist. The Basque society was not an exception. In spite of the initial spirit of Alternative Media still being alive among some collectives, it's necessary to accept that new social trends have seriously affected this society and that egotistical behaviour has become more and more evident every day.

The survival of the conflict. The prolongation of the Basque conflict, especially in everything which surrounded the phenomena of ETA [13] (attacks, bombs, murders, party illegalization, prisoners, tortures,...) has brought a generalized

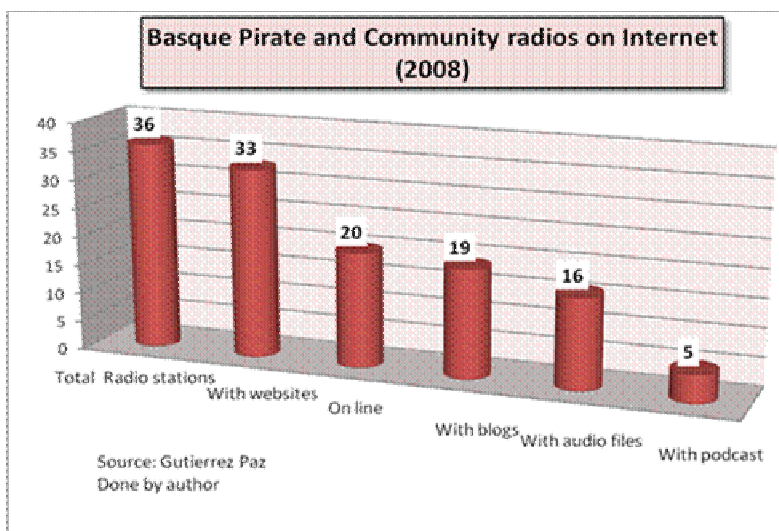
despondency, disillusionment and boredom in Basque society, including the most active sectors, those which are closer to left wing nationalism sectors. At the end of the 80s the hope among these collectives was apparent, but they lacked experience and material resources. Now, new technologies have cheapened printing costs and the internet has revolutionised the communication process. Today there are material resources, alternative experiences are very rich, but Basque society has changed and hope has disappeared. The survival of the conflict has become a heavy weight, a terrifying nightmare which blocks the heart and the possibilities of volunteers who are theoretically able to work in favour of Alternative Media.

The sum of these seven factors contributes a better understanding of the important decrease that Alternative Media suffered from the middle of the 80s to the end of the millennium.

4.4. Reasons for an increase

Though some of these elements continue today –the social changes experimented in Basque society and the listlessness caused by the endurance of the armed conflict–, it is necessary to underline that we can appreciate a slow but continued increase of Alternative Media as we can see in the previous graph.

The impulse carried by new technologies has been decisive in that growth. The presence of Basque pirate and community radio stations on the internet is very important as you can see in the following graph (Gutierrez Paz, 2008: 10):



Most of them have websites (91,6%) and broadcast on line (55,5%). There are fewer stations which have blogs or which offer the possibility to download audio files or syndicate podcasts. Anyway, we can say that the connectivity of these radio stations to the internet is very important today, even more than that of commercial radio stations.

The process experienced by Basque pirate and community radio happened to fanzines and counter-informative expression organs too. Everything has changed under the influence of the Net. Most fanzines which appeared in the 80s have disappeared, but today the internet is the perfect echo for their successors. In fact, the Web has plenty of Basque counter-informative sites, proportionately greater than would correspond to a country with three million people.

On the other hand, the amplitude of the Basque blogosphere is worthy of underlining here. 600.000 speakers, more or less, constitute the Basque speaking community [14]. That means a minority language, a language that theoretically is at risk of disappearing according to the last Unesco report [15]. But, the traditional vitality which surrounds this community leads us to think that this threat is only potential, as the former person in charge of the Basque linguistic policy, Patxi Bastarrika has recently claimed [16].

Anyway, the effect of new technologies on the increase in the counter-informative sphere is a universal phenomena, an evident reality which does not need further comment on our part.

5. The particularity of Gasteiz

The alternative atmosphere which characterized anti-establishment circles in Basque society at the end of the 70s and at the beginning of the 80s was also present in Gasteiz. Vitoria-Gasteiz is the capital of the Basque Autonomous Community. It's a medium sized town, with 230.000 habitants and historically characterized by its traditional atmosphere. In spite of that, alternative sphere has historically had an important presence; not in absolute, but yes in relative terms. And what is more important: that presence has remained stable through the last 25 years. Three examples illustrate our hypothesis:

The continuity of the *Gaztetxe (Youth Club House)* born in 1988 The permanence of the electronic version of "Resiste" fanzine (now named Eutsi) created in 1985. The persistence of Hala Bedi Irratia station launched in 1983.

The Gaztetxe. Continuing the trend of the Squatter movement and similar experiences in other villages of the Basque Country, a group of young people occupied in 1988 an old building placed in the medieval area of Gasteiz (Gasteiz is the Basque denomination of the town). The occupation was doubly significant: the occupied house was in a strategic place, just on the top of a hill from where it dominates the town and, on the other hand, the owner was the Bishopric. That conferred an additional value, a special *leitmotiv* which gave a morbid pleasure to the action.

The occupied place was totally abandoned by the owners and in the past was used by the Bishopric as a horse breeding establishment. Young people spent some months clearing the place. After that, they organized all kinds of activities: concerts, exhibitions, conferences, cultural performances,... until today. They even organized a library thanks to the donations of anonymous citizens, a library which is open today and that has free entrance for everybody. They have an assembly function and they have never asked for a grant from the institutions. That's a primary condition to preserve their independence from political parties.

The Gaztetxe of Gasteiz is today one of the oldest that exists in the Basque Country. Like the rest of these Youth Club Houses, they have had a lot of problems with governors, with different bishops and with different mayors who have governed the town during the last 21 years. In spite of eviction and demolition threats, the managers of the Gaztetxe have managed to keep their initial spirit alive and what is more important: they have gained the respect of the authorities. What are the secrets of this continuity? The most important are the following:

The good relationship that they have with the neighbours. For example, from the beginning they agreed a reasonable hour to finish their concerts so as not to disturb the rest of the neighbourhood. That has been crucial to get their cooperation.

Broad-minded functioning. A wide array of collectives can use the facilities of the Gaztetxe. The only condition is not to practice sectarianism. This broad-mindedness has produced a peculiar empathy among cultural and social sectors. For example, 10,000 people took part in the last party (11th October, 2008) organized together with Hala Bedi Irratia station.

Social support. The success of this initiative wouldn't have been possible without wide social support, without the voluntary work of hundreds of young people.

Economic resources. The principal economic support of this initiative comes from the tavern which they have inside the Gaztetxe and the money collected by selling tickets for the concerts.

Today the area of the Gaztetxe is undergoing urban remodeling and has become a desirable place for speculators. The future is not very sure, but the eviction threat is now weaker than in the previous period.

"Resiste" fanzine. Previous to the birth of the Gaztetxe, three years earlier, in 1985 "Resiste" fanzine was born, also in Gasteiz. This media emerged from autonomous sectors of the working-class movement and in close connection with the university atmosphere. At the beginning it was evident that this fanzine had another touch, a new more elaborated style. The first issue published 350 copies in A3 format and it was immediately confiscated by the police. This attack against freedom of speech was the best marketing campaign. The next issue was more professional and they delivered 2,000 copies throughout the Basque Country (not only in Gasteiz). In spite of being one of the best fanzines in circulation, "Resiste" suffered the crisis experienced by the sector, but it reacted very quickly and put into circulation www.eutsi.org website, the electronic version of "Resiste". Today this is the only expression of this magazine.

The last factor which illustrates the importance of Alternative Media in Gasteiz is Hala Bedi Irratia station. Hala Bedi in Basque means "amen!" and "irratia" means Radio. This is an evident joke because it was born coinciding with the first atheist procession which took place in Gasteiz in 5th August in 1983. That is the most important holy day in the fiesta of the town, the day of Our Lady of the White Virgin.

5.1. Hala Bedi Irratia

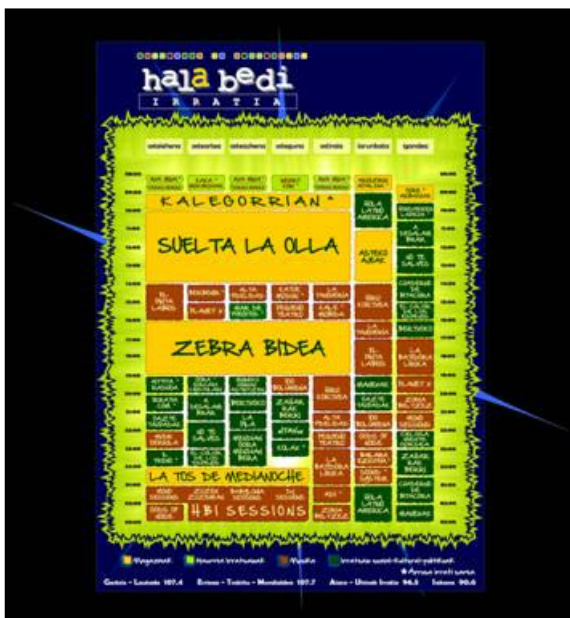
Hala Bedi irratia HBI [17] is the second oldest pirate radio that exists today in the Basque Country. The first one is Eguzki Irratia [18], born in 1982 thanks to the initiative of a group of ecologist militants.

As their current representatives say [19] (Amondarain & Ullibarri, 2009), HBI was "the product of the particular atmosphere that our society lived in the 80s". The Basque Radical Rock and punk movements were at boiling point. From the beginning until today, this station has tried to "give a voice to collectives without voices". They had a lot of problems with governors, especially in the first years and as a result of those they suffered five closures (in 1983, 1984, 1985, 1988 and 1990), but today their situation is quite different. They continue being a not legal but tolerated radio station. Nowadays, they broadcast totally in digital, 24 hours per day and, thanks to the work of Arrosa net [20], they can transmit some of their programmes (almost 15%) jointly with other Basque pirate or community stations.

Technically, HBI has been a pioneer and they are in constant renovation. They began broadcasting in digital stereo in 1995, even before a lot of commercial radio stations which operate in this area. Their website (www.halabedi.org) receives more than 1.000 visits per day. This page is one of the first and boasts many resources: audio files, blogs, podcast... They have 100 watt power and have two booster stations placed on the summit of Zaldiaran and Herrera mountains. In the near future they hope to put the third booster station in the area of Sakana (Nafarroa). Nowadays, their broadcasting is audible in all the province of Araba (2,811 square km.). The second pirate radio of Araba, Uhina irratia (located in Laudio, the second village in importance) broadcasts part of their programming in collaboration with

HBI.

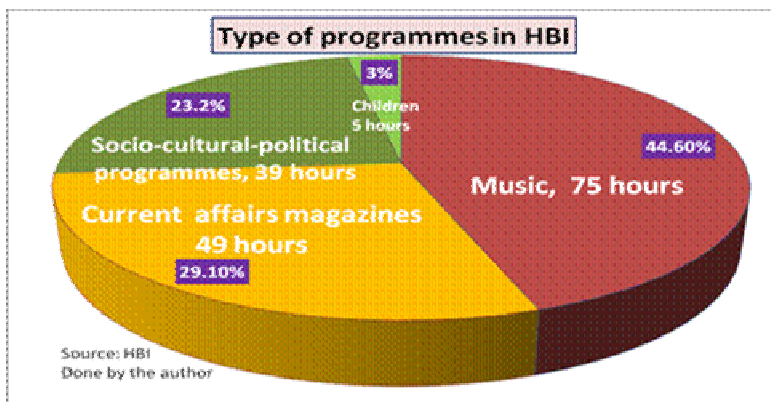
The schedule admits programmes in Basque (40% more or less) and Spanish (the rest, 60%). This proportion has been changing in favour of Basque in the last few years.



The schedule of HBI

The programme-guide is wide and varied. There are four kind of programme genres:

- Music (75 hours per week, 44.6%)
- Current Affairs magazines (49 hours, 29.1%),
- Socio-political-cultural programmes (39 hours, 23.2%) and
- Children's programmes (5 hours, 3%).



As you can see in the graph above, the most important hours –prime time- are occupied by magazines. They are the “flagships” of the station. “Suelta la olla” is the most popular programme. It’s in Spanish and according to the figures given by the station it has achieved 5,000 listeners. “Zebrabidea” is the afternoon magazine in Basque. The principal managers of these programmes have been working disinterestedly for years. Apart from these magazines, there are two kinds of programmes defined by their authors: programmes promoted by collectives (in favour of or against a specific issue) and programmes made by private individuals.

Everybody can have her or his programme in HBI. Normally all proposals are admitted except those which go directly

against the philosophy of the station, like for example, formula-radio programmes because they understand that these kinds of programmes correspond to commercial radio stations. "Our main goal" –say the current managers of the station– "is not necessarily to get a bigger audience. Our principal objective is to extend our influence area to more and more important social networks, sectors close to our communicative project".

Today one person is paid by the station. His main goal is to preserve an adequate coordination of all the people and collectives which pass through the studio during the day and to ensure that technically everything is okay. Apart from that, there is a very wide collaborator's network (almost one hundred at this moment), people who are in constant renovation.

Only a few of the pirate radios which were born in the 80s are alive today. There are some keys which help us to explain the permanence of this project. They are the following:

The evolution of the project. HBI today is very different to the station created in 1983. The project has improved its quality and has considerably extended its offer. Besides that, it's necessary to underline the correct management that has characterized the functioning of this project. Nowadays, HBI in Gasteiz symbolizes a different way to understand communication and interpret the world. They have achieved their own trademark.

Their close relationship with social movements and especially with the *Gaztetxe*. The survival of this station wouldn't have been possible without the intimate synergies created between the aforementioned Youth Club House and HBI. From their independence, each project brings the necessary elements to build an Alternative Atmosphere which diverges from the main stream which governs the town.

Their broad minded functioning. All kinds of programmes have their opportunity in HBI, even entertainment. There is not a concrete editorial line and everybody can express his or her opinions freely. The orientation of their network of collaborators overcomes the traditional limits of left wing nationalism. In fact, at the beginning of the project, HBI didn't have the approval of left wing nationalism, because they considered it as too close to the "autonomous movement".

Their connection with Basque culture. During these 25 years, some famous Basque poet-singers or "bertsolari" (poets who improvise verses) and writers have managed their own programmes through the waves of HBI. That is the case of *bertsolari*s such as Unai Iturriaga, Igor Elortza or writers such as Kirmen Uribe, for example.

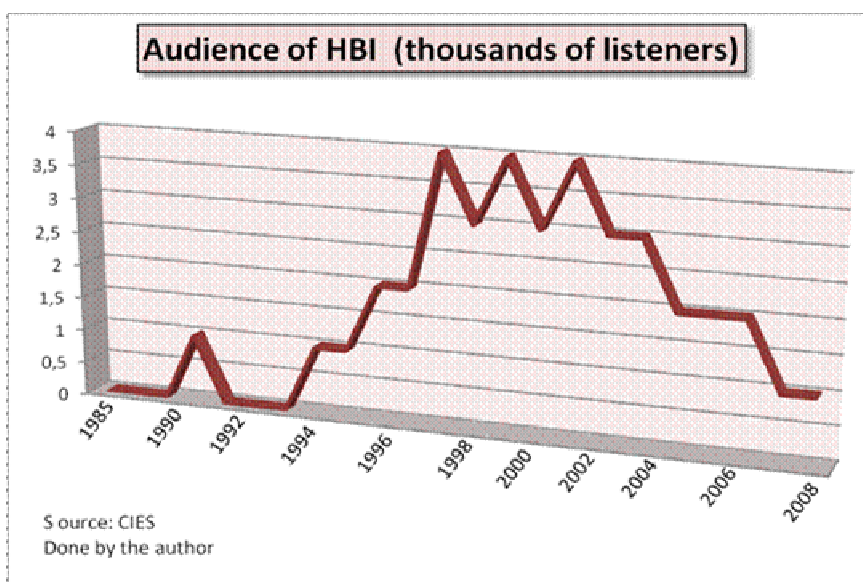
In the last few years, there have been some important landmarks, especially during 2008. On 11th October, for example, approximately 10,000 people met on the streets of the Medieval Part of Gasteiz to celebrate jointly the 20th and 25th anniversary of the *Gaztetxe* and of HBI respectively. The slogan was "*Piztu Gasteiz. Ocupa tu lugar*" ("Wake up Gasteiz. Occupy your place").

It was a very well attended and popular day in different areas and with a lot of concerts, performances and cultural activities for all kind of spectators (children, young people and adults) in a very jovial atmosphere, favoured by spectacular good weather. To get an idea of the success achieved on that day, it suffices to say that the organisers sold all their tickets –700– for the lunch which took place in the open air. It was a very big fiesta in a very captivating ambience. Coinciding with that day, the highest institutional representative of the Department of Culture in the province, Lorena Lz. de la Calle, praised "the dynamism of these collectives and the important work done by them in favour of culture".

Previous to that day, there were other remarkable events. For example, in 2002 thousands of demonstrators protested in the street (5,000 people, more or less) against the possibility of the demolition of the *Gaztetxe*. Three years later, the first "*Gaztetxe Eguna*" or "Gaztetxe Day" took place. That was another celebration, very similar to the aforementioned "Piztu Gasteiz" day. All kinds of commemorations, a mixture of vindication and fiesta, have endowed HBI and *Gaztetxe* with a peculiar style which has captured the complicity of a lot of citizens who some years ago were indifferent to or against these phenomena.

I would like now to focus my attention on the question of the audience of HBI. Normally pirate stations do not appear in the figures produced by the firms specialized in measuring media audiences. That does not happen with HBI. It appears in the ranking done by CIES (a prestigious Opinion and Market Research firm which operates in the Basque Country). It is true that the audience of HBI has always been very modest if we compare it with other stations. In any case, its share is remarkable taking into account that we are speaking about a non professional station that doesn't have any income from advertising or official institutions.

The next graph shows the audience of HBI (measured by CIES) from its birth until today in thousands of listeners. The total data that appears in the graph is the average of all listeners during the week at all hours. According to the data produced by the current representatives of the station, the "flagship" of HBI today "*Suelta la olla*" could have, at its height, 5,000 listeners.

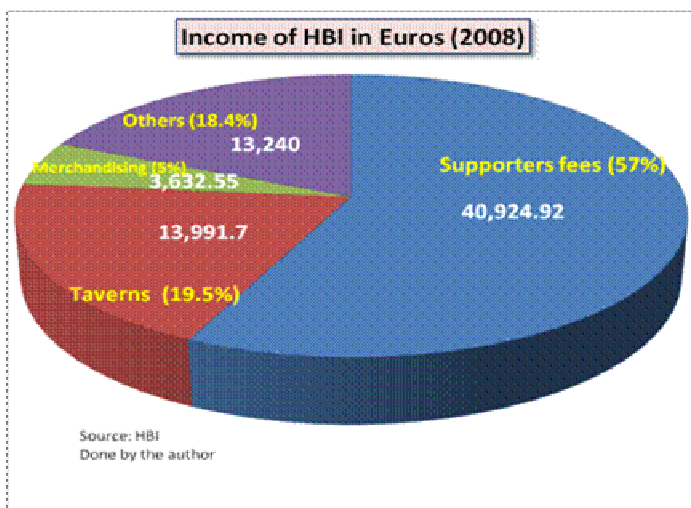


In the province of Araba it's possible to receive more than 20 radio stations. According to CIES, in 2008 the first station was Ser Vitoria with 35,000 listeners on average followed by Radio Vitoria with 27,300 listeners.

But the real importance of HBI exceeds its theoretical 1000 listeners. Let me give an example. In 2005, the managers of HBI thought that in order to alert the population about the dangers of nuclear power, it would be interesting to broadcast a false news item (classic guerrilla-communication action) informing about an important nuclear leak at the plant of Santa Maria de Garoña which is 45 km away from Vitoria-Gasteiz. That joke was very similar to the famous programme "The War of the Worlds" made by Orson Welles on CBS in 1938, which collapsed the streets of New York with a crowd of anxious people who thought that the Martians were really invading the Earth.

After reporting the false news item, a lot of people began calling commercial stations demanding the confirmation of the report. The telephone-switchboards of the principal radio stations were collapsed by calls from people who believed the joke. Even the main public swimming-pools of the city located in Gamarra were evacuated by the authorities to avoid fatal consequences. So, we can say that in spite of HBI not having an important audience, its relative presence is more relevant than its data shows.

As you can suppose, HBI is not a profit making organisation. They ended the last year with a debt of 12,595 euros. Their income was 71,789.17 Euros. Most of it comes from the fees of "Halaberris" or supporters, people who donate a fixed amount (between 6 and 10 Euros per month). The total number of supporters oscillates between 500 and 600. This income makes up 57% of the total. The second most important source of income is the taverns exploited by members of the association during the fiesta of the town. Apart from that, Hala Bedi has its own tavern in the old part of the town.



Nowadays, HBI continues without being a legal radio station. They are tolerated but not legal. They hope to regularise their situation in the near future, but they accept: "this question does not disturb our sleep". HBI expect to continue progressing, improving their quality, extending their social influence and preserving their identity and independence;

that means continuing to be non dependent on official grants.

6. Conclusions

1. In the specific socio-political environment that took place during the 80s, the Basque Country was an important laboratory of Alternative Media experiences: 50 pirate and community radios and at least 354 counter-informative fanzines were born. Only a few of those media, the most vigorous, have managed to stay alive today.

2. From the end of the 80s until the end of the millennium Basque Alternative Media experienced an important decrease as a result of different factors: lack of material and economic resources, poor quality of the media, social changes experimented in Basque society, the crisis of voluntary work and the permanence of the Basque conflict which provoked a generalized disillusionment among the most active sectors which theoretically are the most appropriate to develop these kind of practices.

3. During the last three decades, a variety of local magazines published in Basque have been born. Today they form a wide network made up of 53 small publications whose potential audience is more than half a million people. Though we can't consider these magazines as Alternative Media, it's necessary to emphasize the important role that they have historically played in achieving the normalization of the Basque language. That existence is more remarkable in a world where the power of mega corporations is becoming increasingly evident.

4. One of the keys which can help us to interpret the importance of Alternative Media in the Basque Country is the strength of the social movements on which they are built. These media didn't emerge from nothing. The voluntary work of tens of supporters and militants was and is behind them, volunteers who defended a wide variety of causes which ranged, for example, from antimilitarism to the defence of the normalisation of the Basque language. Thanks only to that, it is possible to understand the magnitude of these phenomena.

5. From the end of the millennium until today, audiovisual Alternative Media have experimented a moderate increase favoured by the impulse carried by new technologies. Today, the internet is the perfect scenario for these kinds of media. Anyway, this moment is very different to the explosion of creativity that the alternative movement lived during the 80s.

6. Some of the most vigorous alternative expressions born in the 80s survive today in Gasteiz. That's the case of the *Gaztetxe*, the electronic version of the "Resiste" fanzine ("Eutsi") and of the pirate radio HBI.

7. There are four causes that help us to explain the continuation of HBI during these 25 years: the evolution experimented by the project, its close relationship with social movements (specifically with the *Gaztetxe*), its broad-minded functioning and its connection with the Basque culture.

8. Today HBI and the *Gaztetxe* of Gasteiz work together in a lot of ambits. In spite of this town being historically governed by moderate or conservative parties, HBI and the *Gaztetxe* have gained their own place, their specific alternative atmosphere; nowadays tolerated and even praised by authorities.

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8. Notes

[1] The author of this article wants to thank the inestimable collaboration of Angela Jones in the English version of this work.

[2] There is a wide bibliography about Media, Alternative Media and New Social movements. A global bibliography on alternative media studies by alphabetic order is available here: http://www.ourmedianetwork.org/wiki/bibliography:ams_alphabetic_order. The author of this paper has based this paper in the following authors: (Atton 1999, 2002, 2003; Castells 2003, 2006; Costa 1999; Couldry 2003; Downey & Fenton 2003; Downing 2003; Fonstcuberta & Gomez 1983; Fraser 1992; Gubern 2004, Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte 2008; Habermas 1962, 1984, 1994; Holloway 2002; Kaplun 1998; Leon et. al. 2005; O'Brien 2000; Olvera 1999; Ramirez de la Piscina 2004, 2006, 2007; Ramonet 2001, Sierra 1997; Sousa 2001, Splichal 1994; Taibo 2002):

[3] Available [in internet](#)

[4] Available in Internet: <http://raulrejo.tripod.com/Mediosensayos/medios.htm>

[5] Data source Eustat, Basque Statistic Office. Document available in Internet: http://www.eustat.es/ele0000000/tbl0000061_c.html However, and thanks to a very important information campaign, the cases of AIDS among Basque Young people from 15 to 29 years old decreased very quickly from 2000 to 2005. In that period the cases were 153 per 100.000 while in Spain it was 237 per 100.000.

[6] This figure includes the actions of two branches of ETA and of another organization: Anti-capitalist Autonomous Commands. Data source: *ETAren historia*. Available in Internet: <http://members.fortunecity.es/artistabar/euskalherria/eta.historia.htm>

[7] The Spanish Court declared this party illegal in 2003 arguing "it was part of ETA". This formation appealed against this verdict to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg which will decide about that in the next few months.

[8] Data source: Official results published by Basque and Navarre Governments.

[9] See "Los últimos corsarios", *El Pais* newspaper 17th September, 1998, page 9.

[10] Talk with Arantza Gutierrez Paz, author of the book titled *Euskal irratigintzaren historia* (The history of Basque Radio System).

[11] The Basque language is one of the oldest in Europe. Nowadays it is spoken by 650.000 people. That means, more or less, 30% of the population of the Basque Country.

[12] Data available in Internet: <http://www.topagunea.org/>

[13] ETA completed its 50th anniversary at the end of 2008. That means that this organization is nowadays the oldest organization which uses armed struggle in Europe and one of the oldest in the world.

[14] Basque society is bilingual. Spanish is the main language in the South and French in the North.

[15] www.eitb.com/noticias/sociedad/detalle/91316/launescomantieneuskeuaulenguasumundoupeligu/

[16] Available [in internet](#)

[17] See <http://www.halabedi.org/>

[18] See <http://www.eguzki.net/>

[19] Conversation with Gaizka Amondarain and Joseba Ullibarri, 17th February, 2009.

[20] See <http://bitakora.arrosasarea.org/>

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