



# 10 proposals for the consolidation of a public service music radio in Spain

*10 propuestas para la consolidación de una radio musical de servicio público en España*

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## ABSTRACT

Music, with its profound ability to evoke emotions and bridge cultural divides, holds a significant place in our collective consciousness. Within the rich artistic heritage and passionate melodies of Spain, public music radio has played a vital role in shaping the nation's cultural landscape. This article draws upon the author's doctoral research, conducted at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in 2015, which explored the profound impact of public music radio on Spanish society. Reflecting on the research and subsequent academic articles published (Costa Gálvez, 2015, 2016a,

2016b, 2017), the author identifies the primary focus of defining a public service music radio. This article presents an opportunity to revisit and update 10 proposals for establishing and strengthening public service music radio in Spain, highlighting ten enduring principles deemed valuable in the year 2023. Through this examination, the article aims to contribute to the consolidation of public service music radio as an essential component of Spain's cultural landscape.

**Keywords:** music, radio, Spain, public service media, PSM

## RESUMEN

*La música, con su profunda capacidad para evocar emociones y unir a diferentes culturas, ocupa un lugar significativo en nuestra conciencia colectiva. Dentro del rico patrimonio artístico y las apasionadas melodías de España, la radio musical pública ha desempeñado un papel vital en la configuración del paisaje cultural de la nación. Este artículo se basa en la investigación doctoral del autor, realizada en la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona en 2015, que exploró el profundo impacto de la radio musical pública en la sociedad española. Reflexionando sobre la investigación y los artículos académicos posteriores publicados (Costa Gálvez, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2017), el autor identifica el enfoque*

*principal de definir una radio musical de servicio público. Este artículo presenta una oportunidad para revisar y actualizar las propuestas de establecer y fortalecer la radio musical de servicio público en España, resaltando diez propuestas consideradas valiosas en el año 2023. A través de esta revisión, el artículo tiene como objetivo contribuir a la definición de la radio musical de servicio público como un componente esencial del paisaje cultural de España.*

**Palabras clave:** *música, radio, España, medios de servicio público, PSM*

## INTRODUCTION

Music has long been revered as a universal language capable of stirring the most profound emotions within us, transcending cultural boundaries, and connecting us to a collective consciousness. In Spain, a country rich in artistic heritage and passionate melodies, the role of public music radio has been a vital thread weaving through the nation's cultural fabric. Within this captivating realm, I embarked on my doctoral journey, delving into the profound impact of public music radio on Spanish society.

In 2015, I defended a thesis on public service music radio in Spain at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain). The final part of the research focused on my main concern: the definition of a public service music radio. In the variety of academic articles that were published based on my doctoral research (Costa Gálvez, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2017), I did not mention the main purpose of the research: to define public service music radio in Spain. That is why I appreciate the opportunity to review, with hindsight, to update my proposals for

consolidating public service music radio in Spain by selecting the 10 that I think are still valuable in 2023.

## THE FRAMEWORK

Radio has faced frequent death sentences throughout history. As Berry (2006) pointed out: "Will the iPod Kill the Radio Star?". The notion of public service radio in Spain is often associated with information linked to manipulation and propaganda. Music public radio holds little interest or importance in the public media landscape. While music programmes are present in public stations, there are only a few specialised music stations in Spanish public radio. Specialisation has been a trend since the early days of radio, but only six out of thirteen Spanish public audiovisual corporations have specialized music stations, raising questions about their significance.

In 1985, the Broadcasting Research Unit used a metaphor to describe public service broadcasting as "a

delicate web of great tensile strength can be destroyed by one unthinking blow". This metaphor holds in the current economic crisis, as the legitimacy of audiovisual public services is being challenged, and media credibility is more important than ever. RTVE, the Spanish national broadcaster, is currently facing a crisis of information legitimacy, reminiscent of its troubled past. While culture is an integral part of public service broadcasting, its presence on television has diminished over the years. However, specialised music radio has gained prominence, even influencing television programmes like Radio 3's *Cachitos de hierro y cromo* and cultural magazines. Specialised music radio has become a refuge for culture, especially after the failure of television initiatives focused on cultural dissemination. Furthermore, public audiovisual corporations have been anticipating staff cuts, and examples of workforce reduction include the Collective Dismissal Procedure at Onda Regional de Murcia. The most notable case is the unfortunate demise of RTVV, which had always been disconnected from society and closed under the pretext of saving schools and hospitals, according to the President of the Comunitat Valenciana, Alberto Fabra.

Scannell (1990, p. 11) emphasises the distinction between public service as a delegated responsibility and its interpretation by broadcasting authorities. The literature review focuses on three main topics: specialised music radio, public service broadcasting, and the cultural music industry. Specialisation in music programming is inherent to radio and has a long-standing tradition in Spain. Firstly, an analysis of the history, current state, and prospects of Spanish public music radio is conducted, along with a review of radio programming and music genres. Secondly, the concept of public service broadcasting is examined, traditionally associated with information dissemination, evident in academic, legal, and corporate texts. Spanish legislation largely overlooks radio (Cortes Generales, 2010), while the European Union views radio as a local business (Consejo Europeo, 1991; DCMS, 2005). However, culture, quality, language promotion, and the national music industry often intersect with specialised music radio programming. The analysis presented here focuses on these aspects using academic, corporate, and legal documents from Spain

and Europe. The study of communication policy is crucial in this thesis, particularly bearing on public service media, given the evolving global media landscape with emerging actors, technologies, and paradigms that introduce new conflicts or accelerate existing ones. Lastly, a dedicated section explores the music industry from a cultural industry's perspective. More than other radio typologies, specialised music radio is closely connected to the professional music environment. This section examines features of the cultural sector, such as the significance of the music industry, copyright, intellectual property, and new methods of distributing artistic music products.

## METHODOLOGY

As stated, this article consists of a review of a set of proposals for the consolidation of public service music radio in Spain, originally defined in 2015, updated for 2023. Our sample consists of 12 radio stations and bitcasters (radio on the Internet) divided into five typologies:

- » Those focused on the so-called classical music and addressed a specialised audience profile: CatClàssica, Catalunya Música, and Radio Clásica.
- » Those focused on commercial music and addressed a general audience profile, especially the young: Gaztea Irratia and Canal Fiesta Radio.
- » Those focused on indie pop music and addressed to a specialised audience profile: iCat.cat, and Radio 3.
- » Those focused on adult contemporary radio format popular music and addressed to a general audience profile: RG Música, EITB Musika, and OR Música.
- » Those focused on a specific genre and addressed to a specific audience profile: Son Galicia Radio and Flamenco Radio.com.

## THE PROPOSALS

The proposals are divided into four categories, considering the research outcomes: the legal aspect, audience, digital profile, and programming.

**Proposal 1. Exhaustive definition of the public service mission in the primary legal and corporate texts.** We refer to documents as the public service broadcasting acts, contract programme, framework mandate, mission and vision, etc. This definition must include the establishment of what a public service programming should have in the case of specialised music radio to develop criteria for measuring programme quality. Unfortunately, we cannot find definitions of music radio in the legal texts, and they are seldom mentioned in corporate documents.

**Proposal 2. The social function of specialised radio music should be highlighted.** A public radio that is not in permanent contact with society is not feasible. Public service music radio should be close to society and have high convening power. The “locality” of the radio should also be present in specialised music radio, especially with the broadcasting of the most important concerts and festivals in terms of social relevance, but also those made by and for the listeners, much along the lines of what Radio 3 is already doing. Closely linked to the social function is the educational aspect of radio. In this sense, public stations should approach primary, secondary and post-secondary institutions.

**Proposal 3. Maintaining the prescription function is fundamental to ensure the present and the future of public service music radio.** The prescriptive role of the radio is widespread in the musical aspect and can be even more associated with public radio as a justification of its presence. Especially for radios that broadcast a 24-hour music selection, this selection should be composed of a wide variety of shows because, realistically, listeners can find all kinds of content outside radio in such a big world as the Internet.

**Proposal 4. Full audience specialisation, both majority, and minority.** The mission of specialised music radio should be to reach the maximum number of listeners. In this regard, more than one station must be dedicated to each audience segment. In this sense, the CCMA and RTVE models are the most successful: exclusive attention to classical and popular music.

**Proposal 5. Enhancing radio websites.** Improving or maintaining the technical qualities of listening in streaming and providing engaging content is essential. Moreover, it is necessary to create tags classifying the range of the programmes, rather than by the existing genre categories, although these also may be useful to the audience. Connecting with this idea, radio content that is present only on the Internet should be increasingly high. Podcasting is shaping (again) the future of radio and music. Public radio should create exclusive content, especially podcasts, for the web pages to configure the stations as “something more” than a traditional radio, without neglecting varied scheduling.

**Proposal 6. The presence of streaming music services should be increased. The search for the music-lover audience is critical.** The presence of online social networks is very high. Still, it is negligible in music social networks and streaming music services, which seem quite appropriate places to develop a prescriptive radio role. In addition, music radio should act as a content selector and create playlists in streaming music services. Moreover, on the website, program playlists should be present. This still needs to be solved, owing mainly to the economic conditions of streaming music services.

**Proposal 7. Promote the educational and cultural role of public radio through programming.** Music is central, but we refer not only to cultural content such as film, theatre, and literature but all cultural content that may interest listeners because music lovers usually love other forms of culture. However, educational and cultural contents are hardly present on public music radio in Spain, especially those aimed at children, classical music, and popular music genres.

Shows like The Selector on Radio 3, conducted in collaboration with the British Council, which is broadcast entirely in English, are an excellent way to teach through entertainment and culture. Classical music stations are another unexplored area focused on the adult public and could be an outstanding public service for children.

**Proposal 8. Specific music content should be desirable for listeners. Music genres and styles must be varied.** In addition, many genres and styles of popular music remain the exclusive heritage of public radio, and maintaining and increasing its presence should be a priority. Aspects such as the publication of concert schedules are also a way to actively involve industry players, with particular attention to under-the-radar musicians, who should have permanent space on websites. In this regard, commercial music programming is difficult to justify on specialised music public radio. The point is not to leave for public radio what commercial radio does not want to do. In Spain, there are already many stations dedicated to adult contemporary and commercial music. In contrast, public radio stations should offer content not on commercial stations with a seriousness not observed in commercial formulas. They should be very close to society, providing entertainment and considering that commercial music stations can also discover new artists.

**Proposal 9. Specialised music radio should support the cultural music industry and cultural industries.** In the present economic crisis, the cultural music industry should be supported, as it is the ultimate content provider of specialized music radio. In addition, radio should maintain and promote relations with stakeholders outside the cultural music industry, especially with concert halls and festivals. As a cultural industry, the music industry is subject to business interests. It is the role of public radio to offer a wide variety of music products and, therefore, should offer exposure to all sectors of the industry, especially the independent and even the amateur scene. Public radio should also promote those cultural players not involved in the industry, like accessible venues. Specifically, most of the shows should focus on discovering new musicians.

Linked to the previous point, radio should support musicians who can start their career on public radio and can also be an essential claim from listeners. Specialised music public radio should promote initiatives and shows dedicated to new and under-the-radar musicians.

Indeed, creating or maintaining initiatives focused on under-the-radar musicians is fundamental. The ideal situation is to devote an entire programme to them and create stable sections within programmes not dedicated to this purpose, especially the popular ones. However, new talent contests, such as Proyecto Demo on Radio 3, Sona9 on iCat.cat, and Maketa Lehiaketa on Gaztea Irratia, should be maintained. The reason is that this competition only gives more prominence to the winning artists. In this sense, the model of BBC Introducing seems well suited for the active participation of the music industry, the ultimate goal of most artists, without winners or losers. The aim should be to facilitate most artists' goals, which are part of the industry or those involved in radio initiatives. Therefore, both platforms must exist at significant music festivals and concerts organised by the broadcasters, as in Proyecto Demo on Radio 3.

Music public radio cannot be a musical selection based on the greatest hits. A thematic radio is not the same as a formula radio. Public radio should create innovative programmes in the formats and content and approach a more thematic rather than a formula model.

**Proposal 10. The 'ultra' music specialisation is one of the possible futures of specialized music public radio.** The existence of stations like the iCat.cat' bitcasters, Son Galicia and FlamencoRadio are one way forward for the future of radio, especially in co-existence with podcasting.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the principles that should guide specialized music public service radio can be summarised as follows: to "culturise," entertain, and prescribe. This type of radio should maintain constant contact with society, particularly through event organisation,

serving as a vital bridge between adult and young audiences. In order to fulfil its social role and strengthen its relationship with listeners, radio must have a strong online presence, leveraging the internet as a powerful medium that accompanies individuals in their daily lives. Regarding programming, culture—understood not in an elitist manner—should be prominently featured, ensuring that public radio caters to all cultural needs, with a particular focus on music, entertainment, and knowledge, all in harmony with the broader concept of culture. This radio should encompass a wide range of genres and styles, with a particular emphasis on those

that are not commonly found on commercial stations. In addition, attention should be devoted to showcasing lesser-known music and providing exposure for emerging artists. Lastly, public radio should actively promote major cultural events and prioritise the support and promotion of the local music industry and scene, paying special attention to under-the-radar musicians. By adhering to these principles, specialised music public service radio can truly serve as a beacon of cultural enrichment, fostering a vibrant and inclusive community of music enthusiasts. \

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