DW Akademie

Innovation for Dialogue
Creative Experiences to Encourage Participation

The Power of the Voice.
Community Media in Latin America

Innovation for Dialogue
Creative Experiences to Encourage Participation

The Power of the Voice.
Community Media in Latin America

Imprint

Table of contents

Foreword

From its beginnings as a journalism training center, over the years DW Akademie has evolved into a major player in the media development sector, promoting freedom of expression and access to information around the globe. Well-trained journalists and media experts who produce high-quality work, as well as unbiased media that publish well-researched, verified, and relevant information for the community, are fundamental to achieving a healthy and non-polarized information ecosystem. Unbiased media and well-trained journalists are, however, not enough to meet the current challenges created by the digital revolution. Audiences are playing an increasingly important role in the creation and flow of content. Consequently, traditional media, such as press, radio or television, while still relevant, are not the only channels through which people receive information about global and local events. We must initiate innovation processes that invite citizens to create or reinvent communication channels and become a part of the media.

DW Akademie has explored experimental, collaborative, and participatory methodologies in a clear commitment to set a new roadmap for media to engage and encourage the participation of audiences in constructive dialogue. The projects presented in this publication are examples of how our work in Latin America is defined by an experimental nature, taking the form of circular processes that rely on feedback-loops and reflection for constant improvement. Accordingly, the four projects described below are not intended to be replicated exactly as portrayed here, but rather aim to serve as an inspiration for other organizations or media to adapt and integrate them into their creative processes as needed.

We sincerely hope that this publication inspires reflection within media development organizations and media outlets and promotes a new way of understanding a more inclusive, participatory, and horizontal communication.

Rodrigo Villarzú
Head Latin America, Media Development
DW Akademie

Carsten von Nahmen, Managing Director of DW Akademie, and Rodrigo Villarzú, Head Latin America, Media Development DW Akademie during their visit to Sónica's Space Booth in Guatemala in 2019.

Series Publications. © DW Akademie

The Power of the Voice

This publication is part of the series The Power of the Voice: *Community Media in Latin America*, which also includes "Media Viability in the CORAPE Network (2020)", "Radio in a Post-pandemic World: Tools and Strategies for the 'New Normal'" (2020) and "Diálogos sobre Comunicación Comunitaria" (2022) ("Dialogue on Community Communication"), available in Spanish. These and other texts can be read and downloaded in the publications section of the DW Akademie website.

dw.com/es/publicaciones/s-54687075

Acknowledgments

As with all the experiences researched for this book, preparing this publication involved teamwork and the collaboration of many people.

Above all we would like to thank the participants of the activities and projects described here. Their stories contribute a testimonial component, valuable suggestions and lessons to the text. We thank the attendees of the #ConectaCulturas Hackathon and the Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador who joined the initiative; the residents of La Paz neighborhood in Barranquilla, Colombia, who participated in the Reporterathon; the community journalists and members of civil society organizations who attended the activities of the Colaboratorio in Bolivia, and the youth of the schools in Guatemala City who embarked on a journey in the Space Booth.

We also wish to thank all partner organizations with whom DW Akademie designed and implemented these activities. DW Akademie's approach is different from that of a classic donor, as it devises and creates projects together with local organizations in a horizontal relationship based on mutual respect. Therefore, we would like to thank Coordinadora de Medios Comunitarios Populares y Educativos del Ecuador (CORAPE), Asociación de Radiodifusión Comunitaria Vokaribe in Colombia, Centro de Producciones Radiofónicas (CEPRA) in Bolivia, and Radio Sónica of Asociación de Servicios Culturales y Educativos (ASEC) in Guatemala.

This collection of experiences has been further enriched with the views of the DW Akademie Program Directors and staff in the countries where the activities took place. Besides supporting the projects, they provided valuable input and the documents used to prepare the four reports.

Finally, we thank Stefanie Staab and Vivienne Gager, our colleagues of the DW Akademie team in Germany, for their support in the research stage and with the transcripts, and Attila Mong and the entire I4D team at DW Akademie.

About the authors

Santiago García Gago

Santiago García Gago is Project Manager at DW Akademie. He is a journalist specialized in information and communications technologies and radio, as well as co-author of the book "Radio in a post-pandemic world: Tools and Strategies for the 'New Normal'" (2020), of the series The Power of the Voice. Community Media in Latin America.

David Olmos

David Olmos is currently Director of the South America Unit at DW Akademie. He holds a PhD in Contemporary History and has had several positions in various departments of DW since 2001. He worked as a television journalist and coordinating media development projects in Nicaragua, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Ecuador. He is also the editor and coordinator of the series The Power of the Voice. Community Media in Latin America, including this volume.

1. Presentation

DW Akademie

DW Akademie is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer. With projects in over 50 countries, DW Akademie works to strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information.

© DW/P. Böll

**Carsten
von Nahmen**
Managing Director
DW Akademie

❝ We stand for people, organizations and communities that want a constructive dialogue and contribute to an active and informed civil society.

akademie.dw.com/en/who-we-are/s-30788

DW Akademie organizes its projects in five interrelated fields of action:

Media Viability
Strong media.
Independent perspectives.
Reliable content.

**Media and Journalism
Education**
Innovative training.
Journalism expertise.
Relevant stories.

Digital Rights.
Digital world.
Digital Rights.
Human Rights.

**FIELDS
OF ACTION**

**Media and
Information Literacy**
Our media.
Our skills.
Our responsibility

Innovation for Dialogue
New technologies.
Digital dynamics.
Agile Dialogue.

1.1 Innovation for Dialogue

The public sphere has become a digital sphere. Current debates on the most relevant public issues now take place on the Internet, albeit with certain limitations. This reality poses enormous opportunities, as we shall see further on in this publication. Nonetheless, this reality also presents serious challenges, such as identifying disinformation and propaganda, or preventing the polarization of ideas and emotions, fragmented dialogues, information bubbles, as well as circumventing algorithms and bots that make it difficult to separate disinformation from truthful facts.

These circumstances are leading to a shrinking public sphere, especially in the countries of the Global South, where these obstacles keep growing. Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean continue to face many barriers preventing equal participation in global debates. We refer, for example, to the lack of equipment or access to Internet, the limited availability of technologies in local languages or insufficient digital literacy. These realities do not guarantee free and fair playing rules.

These difficulties are exacerbated in times of crisis. The pre-existing problems are now compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020. This situation revealed the need for the availability of real information with increased emphasis:

Natascha Schwanke
Director of Media Development
DW Akademie

❝ **Media are essential in fighting this pandemic and other crises. If you want to overcome a crisis you need to have reliable information so people can make informed decisions.**

youtube.com/watch?v=zn5oeWU6srQ

In response to these challenges, DW Akademie is committed to Innovation for dialogue (I4D) as a key field of action in its training strategy.

"Innovation in this field means that societies must have the capacities to take full control of their public discussions using an infrastructure that serves public instead of private interests. They should be able to define for themselves the issues they deem relevant, instead of algorithms which are optimized to increase advertising revenues."

Media Development in Practice: Innovation for Dialogue. New approaches and innovative solutions to improve public dialogue in the digital era DW Akademie, March 2021. https://p.dw.com/p/3ueAA

Specifically, I4D proposes actions such as:

– Working with new actors, such as open data initiatives, start-ups, hacker communities, innovation hubs.

– Experimenting with new technologies to have a positive impact on digital discussions.

– Developing innovation capabilities with agile and *human-centered design methodologies*.

1.2 Innovation for Dialogue in Latin America and the Caribbean

Like its partner organizations in the region, DW Akademie is aware that designing strategies exclusively based on digital technologies would be a mistake in countries where barriers such as those mentioned above persist, especially considering that most of the projects are developed in rural or Amazonian areas or peripheral urban neighborhoods.

For this reason, following the framework actions proposed by I4D, in this region we have focused on finding crossroads where traditional media—especially community radio due to its coverage—converge with the new digital information and communication technologies.

❝ **This research presents methodological, technological and media-based hybridization, that has led to innovative and creative participation experiences extending the opportunities for dialogue available to communities excluded from public discussions.**

This guide compiles and analyzes four of these proposals for content training and production developed by DW Akademie together with some of its partners in Latin America:

– *#ConectaCulturas Hackathon*, in partnership with Coordinadora de Medios Comunitarios Populares y Educativos del Ecuador (CORAPE).

– *Reporteratón*, en colaboración con la Asociación de Radiodifusión Comunitaria Vokaribe en Barranquilla, Colombia.

– *Colaboratorio*, in partnership with Centro de Producciones Radiofónicas (CEPRA) in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

– *Space Booths,* in partnership with Radio Sónica, a member of Asociación de Servicios Culturales y Educativos (ASEC) in Guatemala.

Although there are many other experiences that could be part of this publication, we chose these four, mainly because they share the following characteristics:

– They are **innovative experiences** within their geographical areas and field of work. For example, although *hackathons* have been held before in Ecuador, this is the first time that a community media network has used this methodology to design a mobile app, aimed at rescuing the history and traditions of the country's Indigenous Peoples.

– All four are **experimental**. They are not closed proposals, but processes willing to explore alternative ways of communicating.

– They have been developed by **local or community radios** or networks that work with these media outlets.

– They have emerged to **promote the participation and dialogue** of citizens in the media.

At a time when innovation in the information ecosystem is driven mainly by commercial actors, these innovative participation strategies that improve public dialogue provide a perspective from within the territories, where the access and infrastructure are not always the best, and finding creative solutions is a must.

Furthermore, these experiences were developed by community and local media with the purpose of amplifying the voices of a broad sector of citizens who have historically been excluded from participating in the media.

© DW/P. Böll

Rodrigo Villarzú
Head
Latin America
Media Development
DW Akademie

❝ **At DW Akademie we are committed to strengthening journalism and communication in the territories because we believe that local media, such as community radios, bring about positive transformation. We are confident that sustainable, independent and technologically sovereign local media play a decisive role in promoting participation, democracy and social justice.**

youtube.com/watch?v=rZAjLiAqPOE

1.3 Participant-centered Innovation

DW Akademie applies a participant-centered pedagogy, in which the entire training cycle revolves around the people being trained. Thus, the design of the training process begins by analyzing: who are the participants and what do they need? Both the methodologies and the content is planned accordingly.

Under this paradigm, the training implies not conceiving the participant as an empty vessel or recipient of knowledge, but as the protagonist of the learning process, who contributes to the collective construction of knowledge.

Although DW Akademie does not rule out teacher-centered methods such as presentations, conferences or demonstrations, useful at certain points in the training process, it prioritizes methodologies that encourage participation such as group work, mind-mapping, case studies, guided discussions or experience exchanges. In short, participants are included in the learning process.

The four experiences presented in this document provide multiple examples of how to apply this pedagogy in different activities.

1.4 Innovation based on mutual collaboration

Another characteristic of the experiences described here is that all of them were collaboratively developed by multidisciplinary teams. These were not individual processes designed and implemented by one or two people, but activities in which participation was open to people in the neighborhood or community, to schools, the public, civil society organizations and journalists.

This spirit of mutual collaboration and teamwork also guides the projects of DW Akademie in Latin America. The organization does not merely fund projects independently. On the contrary, DW Akademie designs the action plans and project indicators with its partners, closely follows the implementation or activities, provides facilitators and continuous advice at all stages, and facilitates the evaluation processes on which future projects will be designed.

The experiences presented in this guide are the result of this joint and collaborative work between DW Akademie and its partners in Latin America and the Caribbean.

1.5 Innovative experiences for dialogue

This guide is not intended to be a compilation of best *practices* or a *recipe* that can be followed step by step to replicate these experiences elsewhere. As the interviewees remind us, replicating a methodology that worked in a certain context does not guarantee its success in a different setting, even if applied by the same group of facilitators. If participant-centered training processes are designed based on the participants' needs, the process design must change as the needs change.

This research allowed us to analyze four experiences and extract lessons learned, which we present merely as suggestions for action and not as techniques or procedures to be replicated. These are recommendations that require review and adaptation according to the target group.

❝ The objective is to encourage other organizations to take these initiatives as a starting point to collaboratively design and test their own projects.

In addition to their experimental, participatory, innovative and collaborative nature, these experiences share an effort to document and transfer the knowledge acquired during the activities. For example, Vokaribe invited regional partners to co-create the *Reporterathons* and CEPRA conceived the *Colab-*

oratorio as an open space where radio stations can develop their own proposals. They presented this methodology at different international meetings, such as the Encuentro de Comunicación Indígena in Cusco, Peru, in 2019, for example. CORAPE established close partnerships with social and indigenous organizations and universities during the Hackathon and Sónica is an important pedagogical influence for teachers in the schools it visits with the *Space Booth*. This publication aims to contribute to the dissemination of these innovative initiatives which will hopefully be useful to other DW Akademie partners in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as other regions.

1.6 Structure

The suggestions compiled in this publication were shared by those who implemented or attended the activities, recorded through several interviews conducted in late 2020. As authors, we documented and analyzed them in the hope that they will inspire other media outlets or organizations to experiment with similar methodologies and innovate in the construction of participatory dialogue.

Each chapter summarizes these experiences in three sections:

– First, an overview of the activity and its background.

– Second, the methodological information and practical recommendations to replicate the experiences.

– Finally, we present the lessons learned from the activity.

In developing this work, we have identified five shared aspects that make these projects innovative and enriching experiences. All of them lead to five lessons learned or takeaways: (1) **Disrupt preconceptions**; (2) **foster and enable participation**; (3) **teamwork is essential**; (4) **encourage experimental processes**; and (5) **stimulate creativity**.

We believe that, before presenting the *#ConectaCulturas Hackathon*, the *Colaboratorio*, the *Space Booth* and the *Reporterathon* in more detail, readers could benefit from a broader explanation of the lessons learned from the four experiences. Therefore, we have summarized them in the next chapter and grouped them into five categories, although we will analyze them in more detail and provide examples at the end of each chapter.

We have chosen to include this summary before presenting the experiences individually and not as a conclusion, because we believe it provides the necessary information and background to better interpret them.

2. Learning from experience

VirDual Course, Planning workshop

2.1 Disrupt preconceptions

One of the biggest challenges when it comes to innovation is to break free from the inertia of doing things the way we have always done them.

First and foremost, innovation is an attitude.

Innovation demands boldness. When innovation processes are first proposed, some voices always question them: "Why innovate when things aren't really bad?" "Why change if nobody is forcing us?" "Why do things differently if the current way works?"

Similar reservations arise when discussing the methodology once the activity has been defined: "Developing an app is too complicated!" "People can't travel on an imaginary train!" "You can't interview someone while riding a bicycle!" "How are you going to load a radio booth onto a truck and tour schools with it?"

– Preconceptions are disrupted by choosing words carefully. Instead of convening a workshop where people are used to sit and listen, you invite them to a hackathon, this way participants are likely to come in with a different, more active, and participatory mindset. The same happens if you invite experts to the activities. Who will dare to share their ideas, after the experts have given a master class?
– Preconceptions are disrupted with methodologies: using flipcharts or cards where people can express their thoughts by drawing and writing instead of using static and closed PowerPoint presentations.

– Preconceptions are disrupted by looking for creative and original names: naming a format *EntreCleta* (a word play using the Spanish words for interview, '*entrevista*', and bicycle, '*bicicleta*'), or naming the station's mobile unit as *Choriván* or Space Booth. This is a way of catching the attention of listeners or the participants of an activity from the get-go.
– Preconceptions are disrupted when we involve more people in the creative process and not only the staff of the radio station. Doing so multiplies and enriches ideas.
– Preconceptions are disrupted even by changing the layout of a room. The posters used to decorate the walls and the arrangement of the chairs in the room can influence the participants' creative mood.

Creative presentations of the diagnosis results.

2.2 Promote and enable participation

In short, the main objective of the experiences presented here is to increase participation. Radio stations and organizations want their audiences and communities to be more involved in the communication project in different ways.

But this is not achieved solely by increasing the number of *likes* on social media or the phone calls a station receives, getting more radio listeners or a greater number of attendees at a workshop. In fact, people can *attend* a training, but not participate in it.

❝ **There will be participation if we guarantee the necessary conditions for people to be actively involved and become co-creators.**

Enabling participation means ensuring the right conditions for people to feel invited to be active in a workshop or radio station. The experiences studied suggest the following:

### Enable participation throughout the process

Whenever possible, the community or audience should be involved from the moment the process is conceived and designed. For instance, if we want to increase the number of listeners, why not invite them to the workshops to redesign the programming or take a survey to find out what they would like to hear? If we are going to produce new formats on our radio station, why not do it together with the people who we will interview and receive their input for our new productions? If we aim to offer a participatory workshop, why not design the methodology with the participants and place them at the center of the workshop?

Although these ideas will surely seem obvious to community media and organizations, they are not always applied and create a gap between the media and their audience or community. Organizations involved in this study have detected this gap through their diagnoses.

Ground rules

Trainings and other group activities require a prior agreement on certain rules that allow attendees to speak and express their opinions freely. Especially in hackathons or *ideathons*, where diverse groups meet for the first time and have limited time to create a proposal, achieving a climate of trust is crucial.

We recommend that these ground rules are agreed upon with the group and not imposed. They can be written collaboratively on a flipchart that will be visible throughout the activity.
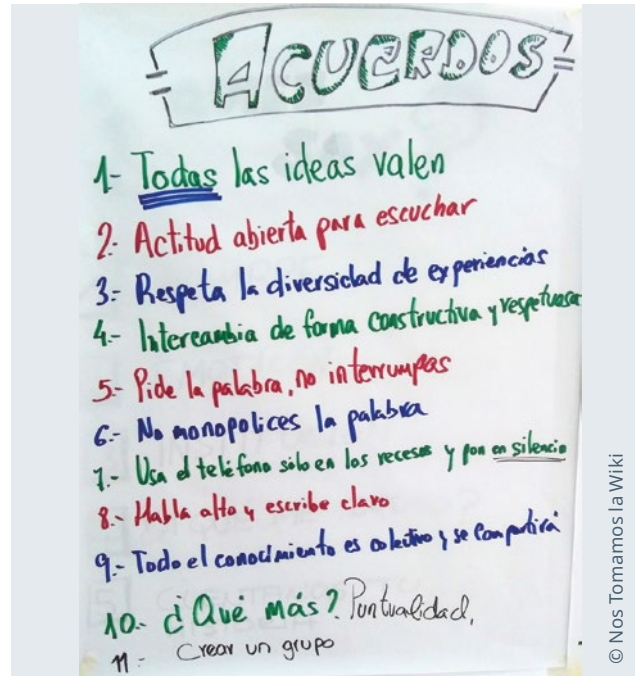
Ground rules for one of the workshops.

After writing them, they can be signed by the attendees in a symbolic act.

Think carefully about the methodology to be employed

Writing on flash cards can work in a certain workshop, but if we repeat that same methodology with participants who speak different languages, it might not be as successful. Instead, drawing can be more productive in these contexts. In the same way instead of asking participants to speak their ideas out loud, we could suggest that they materialize them with Lego or *Rastis* pieces[1]. This way we can overcome barriers such as language, shyness or fear of making mistakes.

❝ **Methodology is not only a way of doing, but also the way in which we guide the learning process.**

---

[1] *Rastis* are building block sets popular in Bolivia, similar to those marketed by Lego. They are named after the Argentinian company Rasti, which manufactures educational games and exports them to various Latin American countries. These pieces have been used in the CORAPE and CEPRA workshops, and we will talk about their possibilities in the relevant chapters. They are an effective and practical method to materialize ideas and enable more creative and manual forms of expression that help overcome shyness or difficulties working in multilingual contexts.

© #ConectaCulturas-Hackathon

The decision of using one methodology over another is not random or a matter of preference, but of suitability. We always choose the most appropriate methodology to achieve our learning objectives. In participant-focused processes, such as those promoted by DW Akademie and its partners, we will opt for methodologies that foster and encourage participation.

If they don't come to us, we go to them

These experiences share another characteristic. They do not wait for people to come to them, but instead go to where the people are. The radio and participatory workshops yield best results if they are done in the streets, in the community or at school.

The #ConectaCulturas *hackathon* visited over fifteen cities. The *Reporterathon* toured the streets of La Paz neighborhood in Barranquilla to the rhythm of the Carnival. The *Colaboratorio* made its participatory diagnoses in different regions and has a mobile unit, the *Choriván*, and tours Bolivia with its workshops. Sónica's *Space Booth* has visited about 200 schools since its inception.

This mobility, which is achieved by not anchoring experiences to a specific space or place, brings greater diversity to participation and opens up the possibility of expression to people from a wide variety of realities and backgrounds who would otherwise not be able to attend these sessions.

2.3 Teamwork

Co-creation and teamwork are essential to ensure the success of the experiences we describe here. As mentioned above, creating the conditions for people to participate actively is therefore essential.

❝ Innovation is a collective rather than an individual experience.

Collaborative projects are more diverse, plural, include a wide range of realities, and draw on different types of intelligence. Thus, a prototype (be it a radio program, an app or a methodology) is more likely to be successful if it is produced considering this variety of perspectives, contexts and approaches. More people will feel reflected in n identity with the final product.

And the great thing about sharing ideas is that no matter how much you share them, they never run out!

2.4 Foster experimental processes

Most of the experiences have channeled their creative innovation processes through laboratories. These are understood as spaces instead of places. That is why these laboratories can move from place to place, experimenting with ideas collectively.

Since these are experiments, some may work and others not. By presenting them as experimental processes, we are allowed to make mistakes and fail.

❝ Innovation requires experimentation. And experimentation is a constant and cyclical process. Learning happens in the process itself, not in the result.

For example, the success of the *Reporterathon* does not lie in the quality of the productions, but in getting the residents of the neighborhood involved with the radio. The *#ConectaCulturas Hackathon* aimed to create an app, but it was intended to encourage and help the indigenous groups of Ecuador to tell their story in digital media by themselves. In that process, they edited Wikipedia, created a documentation center, and a mobile app. The *Colaboratorio* resorts to the creation of a repository of new radio formats as an excuse to promote an innovation environment with community radio stations in Bolivia, in search of greater community participation. And, although Sónica's *Space Booths* seek to increase the number of radio listeners, they want to improve the digital and media literacy of young people so that they use the Internet in a more conscious and responsible way.

In other words, the product packaged as a *Hackathon*, a *Reporterathon*, a *Colaboratorio* or a *Space Booth* is, in fact, a methodology or procedure to achieve the desired objectives. And, as a methodology, it can—or rather must—be adapted to be used in other contexts. These methodologies may eventually deliver specific results in the form of a podcast or radio format, but their quality cannot be an indicator of their success. The real product to be replicated is the methodology that makes people participate and interact.

For this reason, all the experiences emphasize that they are under *constant development*: their design, execution, and evaluation processes are cyclical by nature. They are *living* processes, always complete, but never finished. The methodologies are constantly adjusted and redesigned during the process. This book does not intend to present them as a series of successful and concluded experiences, but rather as processes that are currently being developed in a given place and from which we extract ideas and lessons learned to inspire further innovation for more dialogue proposals.

Indigenous journalists editing Wikipedia.

"Story cubes" used by the CORAPE team to start the workshop creativley by telling a story.

2.5 Stimulating creativity

Unfortunately, there are no magic pills to stimulate creativity. But it can be trained, as the CORAPE, CEPRA, Vokaribe and Sónica teams will show us in this guide.

❝ Creativity is a key ingredient for any innovation process.

The activities created by these organizations include exercises to "warm up" the neurons and come up with more original ideas. For example, CEPRA begins its Innovation Labs with a round in which each participant rolls dice ("story cubes") and tells a story using the five objects rolled. The next participant rolls the dice again and continues the story. In this case, a participant began her story as follows: "I put on my glasses to draw a dog's paw prints on the patio floor with my pencil, to scare away the stray cats that were using it as their playground. Just as I finished painting the last one, the alarm on my clock reminded me that it was time to eat. The menu for today was hamburger... If only the cats hadn't eaten it." How would you continue this story if you rolled a ladder, an ice cream cone, a sun, a flower, and a birthday cake?

This is a simple exercise to stimulate the imagination and break the ice. As a warm-up for the *Reporterathon*, *Vokaribe* holds a similar training with a list of random words that the participants write on a flipchart to create a story.

Playful ingredients encourage creativity and are very useful to encourage people to participate. In radio programming, any type of contest can be the start of a productive conversation. Besides being a way to distract the mind and lighten up the atmosphere, energizers are the perfect excuse to establish a dialogue with strangers. The gamification of the virtual courses engage the participants and energize the learning process. In each experience we will show examples of how to creatively include games in the innovation processes for dialogue and participation.

2. #ConectaCulturas Hackathon
Ecuador

Coordinadora de Medios Comunitarios Populares y Educativos de Ecuador (CORAPE) is a network of over 100 affiliated and partner media outlets from all over the country. Since its foundation in 1990, it has worked as an intercultural media network dedicated to "building a new society" through communication.

The Executive Secretariat of CORAPE is based in Quito and is responsible for coordinating the activities defined by the Assembly, including the development of training and institutional strengthening projects, the production of information programs that show the reality of the country from different contexts, and the production of radio drama shows and public service announcements on environmental protection, violence prevention or human rights, among other topics.

The affiliated media outlets of the CORAPE network include several media managed by one of the 18 Peoples and 14 Nations officially recognized in Ecuador. To reflect such a diverse reality, CORAPE promotes the Kichwa Network and the Amazon Network, which contribute to the visibility of the different worldviews, cultures and knowledge systems that coexist in this Andean country.

It also implements projects in partnership with other organizations to promote a culture of peace and inclusion along the border with Colombia, encouraging public dialogue and critical debate with programs such as *Ágora democrática*, as well as organizing training sessions on the use of digital tools for young people.

Together with DW Akademie, it developed the project *Nos Tomamos la Wiki: fortalecimiento de la cosmovisión de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades,* which concluded with the creation of a documentation center. As part of the activities of this process, CORAPE, together with Medialab Ciespal and the UNESCO Office in Quito, organized the #ConectaCulturas Hackathon, a collective creation space to develop an app that would facilitate uploading of content to the Documentation Center. The hackathon consisted of three intense days in July 2019 to conclude a process that lasted almost a year.

David Muenala, coordinator of the CORAPE Wikis project; Rubén Zavala, director of Medialab Ciespal, co-organizing center of the event; Jean Carlo Obando, member of the team that won the Hackathon; and Magnus Kossmann, DW Akademie Program Director in Ecuador, contributed to this text. The documents and contributions of Jorge Guachamín, Executive Secretary of CORAPE, were also immensely valuable.

© Hackatón #ConectaCulturas

Yicela Guanga
Nationality Awá. Participant in the project "Nos tomamos la Wiki"

" People from all over the world can now learn about us Indigenous Peoples. But the information on the Internet is not told from our perspective, not even the one that speaks about us. Who are we really? What do we do? We do not want others to tell our story for us; we want the Indigenous Peoples to tell their own story, also on the Internet. This way, we will keep our customs alive in the digital world.

Visit the Indigenous Peoples Documentation Center.
corape.org.ec/centrodedocumentacion/
facebook.com/watch/?v=917310405282025

3.1 The #ConectaCulturas Hackathon experience

Etymologically, hackathon is the combination of two words: hacker and marathon. The marathon is 42 kilometer (plus 195 meters, to be exact) endurance race, although the term is also used to refer to other non-sporting activities "known for their great length or concentrated effort," as defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary.

On the other hand, hacker is a word traditionally linked to computer science. In fact, it has some negative connotations. The most widespread image of the hacker, fed by film and television, is that of a computer geek, usually a bearded man, who hides under a hoodie and works in a dark room behind three black computer screens writing computer code to hack or illegally access the web of a bank or government institution. The correct name for that person is cyber-criminal, cyber-pirate or cracker. In fact, according to Wikipedia, A hacker is a "per-

son skilled in information technology who uses their technical knowledge to achieve a goal or overcome an obstacle, within a computerized system by non-standard means."[2]

Therefore, in its common usage, hacker is not necessarily a negative term related to computers or software programming. Simply put, hackers are people who like to solve problems in a creative way and experiment with alternatives. Moreover, those who feel they are hackers prefer to find these solutions by working in a team.

Hackathons, therefore, are long and intense work sessions that span two or three days (one could say they are marathon meetings) in which a group of people from diverse backgrounds work collaboratively to agree on a prototype that presents a concrete solution to a specific need.

In the media world, hackathons became well known within data journalism. These were weekend meetings in which journalists, together with specialists in data mining or extraction and graphic visualization, processed data and made it more digestible for the public by creating graphs or maps. At the end of the hackathon, the journalists continued to work remotely on their investigation to give context to the graphics or maps produced. The process concluded with the publication and dissemination of a journalistic report.

Today, hackathons have become popular as a practical methodology for other purposes such as software development, project design or to collaboratively reformulate the programming of a radio station with innovative formats.

Part of a process

Note that the prototypes developed during hackathons are tentative solutions. The chosen prototype will only represent one of the multiple solutions to solve a specific problem. The prototype is something "open, provisional and unfinished."[3] Accordingly, most of these events do not lead to a final product, but to ideas or prototypes that will be further developed to obtain a final result, either in the form of a software application, a web publication or a project.

---

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacker

[3] In the Cómo hacer un prototipo guide (in Spanish) you can learn how to implement inclusive projects to collaboratively prototype solutions in different areas. http://laaventuradeaprender.intef.es/guias/como-hacer-un-prototipo/

For this reason, hackathons are not considered an activity in and of themselves, but as part of a process. In the case of the #ConectaCulturas Hackathon, besides the three intense days of the main event, there was an extensive previous stage to research needs and plan objectives, and a subsequent stage that involved testing the prototype and developing the app. Overlooking this aspect may cause frustrations and both the organizers and participants may perceive the activity as a failure if a tangible or functional result is not achieved.

Family photo © #ConectaCulturas Hackathon

The wisdom of sharing

In recent years, hackathons have been trending as spaces for collective innovation and experimentation. But in most indigenous peoples of Latin America, joint or collaborative work is an ancestral practice within their social organization.

The *minka* or *minga*, for the Andean peoples, or the *techio* in Mexico, are spaces in which the community works together for a common goal. They can be used to repair the road to the community or build the community house. Someone can also call on neighbors to help them harvest their potato crop, knowing that later on they will answer the call when others need to harvest their corn.

The organizing team of #ConectaCulturas insists that the name of the activity is irrelevant, but "that the way of conceiving the processes is based on collaboration." For Rubén Zavala, it is a question of paradigms: Either we choose to work as a team, as many indigenous communities continue to do today, or we choose the individualistic approach, more widespread in urban societies, which proposes "discovering something and restricting access to it, allowing access only upon payment. Under this paradigm, the rest of society becomes a consumer of knowledge and solutions."

CORAPE and its partners prefer collaborative and diverse activities, such as *minkas* or *techios*, in which the participation of people from different backgrounds enhances the activities with multiple perspectives and knowledge that are integrated into the proposed solutions.

Although they admit that these multi-stakeholder processes always take longer, because they require a fluid dialogue and constant review, the effort is undoubtedly rewarded. In the end the lessons learnt and results are much more diverse and heterogeneous.

Rubén Zavala
Director of
Medialab Ciespal

" **A hackathon does not replace longer project design or software development processes. Essentially, it serves to pave the way to a solution approved through a participatory process. Choosing the best prototype among ten proposals is a good sign that we are opting for a suitable solution.**

medialab.ciespal.org/

The background of #ConectaCulturas

The idea that both the prototypes and the hackathon are part of a larger collective process is reinforced by the history of the #ConectaCulturas Hackathon. We could say that everything is the result of a constant action-reflection-action process that links ideas and solutions to solve the problems encountered when reviewing previous processes. A project is implemented, a new need is identified, and a new initiative to address these needs is created.

In September 2018, Coordinadora de Medios Comunitarios Populares y Educativos de Ecuador and DW Akademie launched the project *Nos Tomamos la Wiki: Fortalecimiento de la cosmovisión de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades del Ecuador* to highlight their culture, identity, history, gastronomy and music on digital platforms.

Through different workshops held across the country, over 50 journalists from CORAPE and other partner organizations participated and learned how to publish information on Wikipedia to tell their stories. This collaborative digital encyclopedia is one of the five most visited websites on the Internet, but most of the articles have incorrect or biased information about the Indigenous Nationalities or Peoples: "They liken indigenous justice to lynchings or, in a demeaning way, they say that we eat 'rats' when referring to guinea pigs, which are part of our gastronomy," said one of the Kichwa participants.

Due to insufficient connectivity or training, a large part of Latin America's indigenous communities experience profound digital exclusion. *Nos Tomamos la Wiki* enhanced the online presence of these communities and allowed them to partially rewrite their history. Over the seven months of the project, 44 new articles were created — 20 biographies of Ecuadorian women and 20 entries on typical dishes of the native peoples —, more than 85 articles with inaccuracies were corrected, and 30 new photographs were uploaded. This work was carried out by 50 participants, including representatives of the Kichwa and Amazonian Kichwa, Épera, Chachi, Awá and Shuar Nationalities, and the Otavalo, Kitukara, Waranka, Puruhá, Afro-Ecuadorian, Sapara and Mestizo Peoples.[4]

Edgar Rosero
Wikimedistas
Ecuador

" **The main challenge in the work we are doing is that the sources are so diverse.**

facebook.com/195750250443390/ videos/521496421686023

© Nos Tomamos la Wiki

While creating or editing Wikipedia articles, the participants learned that any statement made in this encyclopedia must be supported by bibliographic references, academic articles or journalistic publications; otherwise, the articles could be deleted for lack of rigor. Getting these references for many of the articles was extremely complicated since, as Eslendy Grefa, of the Amazonian Kichwa nationality and a member of the media outlet Lanceros Digitales explains, "indigenous peoples are usually oral cultures, we don't write. In fact, although I go to university, I am still hesitant to write, I feel that I'm not good at it".

To solve this shortage of references, CORAPE, together with the organizations and media participating in Nos *Tomamos la*

---

[4] Learn more about this project at https://www.corape.org.ec/ organizacion/proyecto/item/nos-tomamos-la-wiki-para-el-fortalecimiento-de-la-cosmovision-de-los-pueblos-y-nacionalidades-del-

Wiki, decided to create the Indigenous Peoples Documentation Center in collaboration with DW Akademie. This platform is a digital repository of audio files, photos and videos to disseminate their values, customs and worldviews. Thus, while contributing to enhance the online presence of the Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador, they created primary bibliographic references to support the publications on Wikipedia. Moreover, all these publications served as a source of information for the media or academic research personnel interested in obtaining information shared by their protagonists.[5]

Narcizo Conejo
APAK audiovisual producer

❝ **We in the indigenous movement want to push this research process not only for Wikipedia but also for other windows of production, promotion, and dissemination, so that we can highlight our cultural diversity and knowledge, and even epistemologies that contribute to the great changes that humanity faces. We see research as a vital contribution to future generations, so that our identity and culture is not lost, but that we shall always remain strong.**

facebook.com/DWAkademie.AL/ videos/1084698878385105

However, once the Documentation Center was online, CORAPE discovered certain limitations for those who wanted to contribute content. The Internet connection in most communities in Ecuador is quite precarious. Furthermore, the network is accessed through mobile phones instead of computers, using outdated devices and prepaid mobile data plans. Thus, if a person wants to send an audio interview lasting a few minutes, the process could take hours and use all the data available on their mobile phones.

These factors greatly conditioned the communities' capacity to regularly contribute content to the Documentation Center. Actually, these contributions were very scarce.

These limitations called for a tool that consumes little data, works on older devices and allows content to be recorded without the need for an Internet connection (offline mode). This way, the communities would take photos or record interviews and, later, when they had a stable connection, they could upload the contents.[6] The solution emerged at one of the project evaluation meetings between CORAPE and DW Akademie:

– "We should develop an app." This idea was met with immediate consensus.
– "But how? Here we know how to make radio, not code software," said someone at the back of the room, quite rightly.
– "Let's do a hackathon!" suggested Magnus Kossman, Program Director of DW Akademie in Ecuador, who was familiar with the methodology from another partner organization that had used it in Guatemala.
– "Great idea! We just have to find someone willing to *acolitar* this and get to work," said Jorge Guachamín, executive secretary of CORAPE, concluding the meeting.

Acolitar is a very Ecuadorian verb. It means to ask for help, to do things together, something typical of a collaborative activity such as hackathons. And although CORAPE always works with participatory methodologies in its workshops, it had never experimented with a hackathon. Even DW Akademie did not consider itself a specialist in the methodology, although it had implemented similar activities in other regions. So, they picked up the phone and contacted Rubén Zavala, Iván Terceros and the rest of the Medialab Ciespal team, who had been organizing various hackathons to promote safe Internet browsing, gender equality and tourism through video games. The UNESCO Office for Andean Countries, based in Quito, also joined the project, since the app would have an added value: strengthening the indigenous languages. Precisely this year (2019), the year in which the activity was carried out, was declared as the International Year of Indigenous Languages by the United Nations.[7]

---

[5] The documentation center is available at:
http://www.corape.org.ec/centrodedocumentacion

[6] The local government or shops offer free Wi-Fi in some Ecuadorian cities. This service is used by those who live in remote areas when they come to the city to run errands or shop. Community radios are also "Wi-Fi hotspots" that many people use to connect to the Internet.

[7] As part of the International Year of Indigenous Languages, UNESCO promoted various activities. One of them was the #ConectaCulturas hackathon to: "Mainstream cultural diversity, technology and digital empowerment." https://es.unesco.org/news/app-conecta-a-los-pueblos-indigenas-de-ecuador
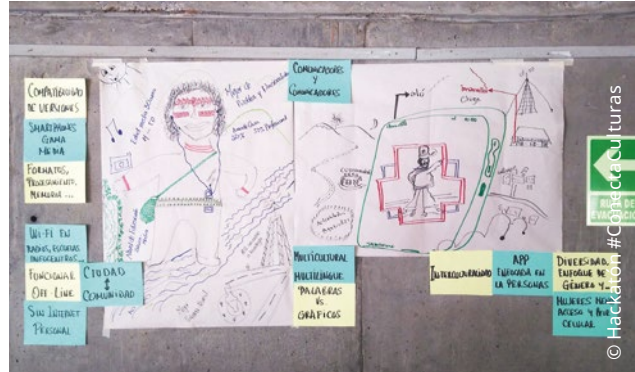
Ideathon: Before the hackathon

The process prior to the hackathon had not yet been completed. Admittedly, both CORAPE and DW Akademie had already detected some of the difficulties that prevented communities from sharing information in the Documentation Center, but they needed better data before offering a more adequate solution. This would be achieved by creating a collaborative space that we call an *ideathon*.

A week before the #ConectaCulturas hackathon, a participatory diagnosis session was held with the future users of the app to get to know their reality, the context in which the app would be used, and to receive specific suggestions on the design which would later be shared with the hackathon participants.

As we will see in the other experiences reported in this book, most of these creative activities attempt to replace words or concepts with drawings or constructions made with Lego blocks (also known as Rastis). In this case, we proposed to start the ideathon by drawing up two profiles of the app's future users.

Instead of describing the characteristics of these people through words, they were clearly visualized in two drawings (*identikits*) that showed two potential users with limited access to the Internet. Users who potentially have to travel for hours to the nearest urban center and use the local school or community center's Wi-Fi, and who speak different languages or belong to communities at risk of losing much of their ancestral knowledge. The drawings made during the ideathon were presented to the attendees of the #ConectaCulturas hackathon on the first day and were posted on a wall to remind participants of the potential users and the app's purpose throughout the activity.

All the ideas collected during the previous activity were processed by the organizing team and served to elaborate the technical specifications that guided the app's development during the #ConectaCulturas Hackathon. These demands were expressed from the perspective of the app users. For example, the app should work without an Internet connection. Later, however, these inputs had to be written up and translated into concrete and measurable requirements that would technically guide the design and programming team to come up with a prototype that meets the needs expressed by the users. Furthermore, the organizations promoting the hackathon set additional conditions such as the use of free software and licenses during the event, or that the prototype should include an option to verify the content uploaded.

Identikits created during the ideathon

The #ConectaCulturas hackathon

Two months before the activity began there was a call for applications, open to any person interested in participating. Participants did not have to be programmers or computer scientists. All profiles were welcome. People could register individually or with a group of five people. The registration fee was USD 5.00 and included meals and refreshments for both days. The call also specified that the team that submitted the best proposal for the app's development would receive a check for USD 3,000. More than a prize, it was the amount received for the complete development of the mobile application according to the contract, which the winning team had to complete in the following six months.

The #ConectaCulturas hackathon[8] was held on July 26-28, 2019 to begin the development of a mobile application to manage the content created in the various regions of the country, connect it to the Documentation Center, and encourage the periodical participation of new inter-cultural productions created with the distinct worldviews of the Indigenous Peoples.

The first session began on Friday evening and was devoted to forming the teams and explaining the objectives of the call. Nearly 50 people, including young computer science students, journalists and design specialists, met in Ciespal's meeting rooms in Quito. Many arrived with their laptops in one hand and their sleeping bags in the other. Participants were allowed to sleep at the venue. Many people are more productive at night and, during these intensive hackathons, it is normal for the teams to take advantage of every minute to work, even in the early morning hours.

---

8 More information about the Hackathon is available on the CORAPE https://www.corape.org.ec/centrodedocumentacion/contenido/item/hackaton and Medialab Ciespal https://ciespal.org/hackaton-conecta-culturas/ websites and, in these two videos (in Spanish): https://m.facebook.com/watch/?v=423682288261763 https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=532920143911885

The databases and a technical instruction on the Documentation Center were shared with the participants, as the app would have to connect to this website to display the content. From that moment on, the teams worked independently.

Throughout the hackathon there were people from the organization who helped by answering questions about the app requirements. Technical mentors were available for people to share their ideas or ask for feedback on their progress.

At certain times, short talks were held in an adjoining room—so as not to interrupt the work of the teams—to provide specific information that the participants might eventually need. The meetings of the talks included the technical operation of the Documentation Center or suggestions to present the prototype before a jury, which in the hackathons slang is known as an 'elevator pitch': presenting the key aspects of an idea convince others in a short period of time, such as the duration of an elevator ride.

On Sunday, the final day, the tension was palpable in the room as the teams scrambled to finish their proposal before the deadline. At the end of the day, the eight participating teams presented their prototypes to the jury, formed by the organiz-

The ideathon led to the development of very specific ideas to inspire the participants of the #ConectaCulturas Hackathon.

Ideathon? Hackathon?

An ideathon is a dynamic, collaborative, playful and creative meeting that encourages the exploration of original ideas to solve a problem. Usually, an ideathon is developed in the realm of ideas: what would we like to do and how can we do it? The next logical step in this process is to collectively experiment and creatively put those ideas into practice. The hackathon format is used for these more practical spaces where solutions can be developed.

Both methodologies share some characteristics: teamwork, learning through play, challenges, and the search for creative innovation. However, one is aimed at thinking about ideas and solutions, and the other at executing them.

As we will see throughout this book, most of the collaborative experiences we present combine both methodologies in one way or another.

Prototype presentations.

ing team and specialists in web and app development.

Several proposals were praised by the jury; some for their usability, and others for the code's quality. The proposal that best met all the criteria was the one presented by the team *Uma maki* (head-hand in Kichwa) [9].

---

[9] The Uma maki group was comprised of students of the Software Club of Escuela Politécnica del Ejército (ESPE) Jean Carlo Obando, Alexander Mejía, Bryan Oscullo and Wladymir Brborich, as well as Yeimmy Clemencia, of Amimpo Comunicaciones and producer of the show Megáfono Joven.

Although several people had already formed their teams previously, the first activity on Friday was to double check that no person was left without a team. Teams should always be as diverse and multidisciplinary as possible, ensuring that each team has someone with design, communications or programming skills. There are some strategies to achieve balanced teams, which we will address later on.

After the eight teams were formed, the project's challenges and target audience were presented. David Muenala, a member of the CORAPE team and coordinator of the project N*os Tomamos la Wiki*, showed the drawings made during the ideathon that summarized the profile and context of the app users.

The teams working hard on developing the app.

After three intense days during which the 50 participants learned, collaborated and struggled to create an intuitive and usable app that met the requirements, the winning group moved on to the next stage and began a long development process. Their members now had six months to turn the prototype into a fully functional software. But they were not alone; they were assigned a technical team to help them and could always count on the staff of CORAPE, Medialab and DW Akademie, with whom they tested their progress and organized review sessions with the application users. The winning team also received a check to the value of USD 3,000 for their work.

The application is available on the Play Store and can also be downloaded from the CORAPE website, under the name "Conecta Culturas". [10]

---

[10] Link https://www.corape.org.ec/centrodedocumenta-cion/contenido/item/apk https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.cmue.umamaki
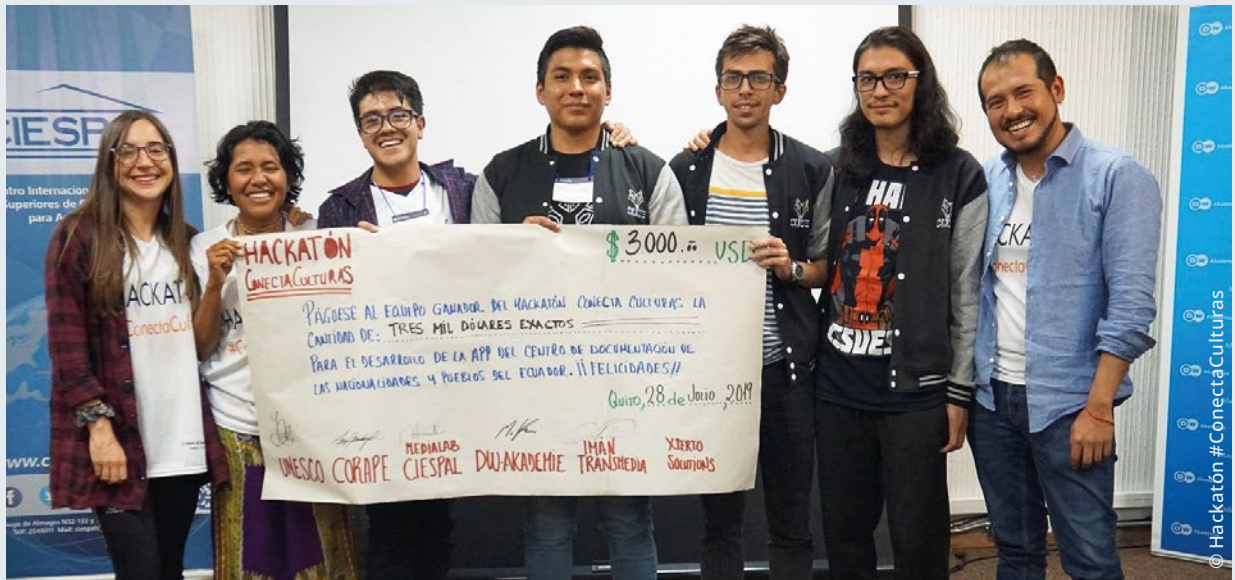
Uma maki, the winning team, receiving their prize.

Why not commission a company to develop the app?

With the USD 3,000 awarded to the winning team plus the money invested in organizing the hackathon, it is likely that a software development company could have been hired to develop the app. Undoubtedly, the process would have been shorter and, possibly, simpler. There will be times when this is the most appropriate choice.

But DW Akademie and CORAPE, together with Medialab Ciespal and UNESCO, knew that the right decision in this case was to develop the app through this collaborative process rather than contracting a company. The reasons can be summarized in these four ideas: diversity of approaches, collectivization of knowledge, connection of knowledge, and human-centered development. "None of these things are usually in the priorities of most commercial companies," said Rubén Zavala, director of Medialab Ciespal.

Diverse approaches: Any format that encourages participation will have more ideas and proposals. This does not mean that all contributions are valid, but there will definitely be more options to choose from, and those options will be more diverse.

Share knowledge: These processes have an implicit advantage because all the knowledge created benefits the participants. The more people participate, the more ideas and knowledge is shared. The difference between immaterial goods — such as ideas — and material objects — such as apples — is that if the former are shared, they are not lost, but replicated. If I give you an apple, I no longer have it; but if I share my ideas with you and you share yours with me, both of us will have two ideas.

Connect knowledge: Knowledge that would not otherwise be connected converges in ideathons and hackathons. In #ConectaCulturas, for example, we found teams specialized in programming and open software, journalists and community media practitioners, students, and people who work in the territories and with the users of the app. This exchange of knowledge not only enhances the development of the prototype, but also sensitizes those involved and contributes to the development of more accessible and inclusive proposals.

Human-centered Design: This is a development methodology — mainly technological, although it is also applied in other areas — which puts people at the center. In this way, it guarantees usable and useful prototypes that respond to the users' requirements and needs. Human-centered Design processes require users to actively participate throughout the development of the project or prototype.

Use the app!

After developing and publishing the app, the next step was to promote it and invite the communities to learn how to use it and develop more content for the Documentation Center. CORAPE is not interested in achieving thousands of uploads, but in empowering the Indigenous Peoples to adopt the tool and, through the Documentation Center, provide the media, academia or civil society with accurate information that reflects their identity, culture and knowledge.

#ConectaCulturas App adoption workshop at Casa de la Cultura, Quito, Ecuador.

Between late 2019 and early 2020, CORAPE and its radio stations held several workshops on using the app and the Documentation Center. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the face-to-face outreach campaign was suspended, just like so many other activities. David Muenala admits that the "adoption has been challenging," and they have planned more events to present the Documentation Center as a space to disseminate the knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador. They also focused on schools and educational institutions, believing that this is a good way for ancestral knowledge to endure, because "in order to create stories, young people should ask their elders about their traditions and knowledge".

Innovation

This is a term that is constantly heard in ideathons, hackathons and similar events. As a matter of fact, these workshops are classified as 'experimental and innovation laboratories'.

Innovation implies seeking original solutions that have not been applied before. We can innovate on processes that already exist and we want to creatively update or also suggest proposals that no one has imagined before.

There are different paradigms from which to understand or propose innovation processes. For Rubén Zavala, one paradigm would be the one imposed by the *logic of markets*, in which the person who finds the most efficient solution at the lowest price is described as innovative. On the other hand, the "antagonistic approach", for which Medialab advocates, only considers something as innovative if there is transformation, that is, if it serves to change or modify processes. Therefore, innovating is essential to understand the environment that surrounds us: "If I don't understand the context, I can't come up with a different proposal. Most of the time, innovation is not about inventing something from scratch, but taking something that already exists and turning it on its head".

Innovation is also linked to possibilities. The myth of the 'entrepreneur' is widespread: "Where there's a will, there's a way." However, social and material conditions greatly determine creative and innovation possibilities. For this reason, DW Akademie and its partner institutions present hackathons as spaces for the integration of people and groups that offer the necessary conditions to innovate. This would be much more complicated to do individually or in the private sphere.

3.2 Ideas for replicating a *Hackathon*

There are several guides with detailed recommendations for doing *hackathons*[11]. Therefore, we will not go into a detailed account of all the aspects to consider, but we will collect the most important ones that must be taken into account when organizing a hackathon according to the experience of DW Akademie, CORAPE and Medialab Ciespal.

Encourage teamwork

One of the success factors in collaborative activities such as hackathons is getting people to work as a team. This is why the moment the teams are formed is so important. There are two trends: The first is to work with teams that have been previously formed. The second is that the teams are formed at the beginning of the activity.

The #ConectaCulturas Hackathon used a combination of both. Time was of the essence, and the goal was to prototype an app. Furthermore, most of the participants who signed up were programmers from universities and programming clubs. With these two conditions in mind, having teams formed by people who already knew each other allowed for faster integration and greater progress in prototyping.

However, people who signed up individually had to be included. The organizing team applied a widely used and effective strategy to create teams from scratch at the start of the hackathon. Each person not part of a team describes his or her profile based on a series of defined characteristics. This way, they can be included into teams that need someone with these characteristics.

For example, depending on the type of hackathon, different colored post-it notes with the desired skills or profiles are posted on the wall[12] : "Think," "Communicate," "Design," "Program." Each person writes their name on a post-it note of the color that matches their skill and pastes it underneath. Then, the teams are formed, ensuring that each team has at least one member with each profile. This grouping can be random, although it is advisable to set some other criteria so that the groups are diverse, mixing people from different cities and of different genders and cultures. Any methodology will be valid as long as we create diverse and multidisciplinary teams with different skills.

Creating balanced, diverse and multidisciplinary teams.

At the #ConectaCulturas Hackathon, the teams had an excess of programmers who were complemented by designers, journalists or people with no technical skills but who contributed ideas to improve the app's usability. Upon arriving at the hackathon, some teams even preferred to swap some of their members with other teams to be more heterogeneous!

Jean Carlo Obando
Hackathon participant
Uma maki team

❝ One of the first challenges was that our team had four people and we had to be at least five. We had to include a participant who had no equipment. A journalist who contributed a lot from her communications perspective joined our team. She helped us to understand that an application is not only functionality but that its use is greatly affected by how the user understands it. For the rest of us, who were all programmers and designers, it was a learning process. We realized that we had to really understand the problem before coming up with a solution. I think having a person like her on our team helped change the way we think.

---

[11] The article How to organize a successful hackathon contains some guidelines. https://p.dw.com/p/35D5H

[12] Small sticky note sheets that stick and peel easily. They exist in several colors and were popularized by the brand Post-it, hence their name.

> **Traditional training processes specialize you too much, they make you an expert in one subject and place little value on interdisciplinary work. Moreover, they invite you to see that the world has a single solution, when the world needs solutions that propose a lot of dialogue, many perspectives, and converging knowledge. Such formats, like the hackathon, pose the following question: 'what would economists, linguists, broadcasters or members of a determined community say about this problem? What solution should we consider from your experience?' With these questions alone we are already posing a level of participation that is normally not common. Your academic degree is not important, but what you know or your experience, how you present your argument and the foundations that lead you to make a given decision, is important.**

Rubén Zavala, Medialab Ciespal Director

Establish clear rules that enable participation

Every collaborative space must have ground rules to make participants feel comfortable participating. And this is not achieved with a simple invitation to speak. The conditions, for each member of the group to feel empowered and confident to speak their mind, need to be created.

Clarifying the collective nature of these type of meetings. In a hackathon, knowledge is built collectively. Gurus are not invited to explain to us how things should be done. On the contrary, we will come up with multiple ideas and opinions that will lead to a possible solution that was devised collaboratively. "This is about creating spaces where people feel free to collaborate. These are not closed activities in which you say: he/she is the specialist, and he/she is the only speaker. That is not how a hackathon works," said one of the #ConectaCulturas organizers.

Not everyone who attends a hackathon is aware of these particularities. There are those who come thinking that it is a talk or a conference and sit in a chair in a receptive/passive attitude and only listen. Therefore, starting the activity with this clarification and the invitation, to take an active and participatory attitude, will always be necessary. The organizers consider themselves as facilitators; they are there to encourage the exchange and to facilitate and organize spaces for creation.

Mutual respect is essential if we are to build the trust necessary to speak our minds. All ideas and opinions are valid and none are ruled out beforehand. They are all acknowledged and discussed. This is very important because an isolated idea may be valued negatively at first, perceived as a mistake or something to be dismissed, but when seen together with other ideas, it may take on a different meaning and become useful.

When team members are struggling to agree with one another, reaching consensus is much more convenient than voting. To reach these agreements, it is important to defend one's own ideas and not to categorically dismiss opposing ones. We can establish a rule that forces us to offer an alternative whenever we disagree with another person's point of view or proposal, and not just express our dissatisfaction or disagreement.

If there is still no consensus, change the subject or take a break before continuing. If the group is still struggling, then we call a mediator, who may be someone from another team. But we do not make him /her decide; we just talk about our concerns and ask him/her to bring a new perspective that will not be *contaminated* by the discussion. In most cases, those outside inputs are enough to untangle the discussion.

No one should be forced to speak. The necessary conditions to encourage participation must be created. There are people who prefer to listen during mind-mapping and process everything that has been exposed and at the end, suggest their solution. However, it is important that no one who wants to talk feels silenced by other participants.

For example, if a group in a technological event is formed and only has one woman while the rest are men, she may not feel confident enough to speak. Or, if a vast majority of a team is formed by programmers, the designer may not feel in a position to have a say in that group.

There are no failsafe rules for hackathons. Sometimes it is possible to send the "rules of conduct" in advance once the registration is completed. However, since this is a collaborative activity, it is best to start with an exercise that allows the group to establish the collective ground rules that will govern the activity. This may include how to create a safe and trusted space where we can discuss and speak our opinions freely, to reaching an agreement on the photos we take at the event - in case someone does not want to be photographed. The organizing team may also suggest rules that it deems appropriate and that have not been proposed by the group.

Clearly describe the challenge

The time to propose a solution during hackathons is very limited: merely two or three days. Therefore, the organizers must establish the objective of the proposed challenge and the conditions clearly and in advance.

Teams should know that a complete and functional solution is not the goal, especially if the objective is to develop software or hardware. In other words, the goals must be realistic and the prototype criteria must be very well specified, especially when the jury will decide the winning proposal based on these specifications.

For example, in the case of the #ConectaCulturas app, the technical requirements were defined to guarantee the usability and accessibility for all types of users: post geolocation, basic editing of photos and videos, a spellcheck feature, it should be compatible with old and low-end cell phones, and the development should be offline first, that is, prioritize the use without an Internet connection.

Give out a prize?

Hackathons foster cooperation, but some degree of competitive spirit is always encouraged. Giving an award to the winning team can be an incentive, but also a risk that distorts the process and tilts the balance to a competition by decreasing the collaboration between the teams.

In #ConectaCulturas, the USD 3,000 awarded to the winning team was not promoted as the prize of the hackathon, but as a compensation for the subsequent work to fully develop the application.

If there are concerns that a prize or recognition may affect the collaborative spirit or cause some conflict within the groups, it is better to avoid it.

Knowing the users is the best inspiration

It might sound obvious, but it is important to remember that the participants must be familiar with the users of the apps or products developed during the hackathon.

The #ConectaCulturas hackathon encountered several conditions that made the challenge more complex. In addition to the lack of modern mobile phones and good Internet connectivity, most of the app users did not speak Spanish as their mother tongue and did not have a common language. Therefore, the graphic component needed prevail over words.

Teams also had to consider that most applications and platforms are designed outside the uses and customs of the Indigenous Peoples, so they should take nothing for granted. A *like*

can mean the same thing in a Berlin neighborhood and in Guayaquil, Ecuador. But someone from San Lorenzo, a town on the Colombian-Ecuadorian border, does not necessarily know its meaning.

Besides the technical and graphical aspects, there are also social aspects to consider. Historically, much of the ancestral knowledge of native peoples, such as their handcrafts or their wisdom about medicinal plants, has been extracted and commercialized without their permission. Quite rightly, they are somewhat reluctant to share their knowledge if the reasons, the objective and the beneficiaries are not clear. Therefore, an app of this type cannot be developed without consulting the people who will share the content and without establishing terms and conditions for the future use of the material with them. If these aspects are not considered in the development of applications, projects or prototypes, it will be much more difficult for the target audience to empathize with the idea, want to use the application or participate in the project.

The easiest way to raise awareness is to involve the users in the hackathon, either by inviting them to the activity or by carrying out a prior diagnosis, such as the ideathon organized by #ConectaCulturas a week before, the results of which were presented at the beginning of the hackathon.

> **❝** We had to be aware of how we used language. What words can we use so that we do not hurt other people's feelings? As technicians, we often forget to consider these things. It was really enlightening. Not only for the hackathon, but to understand the users of the app and their needs. This makes proposing sustainable technological solutions easier.

Jean Carlo Obando, Hackathon participant
Uma maki team

Developing a proposal and inputs

During a hackathon, most of the time teams work autonomously to design their prototypes. However, people from the organizing team and mentors should always be available to answer the participant's questions and advise the teams that get stuck or need to resolve any specific conflict.

Furthermore, there should also be short, optional talks on specific topics throughout the day. These should not last more than 20 minutes, and usually a single member of a team attends the talks and then shares what they learned with the rest of their team. At the #ConectaCulturas Hackathon, these talks explained the operation of the Documentation Center database, offered suggestions to prepare a good elevator pitch and answered questions about the technical specifications to develop the app presented at the beginning of the hackathon.

Presenting and selecting proposals

Groups should be encouraged to take the time to prepare the elevator pitch of their prototype. Good proposals are often overlooked because they were not presented correctly and neither the jury nor the other groups saw the potential of the solution presented.

In the case of apps, if the group focusses too much on the technical aspects, they may not be able to show that their prototype meets the intended functionality. However, if they do not explain how the software is structured, its technical feasibility may not be clear enough. Covering all aspects requires good time management and an attempt to go over all the requirements mentioned during the hackathon's presentation.

Part of the success of the Uma maki team, winner of the #ConectaCulturas Hackathon, was having a community media practitioner who was perfectly familiar with the app's target group. They quickly covered the more technical details—explaining the database functionality in json format or how the API was integrated into the frontend—nd spent most of the time showing the navigation flow, the language selector or the audio recorder's simplicity.

If the prototype chosen in a hackathon is to be developed to achieve a fully functional app, as was the case in #ConectaCulturas, the organizations inviting to the activity must plan a system to support the winning team. In #ConectaCulturas, this group was comprised of members of CORAPE and Medialab. They also received a consultancy from the company that programmed the Documentation Center with which the app interacts. This way, the Uma maki team had their questions answered, coordinated tests of the application with real users, and received feedback throughout the design and development stages.

Open licenses

After a collaborative and open process like the one we have described, it would not make sense that the final product was a closed software. When a software is developed, we can choose to distribute it under an open or closed license. A license is the permission that will determine how a software can be used. For example, an open license authorizes you to use the software without restrictions and allows you to access its code. The code is all the computer instructions that make the application work. By being able to access this data, other people anywhere in the world could adapt the CORAPE application to their needs, for

© DW Akademie

Kanban board as used by several of the Hackathon teams

Kanban board

Each team can choose the technique they prefer to structure the work, but the organizers should suggest one, especially because it will be the first hackathon for some groups.

Kanban is one of the most common methods. It is a widely used method of organizing workflows among development teams. Although there are digital platforms (for example, Deck, Jira or Trello), in a hackathon it is easier to use cards, post-it notes or flipcharts.

Four cards of different colors are posted on the wall: One with the tasks To Do, one with the tasks In Progress, the third one with the tasks To Review, and the last one with the tasks Done.

In each column, cards with the different activities are subsequently posted, writing the name of those responsible for each task on a corner. In some cases, they can also include a deadline.

As a task progresses, it moves along the columns. This is a visual way of organizing the tasks within a team and seeing the evolution of the work.

example, to change the language if they wanted to use it in an African country.

On the other hand, closed or proprietary licenses do not authorize such changes, which can only be made by the company that owns the software. In some cases, users must also pay to use proprietary software, although the main restriction of these licenses is the inability to create new products based on it.

Hackathons and similar activities where open knowledge is produced usually work with free licenses. The #ConectaCulturas call for proposals not only specified that all resulting solutions would be distributed under an open license, but also that the tools used during the development of the application had to be open source.

3.3 Lessons learned from #ConectaCulturas

The hackathon as part of a cyclical process

Ideathons and hackathons are considered open methodologies and fall under the human-centered design approach, a concept originating in software design that seeks to put the user's experience at the center. It is combined with *design thinking*, a strategy to collaboratively search for creative solutions to a specific problem.

These concepts have now been extended to training methodologies with the aim of focusing these learning processes on the participant, which are very present in the trainings and courses taught by DW Akademie. We could define this way of training as "spaces where knowledge is built collectively and horizontally".[13]

Most of the participant-focused processes usually have four stages that should be understood in a circular, not linear, way:

A prior diagnosis or evaluation to get to know the participants or users and their needs. For this stage we can use **ideathons**, activities with which we obtain concrete data in a creative, dynamic and participatory way. Although we have addressed them briefly in this chapter, we will delve into them further when we present the experience of the CEPRA Colaboratorio.

---

[13] This is something that in Latin America is very reminiscent of Paulo Freire and his Popular Education. This model critiques the "banking model of education" that "deposits" knowledge in the participant, who memorizes and then repeats. His proposal was a "liberating education" that teaches how to think. "To teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge," said Freire in his book Pedagogy of Freedom (1996).

Prototype possible solutions. Hackathons come into play in this second stage. They are similar to ideathons in terms of the techniques applied, but have a more proactive, active and experimental component. This is time to enter the "laboratory" and develop the prototypes. The objective is to implement solutions to the problems of users detected in the first stage.

Test designs. This is the time for the users to examine the prototype. These are the **testing workshops** where communities learn to upload information to the Documentation Center through the app or the support that an organization provides to several radio stations to implement experimental formats obtained in an innovation.

Evaluate. The last step, with which the cycle ends — and begins — is the **evaluation**. This is the time to review the suggestions for improvement, analyze failures, and correct them before starting a new process.

❝ Innovation with constant feedback

Both the *Nos Tomamos la Wiki* project and the design of the #ConectaCulturas app were carried out under a circular logic.

Ideate. In *Nos Tomamos la Wiki*, the first activity was an ideathon to co-create the project. After a diagnosis of the communities that would participate in the initiative, they communicated their realities and needs, and proposed specific ideas on how to develop the project.

Do. In the next step, the organizing team met to design the project's activities using the proposed solutions, which consisted of hackathons to create and edit articles on Wikipedia, also called editathons.

Test. Finally, the participants approved the edits and the Wikipedia articles created with people from their communities.

Evaluate. The evaluations of the process allowed some of the participants, along with their media and organizations, to continue with specific activities to further improve the information available on Wikipedia. The evaluation also showed the need to create a documentation center, which served as the basis for the creation of a new project that led to #ConectaCulturas.

This opened a new cycle for the creation of the app that, as we saw, had a similar process:

– The process began with an *ideathon* in which a multidisciplinary team collaboratively profiled the potential users of the application and visualized a first approach to the app they dreamed of.

Creative and participatory techniques were applied during the ideathon to devise the project's activities, such as the use of building blocks and other craft materials.

Participants of Indigenous Peoples learn to create and edit articles on Wikipedia in one of the seven "editathons" held during the project Nos Tomamos la Wiki.

– During the hackathon, 50 participants developed 8 possible prototypes for the app and presented their proposals to a jury using an elevator pitch. The proposal of the winning team was developed over the next six months.

– The app prototype was tested and promoted by CORAPE in different workshops across Ecuador. In this stage, in addition to uploading several pieces of content to the Documentation Center, there were some suggestions to improve the application (evaluation), which opened the possibility of starting a new process.

Do not repeat the methodologies

During the *Nos Tomamos la Wiki* workshops, production meetings were held to record audio files on the traditions and customs of the Indigenous Peoples. These were later uploaded to the Documentation Center and used as a reference to make a Wikipedia entry. These activities were carried out in various parts of the country, covering the participants of the three regions: Coast, Andes and Amazon.

The three meetings were planned around a single methodology, which would be later implemented by the same training team. During the first meeting, everything worked wonderfully, but this was not the case in the second.

The methodology must be adapted depending on the audience and context. Activities that work perfectly with a given group might not be equally effective with another. Although the facilitator team is the same, the participants and the context vary. These factors affect the participants' needs and conditions; therefore, they must be considered when designing the methodology. An activity that uses cards or post-it notes in urban areas, where most people speak the same language and are used to writing, might not have the same effect in rural areas, where several native languages coexist and the tradition is predominantly oral.

© Ingrith Perugachi, Hackatón #ConectaCulturas

Hackathon integration activity.

The collective prevails over the individual

Working collaboratively as a team is a key requirement for a hackathon—or any activity of this type—to work and achieve the goals.

This implies making certain sacrifices or compromises. In other words, the participants must understand that their contributions are combined with the rest of the group's ideas and suggestions. It is a collective rather than individual sport; we must leave our egos at the door. To continue with the sports metaphor, it does not matter whether the goalkeeper is the one who stopped the most goals, the striker scored them, or if the coach was right with the substitutions. The victory will be shared.

Many groups will not see their proposed solution as the chose one, nonetheless ideally they should still be satisfied with the knowledge gained and feel that participating was worth it.

Hackathons should be presented as spaces for collective learning, self-improvement, experimentation, or to practice what people learn at university. "We did not win, but what I learned about programming this weekend is more than what I learned in four months of class. And it was more fun!" said one of the participants.

This does not mean, however, that the process will not be met with resistance at times. There will always be people who are not prepared to compromise or who do not dare to speak for fear that their ideas will be judged or disavowed. In order to avoid this, the experience of #ConectaCulturas gave two recommendations to start the activity: motivate the participants by fostering a single group spirit, and jointly establish the ground rules.

At the start of the #ConnectaCulturas Hackathon, the participants introduced themselves one at a time as they tossed a ball of yarn to someone else while holding the thread. By the end of the presentation, a network had been woven and one of the organizers reflected on the need to work as a single team that, although divided into several groups, would feel like a unit.

> **❝ A short and symbolic activity that helped to focus and highlight the spirit of the activity.**

In fact, that was exactly how the participants' experienced the process. Over the three days it was possible to see how the groups sought each other's advice and helped each other to clear up doubts. The prize at stake was never a barrier to collaboration. The real reward of the activity was clearly established, not only with the initial activities but also when the objectives of the app were presented: obtain the best possible application

to disseminate the culture and worldview of the Indigenous Peoples.

Apart from these motivational activities, it is convenient to reinforce the collaborative aspect in the ground rules agreed by the group and to propose methodologies that encourage collaborative work (for example, remember that in mind-mapping all contributions are valid and that no one is left behind even if they might be wrong); try to reach decisions by consensus, not by voting, so that the group is forced to discuss the proposals and decisions; do not allow "no" as an answer if it is not accompanied by a "but" that introduces an alternative or a convincing argument for the rest of the group; define roles by experience or knowledge within the team. This way, if the team is unable to reach an agreement on a design matter, the people who know more about design can have a "double vote" on that matter. Any rule to avoid conflict in the group is welcome.

Networking and partnership events

"You don't organize a hackathon if you're not interested in creating a community," said Rubén Zavala. Although the main objective is to develop a prototype for an app, the intention behind these activities aims to create links between software development communities and cultural activists, between journalists, community journalists and experts in graphic design, and between international organizations and civil society organizations. "Although #ConectaCulturas was not specifically conceived for that purpose, it ended up creating an intercultural dialogue that is even difficult to achieve in activities designed specifically for that purpose," recalled Rubén.

The activity even created some unexpected links. CORAPE needed someone to be in charge of the technical management of the Documentation Center, and ultimately hired one of the young programmers who participated in the hackathon.

Anecdotes aside, during the hackathon evaluation, participants suggested decentralizing these activities. Most of the time these are held in the big cities because that is where the best facilities are, and generally universities provide a good number of the participants. But carrying them out in indigenous communities or rural settings would add significant value and more diverse participants. Moreover, it would allow people who are unable to travel to the city for economic or other reasons to participate. "This does not mean that the results are better. They would simply be other results because they have had other experiences and would offer equally valid ideas, especially if we are prototyping solutions for those communities," said David Muenala, quite rightly.

4. *Reporterathon* Colombia

Vokaribe is a collective communication space with several dissemination and participation channels. These include a community radio station in La Paz neighborhood in Barranquilla, a city of the Colombian Caribbean, in the north of the country.

Barranquilla's population generally associates La Paz and the other neighborhoods of the city's south, where almost 2 million people live, with marginality and crime. There is a strong social rejection and discrimination against the people from these areas. The Vokaribe community radio station seeks to break this trend. "We seek to serve as a bridge to narrate the *souths* of Barranquilla, free of the stereotypes and clichés that are so strongly positioned in all social spheres, and which are only mentioned by the city's media in association with homicides, gang fights, or other cases that catch the media's attention. In Barranquilla we know little about the periphery and the lives of those living in this part of the city. We have a duty to break with this deficiency and lack of information," explained Walter Hernández, one of the founders and current legal representative of Asociación de Radiodifusión Comunitaria Vokaribe.

Although the station is defined as community radio and its FM range only covers the neighborhood, it takes advantage of digital platforms and organizes street activities to break down these stigmas and make local social transformation processes in the area visible. "Here at Vokaribe we never say that 'we are the voice of the voiceless'. Everyone has a voice and a story, and Vokaribe only facilitates a medium and a space. Vokaribe creates the minimum conditions so that these voices—which are many and diverse—have a place in the radio spectrum," said Patricia Rendón, one of the project founders.

Vokaribe was founded in 1993. In the mid-2000s and after a couple of years of "crisis," the project resumed in 2007 and started to grow. A couple of years later, in 2012, it aired on the frequency 89.6 FM, reaching about 70 neighborhoods and approximately half a million people. The radio station opened new channels—such as the website—and, to expand its activities, established partnerships with organizations like DW Akademie.

More than a media outlet, Vokaribe is also conceived of as a "school". This association, heir to the community communication practices developed in Latin America since the 1940s, understands training as a transversal axis of its project. These initiatives include *Reporterathons*, a space for residents of a neighborhood to receive training and get involved in the radio by creating new shows. Furthermore, to take this playful meth-

odology that encourages participation in community media outside of Barranquilla neighborhoods, Vokaribe has fostered a fruitful exchange with allied networks and media outlets in other countries and regions of Colombia, where *Reporterathons* have already been replicated.

This text was written by Patricia Rendón, designer of the *Reporterathon* strategy in Vokaribe; Iván Mercado, member of Vokaribe and coordinator of the project with DW Akademie; Laura Gómez, from Cali, a member of the radio stations Oriente Stereo and Renacer del Pacífico, and participant of the 2020 *Reporterathon*; Paúl Salas, of Coordinadora de Medios Comunitarios Populares y Educativos del Ecuador (CORAPE), participant in the second edition of the *Reporterathon* in 2019 and coordinator of the replica of this activity in Ecuador; Omar Rincón, Colombian professor and media critic, who was a guest expert for the introductory talks to the reporters; Matthias Kopp, Director of the DW Akademie Program in Colombia and participant in the three versions of *Vokaribe's Reporterathon;* and Lena Gamper and Belén Pardo, members of DW Akademie team in Colombia. Belén Pardo has also been part of Vokaribe since its foundation.

> 66 **In this quest to solve the issue of the social sustainability of community radio — the cornerstone of any communication project — we became entangled in an idea that would help us spark curiosity to know community radio from the inside, the interest of people in participating, their motivations to produce their own content, adopt a voice of their own and show that their side of the story is also valid. That's how Reporterathons were born.**

vokaribe.net/

4.1 The Reporterathon experience

If we go by the experience of the #ConectaCulturas Hackathon told in the previous chapter, the definition of a *Reporterathon* would be simple: a "reporter-a-thon". In journalism, reporting refers to the exercise of going out to the streets to look for reports, news or stories. In the case of radio stations, such as Vokaribe, we could summarize it by going to the streets and recording: "We let people tell their realities and stories with their own voice."

The *Reporterathon*, as conceived by DW Akademie and this radio station of the southwest of Barranquilla, is a collective exercise in which journalists, members of social organizations and local residents meet to record stories in short format — in just two or three days — and then broadcast them on the radio and through digital platforms.

Media sustainability

However, *Reporterathons* are more than just a collection of stories recorded at a certain time of year. "These activities are a social sustainability strategy to engage and educate the community to participate and become more involved in the communication project," said Iván Mercado.

When talking about the sustainability (or viability) of the media, the first thing that comes to mind is money. The economic aspect, however, is but one of the factors to consider, along with the legal frameworks, infrastructure, contents, and audience participation[14]. This last factor is what Vokaribe calls *social sustainability*: getting the community or audience of the radio station to participate and get involved in the production of shows. In short, that they become an active part of the project. "We seek to form participatory audiences, to train citizens who are interested in the reality of their surroundings. In other words, less distracted, more attentive and more informed citizens to turn our gaze and senses towards the environment, provoke the need to inform and be informed, and increasingly refine how we share information," reads the Vokaribe team on its website.

[14] https://www.dw.com/es/sostenibilidad-de-medios-comunitarios-en-la-red-corape/a-55718178
https://akademie.dw.com/en/more-than-money-rethinking-media-viability-in-the-digital-age/a-47825791

Training to encourage participation

One of the main barriers stopping people from getting involved in these projects is training. Media have projected an idealized image of broadcasters and journalists: people with immersive voices, perfect diction and sharp words. However, the reality is very different, especially in local and community media. Therefore, these projects aim to be safe spaces where anyone in the community can speak their mind freely.

It is also possible to participate more permanently with regular programs or as a news correspondent or reporter. To give *community-style* training on these tasks, the station regularly convenes activities such as the *Reporterathon* as part of its regular courses and training activities, such as *Radiofonías, Tu voz en todas partes, En clave de radio or 90 minutos de radio en la calle,* among others.

"No one teaches you how to be a community radio host or a journalist. They don't teach that at journalism schools. So, we had to invent these methods based on similar experiences of community radios," they say in Vokaribe. The street then becomes a *radio university where people **learn by doing and experimenting**: the exercise of community radio is transformed, whether we like it or not, into an **open laboratory** in which trial and error is a formula implemented every day.*

Explore (and export) new narratives

Framed in the logic of innovation and experimentation promoted by the labs, Vokaribe also proposes *Reporterathons* as a space to explore new formats, testing the boundaries of journalism and venturing into unknown and unexplored territories, in order to be surprised by what we may hear or find. After all, as the "guru of community radio" José Ignacio López Vigil says, "good popular communication is done by listening more than talking, that's why we have two ears and only one mouth."

Vokaribe organizes and shares all this collective knowledge that is gathered in the *Reporterathons* and other training activities. The station places a strong emphasis on collaborative development of and experimentation within its proposals. This enriches the process, by providing access to a greater variety of ideas and allows them to be implemented in other contexts in the future. This is why in all the versions of the *Reporterathon*, together with DW Akademie, Vokaribe has invited journalists from other cities of Colombia or other Latin-American countries. As a result, the format was replicated in other countries: *Reporterathons* have been held in Ecuador, Bolivia and Guatemala.

The history of Reporterathons

So far, Vokaribe has organized three Reporterathons: the first one was in 2017; after a year of absence, it returned in 2019; and the last one was held in 2020, just a few weeks before the world was shaken and locked-down by the COVID-19 pandemic. Precisely, this was the reason why there was no Reporterathon in 2021.

Each Reporterathon has had its particularities and has always been modified and adjusted considering the results of the previous one. As Vokaribe points out, these experimental processes (or action-reflection-action processes) require asking oneself at the end: What did we learn? Can we adjust the methodology? What would we like for the next Reporterathon?

2017 Reporterathon – Voices from La Paz neighborhood. Twenty-five reporters, mainly from La Paz neighborhood, attended the first Reporterathon. It was a more local experience, with no international participation. After a brief training session, people who had never participated in radio before jumped to the streets with their mobile phones to record the stories of their neighbors for eight intense hours. Vokaribe wanted the very residents to interview one another about the issues that concerned them: the history of La Paz neighborhood, its architecture or cultural identity. Other topics included gastronomy, recycling, the economy or insecurity in the streets.

The stories of the 2017 Reporterathon can be heard (in Spanish) at: https://soundcloud.com/vokaribe/sets/reporteraton-2017

Participants in the 2017 Reporterathon

2019 Reporterathon – At the People's Carnival! In its second edition, the *Reporterathon* set out to record the party and the excitement of the Southwest Carnival. Vokaribe approached the residents of the neighborhood where the station is located, far from the official celebrations of Barranquilla Carnival.

The Carnival in La Paz is a *curb party*[15] organized by the residents of the commune. While the comparsas danced and people paraded the streets in colorful costumes, the participants of the 2019 Reporterathon, who came from other Colombian cities and from Bolivia, Ecuador, and Guatemala, joined the party and recorded the people speaking about their costumes, recalling the stories of previous carnivals or explaining the meaning of traditional characters such as the *Marimonda*.

This *Reporterathon* was longer than the first one. The guests from other places would not only live the experience of telling the stories of the Carnival but would also take this radio format home to replicate it in their stations. Over five days, they attended talks from other radio broadcasters and academics, including Mauricio Beltrán (Fedemedios), Mónica Valdés (AMARC) and Omar Rincón (FES). They explored the methodology together, and formed teams with Vokaribe members, residents, and communication specialists.

In record time, the teams recorded, edited and published seven stories about the Carnival that Vokaribe Radio broadcast and shared on different podcast platforms as an audio memory of Barranquilla's cultural traditions. These stories had never been told before and are narrated by the people who starred in the Carnival in La Paz neighborhood wearing masks, costumes and makeup.

The 2019 Reporterathon stories are available (in Spanish) at *soundcloud.com/vokaribe/sets/reporteraton-2019*

---

[15] The curb is the space separating the pedestrian sidewalk from the road intended for cars. Being a higher part, people use it to sit and watch the Carnival go by.

The Carnival was a suitable scenario for this group of reporters from different places to meet and explore this community reporting methodology proposed by Vokaribe Radio.
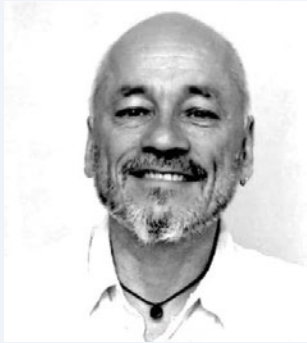
Omar Rincón
Director of FES Comunicación América Latina (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung)

❝ It's done with journalists from the territory, with the territory, and to tell stories about the territory. It's alternative, dissident, borderline to the classic forms of journalism used around the world. It's journalism from another place of expression, other aesthetics, and other narratives".

fescomunica.fes.de/

© Reporteratón

2020 Reporterathon - Formatting narratives. Culture and conflicts. This version was very similar to that of 2019, held in the same context of the Carnival and with journalists from other countries and Colombian cities. The invitation had two objectives: on the one hand, to continue with a process of transferring the *Reporterathon* methodology to other Latin American media outlets and, on the other, to enhance this methodology with new ideas and perspectives, who had not experienced the format or Barranquilla's reality before.

In 2020 colleagues from Coordinadora de Medios Comunitarios Populares y Educativos del Ecuador, CORAPE were invited to this edition. After participating in the previous 2019 edition in Barranquilla, they replicated the *Reporterathon* in Ecuador. This way, the *Reporterathon* is nourished by the different experiences and knowledge as a training experience that seeks to get the neighborhood involved with the local media.

Matthias Kopp, Program Director of DW Akademie in Colombia, even suggests a third objective: "It got us thinking about the meaning of community. We are in a very specific place, in a neighborhood in the Southwest of Barranquilla, with local children walking around their neighborhood, talking to the neighbors, with the police on the corner, with the baker... Then guests from Bolivia, Ecuador, Germany, Bogotá joined. So, where's the community here? It is what unites us to talk on the radio, showing us that a very localized radio station with a very limited range of a few kilometers gains a much larger reach, where

Biciradio

As part of the efforts and endeavor to find original ways to motivate the participation of the people, Vokaribe paraded in the Carnival with a Biciradio.

"It was a rickshaw disguised as a radio. It paraded in the Carnival and anyone could get on to be interviewed.

Neighborhoods such as La Paz are not covered by public transport, so people use rickshaws to get around. "It was an experiment to see what happened if we introduced a striking — yet known — element. Some people just didn't understand what was going on. It was an interesting attempt for the radio to be present at the Carnival in a different way."

people from different countries, backgrounds and experiences speak. All of them enter into the communication process, and community dynamic, together."

In this third edition of the *Reporterathon*, although the context was also the Carnival, we tried to rescue other themes and explore genres and narratives to narrate the impact of conflict on local cultures in Colombia, reformatting the classic radio formats.[16] Pere Ortín, Patricia Rendón and Omar Rincón[17] were the invited mentors to guide this new approach to the *Reporterathon*.

Another novelty of this version–Vokaribe has always included new things in each edition—was to transform the previous conferences (which they call warm-ups) into a space where participants, journalists and the academic community converged. This was a way of bringing the experiences of street journalism produced by the people of the neighborhood closer to the university.

Listen to the 2020 Reporterathon stories (in Spanish) at: *soundcloud.com/vokaribe/sets/reporteraton-2020-formateando-narrativas*

As this publication goes to press, Vokaribe is preparing for the fourth *Reporterathon*, to be held in late March 2022. This time it will be held virtually, and the stories will focus on environmental issues, including some content on Media and Information Literacy (MIL). That is why the fourth edition has been called *"Reporterathon AMIL"*, playing with the Spanish acronym and remembering the speed that has always characterized these reporting races [18].

Alfredo González
Member of Vokaribe

❝ **I really enjoyed being on the curb, on the terrace, getting into the houses of people and dancing with them. I had fun! Being able to hear and interview them. We were not a journalist and an interviewee; we were just two *barranquilleros* talking and enjoying the party.**

4.2 Ideas to replicate a *Reporterathon*

There is no one-size-fits-all methodology for *Reporterathons.* Moreover, Vokaribe has made changes in each edition and will undoubtedly introduce changes in the next versions.

"At Vokaribe we imagine the radio by doing radio," said Patricia Rendón. By conceiving radio as an open laboratory, the *Reporterathon* becomes a space to explore new ways of telling stories year after year.

These formats evolve through practice and adapt to the context in which they are implemented. For this reason, Vokaribe proposes guidelines and suggestions for adopting and repli-

Laura Gómez
from Cali, is a member of the radio stations Oriente Stereo and Renacer del Pacífico and participated in the 2020 Reporterathon.

❝ **Enjoying making radio, making it possible and accessible to people. This has been the cornerstone of the three Reporterathons.**

---

[16] After living in protracted violence for over 50 years caused by various armed conflicts, the country has been undergoing a peace process since 2016. Iván Mercado explains that in this Reporterathon they wanted to "research the transformations of their traditions and cultural expressions in rural communities and urban centers of some municipalities caused by the appearance of violent actors and the successive imposition of forms of regulation of daily life in these territories."

[17] Omar Rincón, Colombian journalist and academic, talks about the good and bad things of the 2020 Reporterathon in five minutes. https://www.facebook.com/watch/122299381167537/160471134941761/

[18] "A mil" is a Spanish expression used when something moves really fast.

cating the idea with the necessary adjustments so that it is in line with the place and the environment where it will be implemented or the subject matter of the stories.

However, regardless of the context or subject, Vokaribe recommends conceiving the *Reporterathon* as an excuse to approach a place, whether it is a neighborhood or a cultural experience such as a carnival or a sports event. The objective is to approach and observe it to tell its story from a new perspective and with new voices.

Methodologically, Vokaribe divides the R*eporterathons* into four stages, plus a warm-up, which are very reminiscent of the stages of a sports marathon:

– *Warm-up:* This is the stage before the activity, in which theoretical information on how to record audio and do reporting, or the context of the themes on which are to be reported, is shared via short conferences or workshops.
– *On your marks:* The topics and stories to be recorded are identified and described, the formats are proposed, information is sought, and the reporters' teams are formed.
– *Get set:* One last check before starting to make sure that all the equipment is complete, from the voice-recorder to sunscreen,

© Patricia Rendón / Reporteratón

many things are needed to walk in Barranquilla at this time of the year.
– *Report!:* This is the central moment of the *Reporterathon*, when we conduct interviews, observe, listen, and talk to the people of the neighborhood.
– *Share your stories:* Back in the station's studio or the workshop space, the recordings are edited and the final podcast is produced and later broadcast.

You've reached the finish line! Let's look at each stage in detail.

Stage 0. Warm-up

Just like a sporting event, teams must warm up before going out to the streets with their voice-recorder in hand to avoid injuries. The idea is to provide a basic preparation with specific training on technical matters and on the topics to be addressed.

For example, in the first Vokaribe *Reporterathon*, 90% of the people who participated had no previous experience on the radio, let alone with journalism. However, the objective of the warm-up is not to share theoretical immersion on radio journalism, but to offer the basic tools for good reporting: how to use the recorder or the mobile phone to record audio, how to approach the people you want to interview or ideas to prepare a good questionnaire.

These workshops should be facilitated by the station team to make first contact with people who, beyond this specific activity, could have a more stable participation in the radio station. Note that, above all, *Reporterathons* are a way of strengthening ties with the neighborhood to encourage its inhabitants to embrace the community radio and participate more actively.

In the versions attended by journalists from other countries or cities, this stage was used to talk about the particularities of the neighborhood, the Carnival's history or the armed conflict in Colombia, a much-needed context for the interviews.

Furthermore, there were talks by media experts and discussions with other journalists to strengthen the ties with the academic community.

Stage 1. On your marks…

The global themes on which stories will be recorded is collectively established. "Sounds of La Paz neighborhood", "The peoples' Carnival" and "Cultures and conflicts" were the proposals in the various Vokaribe *Reporterathons*, but each media outlet can choose their own. The themes should be broad enough so that all reporters have an original story to report.

After choosing the topic, it is time to divide the participants into teams according to their interests. Each group should decide

how it wants to organize and assign roles and responsibilities.

Each group will narrow down the overall theme to come up with concrete ideas about stories they would like to tell. Once they go out to the street, new approaches and topics will surely arise, but they should not jump into reporting unprepared or wondering what to report about. On the contrary, they should always have a couple of stories in mind. This will force them to carry out prior research and go to the street with certain information that allows them to further explore the subject with the people they will interview.

Finally, Vokaribe invites journalists to think about the formats without restricting their creativity. In this way, the groups will also have a clearer idea of the work that awaits them once the *Reporterathon* begins. They have very little time for the recordings, so a little planning won´t hurt. Then, in case a group decides to try out an audio documentary for example, the group members will have to agree and assign the task to someone to record ambient sounds in addition to the interviews. Furthermore, if a group prefers to try out life-stories or biographical formats, they will need to design a solid questionnaire to explore a more experiential and human side of the interviewees.

Stage 2. Get set...

When the groups are at the starting line about to embark on the race, take a few minutes to confirm that the reporting kit is ready. A detailed checklist will allow all the participants to make sure they are completely prepared. We start with the most technical items: make sure the mobile phone or the voice recorder have sufficient memory; check that the battery is charged or if we need a spare; check that each reporter has a headset to ensure correct audio levels and, if possible, a microphone to improve the recording's quality.

Remember to bring enough water, sunscreen or a jacket depending on the place where the activity will take place.

© Ivan Mercado / Reporteratón

Don't forget snacks! In the case of the Carnival, the street food stalls did the trick, as they are part of this popular festival and are the main characters of some of the reports produced during the *Reporterathon.*

Stage 3. Report!

The time to go out to the streets and report, and search for the stories and the testimonies, has come. Each group observes and listens, asks questions, records audios and takes photographs, some participants even record videos! At the same time, they are taking notes to gradually structure the story they will tell. It's important to do it on the fly because, after the time to collect the audio and images is over, they'll have to come back and edit the final production quickly.

In some editions, Vokaribe tried a scoreboard where they noted the times in which each group completed the tasks. This competitive incentive motivates the groups and gives a playful tone to the journalistic work. And, contrary to what one might think, instead of putting pressure on the groups, it relaxes and encourages them!

Stage 4: You've reached the finish line!

Once the time is over, the teams return, but the race is not over. They must download the audios they recorded in the streets, edit them, and select the parts they are going to use, record the voiceover that will accompany the testimonies, if they decided to produce a format that combines both elements and, finally, once the story is finished and approved, share it with the other participants.
The story's format has been different for each edition. Some of them were broadcast directly on the radio and then the authors explained their experience. In other cases, the community was called to an assembly hall and the work was presented while the event was broadcast on the radio. And of course, the work done in the *Reporterathons* was disseminated on social media and on podcast platforms to reach audiences beyond La Paz neighborhood.

Patricia Rendón
Vokaribe team, designer of the *Reporterathon* strategy

" It's really fun to see how they come here, so serious and earnest on the first day, and everyone gets really invested in this competition of wanting to be the first to produce and publish the story. This component of presenting it as a race enriches the process, even more in a context as diverse and colorful as a carnival.

vokaribe.net/

Iván Mercado
Project manager, Vokaribe team

" Seven stories resulted from the 2017 *Reporterathon*. It was very nice because people who had never done radio before did it for eight hours and returned with new skills. For example, they used their phones for reporting to learn and tell the story of their neighborhood. In the end, this exercise served to discover the neighborhood. They see it every day, but few people really wonder what's going on there.

vokaribe.net/

Salinas de Guaranda, Bolívar
13 y 14 de septiembre de 2019
© CORAPE

© CORAPE

The Reporterathon travels to Ecuador

The sharing idea worked. After participating in the second Reporterathon in February of 2019, Paúl Salas, a member of CORAPE, replicated the experience with his team in Salinas de Guaranda, Ecuador, in September of that same year. "We invited 30 journalists to this iconic place in the highlands of Ecuador. It is well known for its cheese and salt production and has a long history of community media. We told them that this was not about looking for news, but about making a report by talking to the locals. They went to the places where ponchos are woven and cheese and handicrafts are made. It's a small community, we all stayed and ate there during those days. It served as the setting for the Reporterathon, and also helped reactivate the local economy."

corape.org.ec/satelital/produccion/categoria/reporteraton

4.3 Lessons learned from the *Reporterathon*

A different way of doing radio

If the challenge is to attract people who have never done radio, you have to look for ingenious strategies. One of the good things about the *Reporterathon* is that it is disruptive, "it attracts attention," says Matthias Kopp, "starting with the name. What's a *Reporterathon*? Even the idea of turning it into a sport is attractive. It's a captivating experience and it attracts people who have never done radio before and who grab a voice recorder and talk to their neighbors and people on the street. Another incentive is that they can listen to the results on the same day they record the stories and have their mother, grandmother or friends listen to them on the radio. That's fantastic!".

During these provocative and colorful activities, the community gets to know the radio, establishes a first contact, and become familiar with doing interviews and producing radio. This relationship is likely to become more permanent. In fact, several *Reporterathon* participants continued to be involved in the station and participating in the community project.

Foster dialogue

In any case, Vokaribe's main objective with the *Reporterathons* is not to get more members for the radio, but to strengthen its relationship with the community where the radio is based. In this sense, these reporting marathons foster dialogue between neighbors.

A radio station's booth is also a good place to communicate with the public. Social media or phone calls are also useful, but there is nothing like the neighborhood to talk with the neighbors, especially in the context of a party that brings them together. We must take the radio to the streets, foster dialogue wherever dialogue takes place.

Evolving projects

Another feature of the Vokaribe experience, which can also be seen in the CORAPE project and will reappear in the next two, is how the process has evolved over time.

Vokaribe could have repeated the format of the first year, inviting only people from the neighborhood and recording the pieces during one intense day. This was an experiment that worked well, and would have been easy to replicate. But, after

© Jairo Rendón / Reporteratón

the evaluation, they saw the potential and possibilities of the format for other media outlets, and how it could contribute to strengthening their ties with the community. They also discovered the desire to continue experimenting and finding new methodologies and formats that contribute to the social sustainability of the media outlet.

> **"** You come with an idea, but once you're inside the action your perspectives change completely. That was the intention of having them take part in the parade, to be a part of the carnival and not experience it from the outside. And we completed the whole parade! I don't know how many kilometers it is, but we did it from start to finish.

Iván Mercado, Project manager, Vokaribe team

Living the experience from the inside

Although the *Reporterathon* invites journalists to observe and listen, this format is successful if experienced from the inside.

If it is covering the Carnival, participants must participate in the parade. If we want to cover a sports event, why not sign up for a team and play?

"Living transfers"

When we talk about knowledge transfer, we usually think of someone who tells us something, either in person or through a text. But no matter how many times we are told, we do not learn to do something ourselves, until we actually do it.

Living the experience in the first person, walking the Carnival while recording interviews, going through each of the stages of the *Reporterathon*, is the best manual that someone can receive to replicate this activity elsewhere.

One of the greatest successes of the *Reporterathon* was to design the transfer process as a kind of internship in which reporters from other cities of Colombia and other Latin American countries attended as participants. Furthermore, not only did they benefit from learning a methodology that they could later apply in their communities, but they also contributed with their experience and creativity to enhance this methodology.

© Elaine García / Reporteratón

4. *Colaboratorio*
Bolivia

Centro de Producción Radiofónica (CEPRA) was founded in 1980, in Cochabamba, Bolivia. It produces intercultural radio programs, both in native languages and in Spanish, for the popular and campesino sectors. It currently has three FM stations in La Paz, Cochabamba and Sucre, and coordinates a network of 50 community and indigenous peoples' radio stations in Bolivia.

Since community radios began their journey in Latin America, back in 1947, these media outlets have established themselves as amplifiers of the joys, demands and concerns of the residents of the communities where they are based. "We have a duty to them, they are our *raison d 'être*," say those who work in these community radio stations, also called popular, educational or alternative radio stations.

However, for various reasons—mainly lack of economic resources and personnel—many of these radio stations have become increasingly inward-looking; they barely leave their booths and, therefore, miss out on the close contact and direct relationship with their communities and audience. These are the preliminary results of a diagnosis made by CEPRA in Bolivia. Is it possible to have a community radio station that does not listen and talk to the community?

As a result of these questions and the latent need to *rejuvenate* community media, CEPRA considered starting the *Colaboratorio*

project in late 2018. Developed with the support of DW Akademie, it aims to improve the programming and increase the audience participation in Bolivian community radios.

The *Colaboratorio* is a space for training and innovation, an *apthapi* of ideas[19]. It is a way of doing things, a methodological proposal to carry out participatory diagnoses and design training and programming proposals, and an experimentation laboratory to test new radio formats and participatory programs in a collaborative way. Some of them will ultimately be integrated into the radio station's programming, while others will be discarded. The main objective is to test and try new formulas - *errors* are part of this process.

The Colaboratorio is conceived as a space for meeting, debate and reflection; a work in progress that relies on contributions to adapt to the needs and requests of the media. This is why we cannot offer a closed and unique definition of this initiative. It is best to explain how it works, its methodologies and proposals. This is the best way to understand how this community communication laboratory, promoted by CEPRA and DW Akademie, works.

This text was written by Juan Ordoñez, director of CEPRA; David Huanca, coordinator of the Colaboratorio; Fabiana Condori, of the CEPRA Colaboratorio team; Álvaro Benjo Cruz, of Radio Cultural Café de Caranavi; Gabriela Calle, of Radio Pachamama de

[19] The *apthapi* is an Aymara community celebration in which the participants share food and knowledge.

© Colaboratorio

Tarija; Remberto Camacho, of Radio Raqaypampa; and Benedikt Borches, Program Director of DW Akademie in Bolivia.

5.1 La experiencia del *Colaboratorio*

The *Colaboratorio* is conceived as a collective space to develop, research, experiment and innovate about community radio with the participation of social actors. During its first pilot stage, it focused on finding out how to increase the participation of the community in the communication projects of local and community radio stations.

What does each of these terms mean? How does a collective and experimental space develop in the field of community communication? What is innovation? At what stages of the process does the community participate? To answer these questions and clarify the CEPRA *Colaboratorio* and its activities, we must go back to the project's origins and learn the reasons behind the initiative.

Throughout its 40-year history, CEPRA has maintained a very extensive and varied line of action in training—both in topics and formats—through more traditional and considerably innovative methodologies. One of the most recent training programs was VirDual, first developed jointly with DW Akademie in 2018 and supported by the Ministry of Communication of Bolivia, Escuela de Gestión Pública Plurinacional and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

VirDual was designed as a blended learning program with regional bimonthly meetings guided by tutorials and asynchronous training through an online platform. The participants were members of community media outlets, so they could practice doing radio under the supervision of those who had more experience. Hence the name VirDual, a term coined during the workshops preceding the program, which merges the virtual or online component with dual training[20].

The *Specialization Course in Digital Radio Journalism for Community Radio Broadcasters* lasted eight months and covered topics such as news reports, radio interviews and digital audio editing. Of the 120 people enrolled, more than 100 successfully completed the training. This is a significantly high percentage considering the course's length, the fact that much of it was taught online, and that many of the participants did not have a stable Internet connection. CEPRA attributes this success to a participant-centered methodology that combined virtual asynchronous moments with face-to-face tutorials and practical workshops, as well as a playful learning environment with constant assistance.

[20] This methodology, with a great tradition in Germany, combines classroom training with practical work under the guidance of tutors with experience in the media or other types of enterprises, since it is used to teach in all professions.

To learn more about VirDual and the Specialization Course in Digital Radio Journalism for Community Radio Broadcasters, visit *radiotallercepra.org/* or watch this video: *youtu.be/-q5gVUVaQQs*

As with any training, at the end of the VirDual course CEPRA's training team wondered whether the participants would apply what they had learned in their media outlets. This is a recurring question among those involved in training. Participating in a workshop does not imply that the participants will incorporate the acquired knowledge into their daily work immediately or automatically.

Therefore, from the pedagogical approach proposed by DW Akademie, we always insist on working the training from three dimensions or objectives: knowledge, practical skills, and attitude or motivation. Presenting theories or applying them is not enough: we must encourage participants to incorporate this knowledge into their practice. Undoubtedly, the attitudinal objective is the most complex to achieve and the most difficult to evaluate during a training process.

Usually, after participating in a workshop, participants return to their media outlets and must deal with urgent matters without having time to imagine how to implement what they have learnt, or the new proposals developed. On other occasions, the participant's ideas meet internal resistance. It is not always easy to break the inertia of something that has been done the same way for years. In short:

> ❝ Providing training does not necessarily imply or guarantee a direct and structural short-term change in media habits.

This does not mean abandoning the idea of workshops all together. Rather, the challenge lies in imagining creative formulas to strengthen trainings and, above all, their application within the media. This is mainly the reason why CEPRA joined efforts with DW Akademie in the *Colaboratorio* project in early 2019: to assist community radio stations in improving their programming to increase community participation.

Gabriela Calle
Radio Pachamama,
Tarija

❝ **We want to open our minds to be able to create and improve the radio formats and think about how to reach our audience with more innovative approaches that consider the needs of the communities. Journalists or radio broadcasters often falsely believe that people like to listen to a certain type of music or talk about specific topics, instead of listening to them and finding out what they really want. The Colaboratorio allows us to approach the communities and know their demands and adapt our programming to them.**

© Colaboratorio / Benedikt Borches

Colaboratorio conceptual framework

Considering this background and the objectives, CEPRA outlined some principles or pillars of the project that have guided the *Colaboratorio* throughout its nearly four years of existence:

More than specific activities, it is a methodology. The *Colaboratorio* is conceived as a space to design processes collectively and collaboratively with the media outlets and other social actors through several moments or activities. Therefore, it should be conceived as a methodology for media renovation and consulting processes rather than as workshops or individual or iso-

lated training sessions. This process generally has four stages: a first stage, in which a diagnosis is made; a second stage, which revolves around experimenting and proposing solutions to the needs detected; a third stage, in which the radio stations receive assistance to implement the solutions; and a fourth stage to evaluate and document the process, incorporate possible improvements, and make recommendations for other media outlets that wish to apply them.

It is a space, not a place. Although the *Colaboratorio* is based in the CEPRA offices in Cochabamba, the concept of space conveys the idea that the *Colaboratorio* is ubiquitous and mobile. It is not that the *Colaboratorio* visits a radio station and implements an activity, but that the radio station becomes the *Colaboratorio* by bringing different social actors together to rethink its programming. A group of radio broadcasters who meet to debate, analyze, reflect and experiment on how to innovate community radio to achieve greater active participation and advocacy becomes a *Colaboratorio*. Due to this extended nature, CEPRA provided the Colaboratorio with a mobile laboratory or *Choriván*, which we will talk about later.

Collective and collaborative. The *Colaboratorio* brings together the producers at the station and the listeners, and political or community authorities and social organizations, with the aim of jointly seeking solutions so that the radio station can communicate with society: "Above all, the *Colaboratorio* means working together," said Juan Ordoñez, Director of CEPRA.

Experimentation to achieve innovation. This is why the space was conceived as a **laboratory** that will not produce magic formulas, but creative proposals that radio stations can use to experiment and readapt until they create—together with their communities—the formats and programs that best adapt to their reality. Experimentation begins with the methodologies used for the workshops or the diagnoses to make them more playful and participatory. As in any laboratory, there will be tests and experiments that work and others that fail. But as they say in CEPRA, "to err is a way of learning too, right?".

The four stages of the process

The *Colaboratorio* does not propose specific training activities or establish unique and closed methodologies. Instead, it designs processes tailored to the participants' needs. Teach stage of this process may also be adapted to the needs of the specific context or group. The following four stages, however, have been tested in the first processes implemented by the *Colaboratorio*. We will now summarize the process and analyze it in further detail in the following section:

Stage 1: Diagnosis. If you want to transform something, you must first know it in depth. Therefore, the first stage of the process consisted of several participatory diagnoses made through **ideathons**, which helped to know the current state of community radios in Bolivia.

Stage 2: Innovation laboratories. Once we knew the needs and the reality to be transformed, the next step was finding out how to do it. The answers had to be innovative. Moreover, only having the radio team look for the answers was not ideal. The audience and community and other actors had to be involved so that the results encouraged them to participate and be part of the community radio project. Then, the *Colaboratorio* held various **hackathons** to design several production laboratories to create new radio formats.

Stage 3: Assistance Transformation processes take time and do not work the same way in different contexts. The Amazon, the highlands of the *altiplano*, or the urban areas of Bolivia do not produce the same content for radio. For this reason, after developing the formulas for creating innovative formats and new programming, the *Colaboratorio* assisted the radio stations that wanted to adapt and test them in their stations.

Stage 4: Evaluation and documentation Finally, the *Colaboratorio* was responsible for evaluating and systematizing the process. The objective was not so much to record the actions and their results, but to write a manual that described, in detail, the different stages and methodologies used for all media outlets that wanted to adapt the experiments, learn from their errors, improve them and, eventually, test them in their community.

We insist that these stages allow us to design structured consultancy and support processes as they experiment with different participatory methodologies to propose possible innovative solutions, regardless of the theme. In the same way that CEPRA has used them to research participation in radio during the first stage of the *Colaboratorio*, they could be applied to solve the problems of economic sustainability of community radio stations or any other problem. Now let us look at how these four stages would work for sustainability:

- **Diagnosis (stage 1):** the *Colaboratorio* facilitates meetings between potential advertisers and enterprises or merchants that have previously advertised on the station. Focus groups are held with the audiences to measure the impact of the advertisements on the radio: Does advertising influence your decision to buy one product over another? Experiences of community media that work on their sustainability with strategies other than commercials or spots, such as raffles, sponsorships and parties, among others, are compiled.
- **Laboratory (stage 2):** a joint strategy is designed with the audience and potential advertisers in which the former produces the commercials. Several alternative financing strategies are envisioned with the station: bartering with local merchants, job fairs, and sponsoring alternative sports. Links are established with public bodies to jointly create health and environmental campaigns. Techniques previously tested by other means to improve sustainability, such as V-Sprints, are tested and analyzed[21].
- **Assistance (stage 3):** Over the course of a few months, the *Colaboratorio* assists in the implementation of the proposals that the station wishes to test. The *Colaboratorio* chooses two other stations in different cities that are in a similar situation to conduct two other pilot tests.
- **Documentation (stage 4):** After finalizing and evaluating the results, the experience is evaluated and documented, describing the particularities of each process, stating what worked, what had to be adjusted, and making recommendations to adapt the proposal to different contexts.

Below we will analyze each of the four stages of the process in more detail, which will allow any media outlet to replicate the *Colaboratorio*. We insist that the process described is the result of the activities carried out in the first year of the *Colaboratorio*, but it is still a *living* process that undergoes constant experimentation, so it will surely be changing and evolving thanks to our formulas. In fact, CEPRA invites media outlets to use its process as an inspiration, and after completing the participatory diagnoses, develop their own processes including the different actors in their community.

---

[21] The V(iability)-Sprint are workshops to work on media sustainability on five dimensions: economy, politics, content, technology and community, and three levels: media organizations, networks and the general framework. More information at: "More than money. Rethinking Media Viability in the digital age" at https://akademie.dw.com/en/more-than-money-rethinking-media-viability-in-the-digital-age/a-47825791, And, in this article, you may learn about CORAPE sustainability experience: https://p.dw.com/p/3kYKI.

Next steps

The *Colaboratorio* is a project conceived and developed jointly by CEPRA and DW Akademie. It intends to increase participation and plurality in the programs of the community radio stations of the CEPRA network. Currently, the *Colaboratorio* is implementing innovation experiences in radio stations in Morochata, Racaypampa, the Andean region of Cochabamba, Uncía, and San Julián.

Like these radio stations, others can approach the *Colaboratorio* and take advantage of this space to devise solutions to a specific problem. In the first stage we shared in this guide, we explain the process of a pilot that worked specifically on how to increase participation in radio. However, the aim is that, knowing the methodology and its benefits, CEPRA receives requests from other media outlets and institutions on other issues. Thus, the *Colaboratorio would become a kind of* **communication hospital.**

Media outlets come with some *symptoms (they have little participation or scarce advertisers)* and, once the disease is diagnosed *(the station does not listen to the needs of its community or does not have an adequate sustainability strategy),* a meeting is held between doctor, patients and family to seek a treatment as a team.

But, in addition to the assistance in these processes, the *Colaboratorio* also intends to promote internships between media outlets and involve students from educational institutions so that they are linked to community radios and, above all, ensure that the community and indigenous peoples' stations of Bolivia adopt the *Colaboratorio*, and propose and lead new processes and experiments.

Stage 1: Participatory (and creative) diagnosis

Surveys, focus groups, interviews... Media outlets have used several methods to learn about the preferences of their audiences and offer them programming more aligned to their interests. CEPRA has extensive experience in the use of these tools to probe the preferences and needs of audiences to redesign the programming or establish baselines for projects. But with the *Colaboratorio* they wanted to try a different and participatory way of diagnosing problems.

Juan Ordoñez
Director of CEPRA

❝ **Traditionally, an institution or technicians visit an area, ask questions, fill out forms and then return to analyze the data and draw conclusions. But with the *Colaboratorio* we wanted to work horizontally and jointly. Not only with journalists, but also with local social actors. We met with small producers in the area, municipal government authorities, young students, teachers, institutions that work in different areas such as the environment or production support, and social organizations. And we basically fostered a dialogue so that everyone could express their opinion on the community radio. This sometimes causes tense moments because people reproach them that they have never been interviewed and were never approached or visited their offices... But all as part of a horizontal relationship and with a lot of respect. Then, the diagnosis becomes a kind of challenge to the role of journalists with the intention of looking for joint solutions: What would you do, how would you commit to improving the radio?❞**

ceprabolivia.org/

This effort to know what the audience wants, from the perspective of a media outlet, becomes necessary when the communication project is conceived as a community project. In that case, the project should not only be thought of by and for the community, but also be developed collectively with the community. Remberto Camacho is the director of Radio Raqaypampa, located in the first region of Bolivia managed by the Indigenous Peasant Autonomy, which autonomously governs its territory and economy according to its traditions and traditional knowledge. Remberto believes that "a radio without a community would not be a community radio. That is why we always work with people from the countryside and from social organizations. We work with them, and they work with us to strengthen and train our brothers in the countryside and rural areas."

To design the participatory diagnoses, the *Colaboratorio* used ideathons.

The first diagnosis, at a national level, was held on March 30, 2019 with three objectives:

– First, it conducted an initial **survey** to find out the needs and challenges of community radios and the communicative demands of the community.
– Second, it designed an **experiment** as an opportunity to test and validate the methodology that would later be adjusted and applied in three regional ideathons.
– Finally, the first ideathon also served to finish the *Colaboratorio* **prototype**. CEPRA had several ideas in mind about the purposes of this space but wanted more input and different perspectives to collectively outline the strategic lines and the initial structure of the *Colaboratorio.*

Twenty-five people attended the first activity, including journalists from different local and community media outlets, representatives of development institutions, social organizations, and the CEPRA team. Two other partner organizations of DW Akademie in Bolivia, UNIR and Fundación para el Periodismo (FPP) were also invited.

The ideathon was designed using a specific narrative as the activity's guiding thread. Storytelling is very useful to gamify the activities but, most of all, it helps to explain the objectives of the event with metaphors that are easier to understand for the whole group.

In this case, the objective was to *rejuvenate* radio. At first, the participants were divided into three groups and asked to draw on a flipchart how they see radio stations in general and community radios in particular. On that drawing they would mark the *wrinkles* they see on the radio, that is, the signs of old age that, in their opinion, drive away young people.

© Fundación para el Periodismo (FPP)

The MediaLab of Fundación para el Periodismo (FPP)

Aware of the profound changes media outlets are facing, FPP, another partner of DW Akademie in Bolivia, has also been working with media laboratories conceived as spaces for dialogue, creation, experimentation and reflection on various issues related to communication work since 2020.

In different laboratories, lessons and experiences that allow the Bolivian media to adapt to a new reality and offer their audience modern, innovative and necessary products or initiatives are shared.

The idea, as David Olmos, Director of the South America Unit at DW Akademie, argues, is not to facilitate workshops that lead to predetermined solutions, but to offer a space for journalists to find the solutions and the path to journalistic innovation by themselves. The spirit is not to impart, but to make the journey of enquiry together: "We don't have the answer to innovation. The answer can be anywhere or in any environment, and it is in the MediaLab, in these spaces for creation, where we collaboratively find innovative responses for journalism."

The topics covered in the two editions (2021 and 2022) were, among others, cross-media journalism, digital media, digital transformation, marketing, educational television, and State radio and media.

In addition to these laboratories, in 2021 the FPP developed the MediaLab Virtual Experience seeking to strengthen the capacities of journalists by using a video game. In a playful and interactive virtual adventure, participants can tour the seven laboratories and reinforce their knowledge about journalism. An innovative idea, unique in Bolivia, that allows "access to conferences by invited experts to learn the methodology used in the laboratories, talk with the coordinators, participate in activities, solve knowledge tests, learn about the final products of the seven laboratories and, finally, download a participation certificate".

laboratoriodemedios.com/MediaLab/
fundacionperiodismo.org/medialabfpp
p.dw.com/p/41vs9
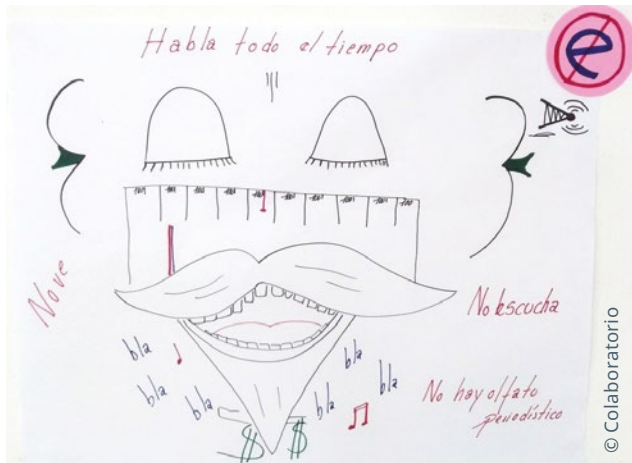
Drawing by one of the groups.
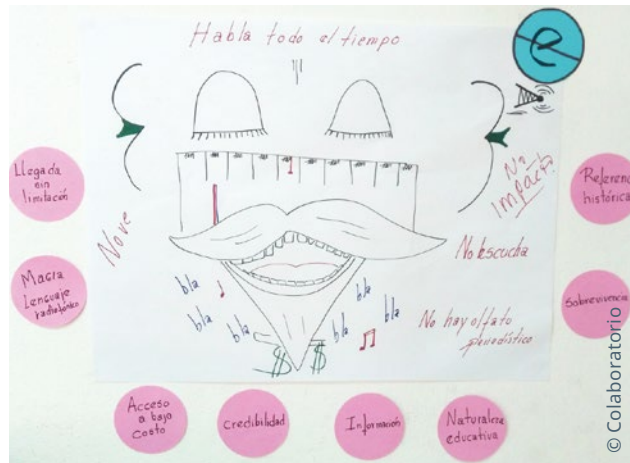
The wrinkles and strengths detected.

However, these wrinkles are not necessarily signs of weakness. The years bring a lot of wisdom. That is why, in a second activity, each group had to write down the *strengths* of the radio station on round cards. At the end of these two tasks, the groups presented their findings, which were consistent in many cases.

Finally, following the presentations, each group was given a bottle of *rejuvenating cream*. These bottles contained a stack of post-it notes. Each group had to write their ideas to refresh and modernize the programming of radio stations, correcting the weaknesses detected in the first activity. Then, the groups presented and discussed these possible solutions.
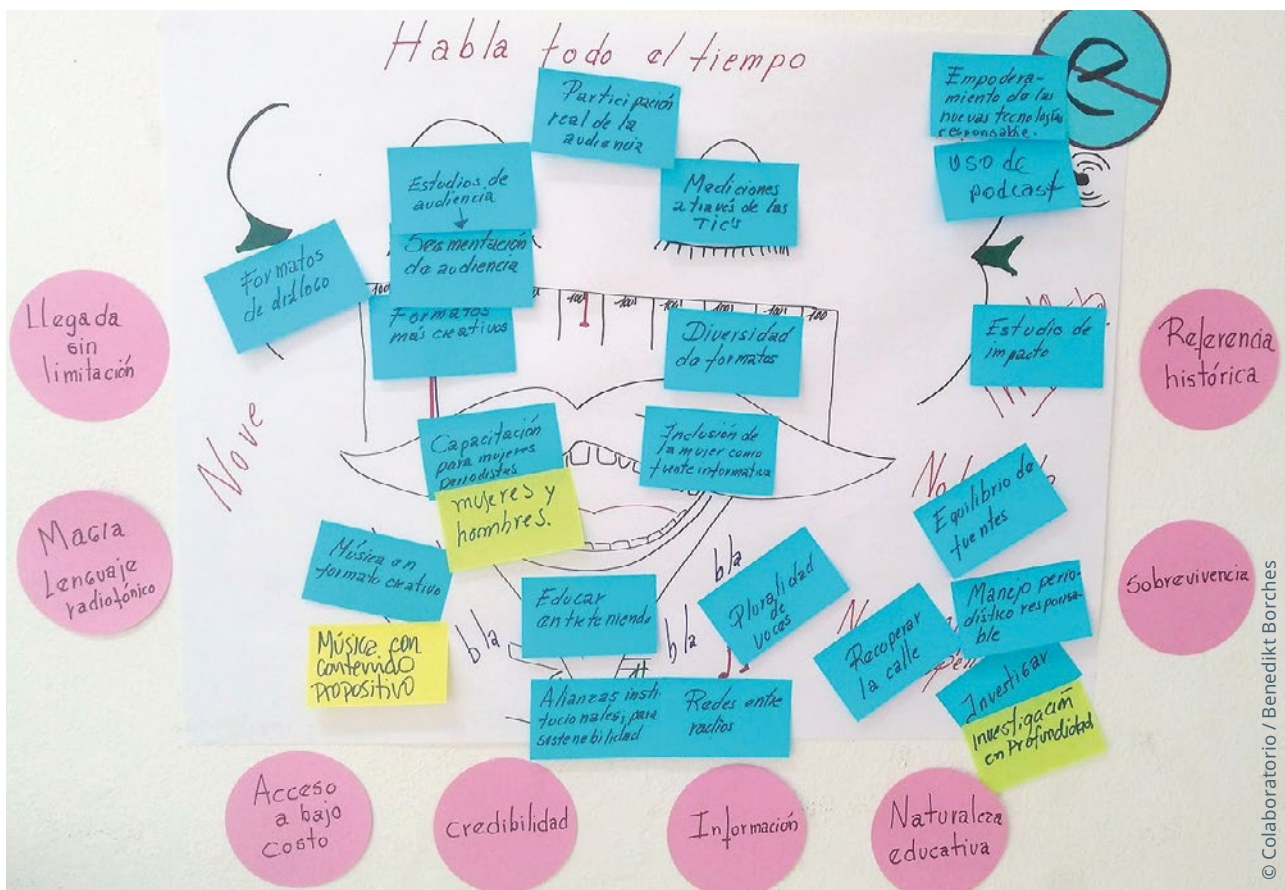
This is how the flipchart looked at the end, with the weaknesses covered by possible solutions (post-it notes) next to the strengths of the media outlet (pink round cards).

Prototypes: Shaping Ideas

As we pointed out, the first national ideathon was aimed at finalizing the Colaboratorio prototype. After the first activities focused on a participatory diagnosis, groups shared their first impressions of the *Colaboratorio* and helped CEPRA define the objectives and future activities.

Following an introduction on the background that led CEPRA to imagine this initiative, the participants were asked — again in groups — to shape the *Colaboratorio*. For this, they received balls of wool, cards with letters, dolls, stickers, scissors, Rastis and other elements to make crafts.

The objective was to build the *Colaboratorio*, imagine what it would be like, how it would work, and its characteristics. At first, many of the participants accustomed to more traditional activities were surprised by the methodology used. Here they participation included discussions held through dialogues, writing on cards or flipcharts, and then presenting in plenary discussions.

But, as the activity progressed, they became aware of their possibilities for expressing and materializing ideas. Once they were finished, each group presented their proposal, but very few words were needed. The proposals were so clear that seeing the sculpture was enough to perfectly understand the proposals, the possible interactions, the type of activities and their participants, their requirements...

Two of the proposals made to inspire the *Colaboratorio*.

After the *Colaboratorio* team discussed the methodology at the national event, and with preliminary conclusions about the radio stations, CEPRA organized three regional participatory diagnoses to understand whether there was any correlation with the results of the first national meeting, held in Cochabamba.

These diagnoses were held through ideathons and were implemented in three representative areas of Bolivia: Caranavi, department of La Paz; El Torno, department of Santa Cruz; and the Andean region of Cochabamba.

These are areas with very different realities and contexts. Therefore, the *Colaboratorio* team did not replicate the same idea in the three regions, but in each event adapted the methodology used in the first meeting, considering the cultural and social particularities of each site.

What they did maintain, however, was the diversity and plurality of its participants. Over 60 people attended the three events, and more than half of the participants were women, an aspect on which CEPRA always insists in its activities. Besides community and local media journalists and experts, representatives of municipal governments, the healthcare

sector, schools, institutions that promote rural development, and small agricultural producers also attended.

During these regional events, after the initial diagnosis of the situation of the radio stations, and given that the community had already gathered, we seized the opportunity to move on to stage 2: the innovation laboratory where we design the ideal radio station. The participants received Rastis and handicraft materials and we encouraged them to creatively transform their ideas into concepts that can be seen and touched, turning training spaces into active and fun moments where everyone feels empowered to participate.

Results

At the end of the four ideathons, the CEPRA team working in the *Colaboratorio* analyzed the results. It sought to understand the relationship between the radio station and the community's social actors, their participation in the programming of the stations, and whether the programs they broadcast respond to the audiences' demands.

Certainly, due to the sample size, the diagnosis would have no scientific value, but it is undoubtedly a very valuable indi-

Álvaro Benjo Cruz
Radio Cultural Café de Caranavi

❝ **The traditional way of conducting seminars or workshops is to prepare slides and project them. However, this activity was more than listening, everyone got involved, participated, shared their ideas and joined work groups. It was very dynamic and inclusive. It was something new, and we had the opportunity to express ourselves, to talk and make figurines, to actually work. It has been wonderful and new for some peers from social organizations, even the same students who participated said: 'We don't do that at school'.**

facebook.com/watch/?v=401818807206696
p.dw.com/p/3NtYu

Fabiana Condori
CEPRA
Colaboratorio team

❝ **Community radios are in trouble because the audience no longer listens to them and the announcers stay in their booth; they are deaf and have long beards. Then, you must renew this, you must bring more people in and get them to participate in these spaces; then, they will fulfill their function as a community radio. I believe that we must continue on this path and that this will achieve several of the objectives of a radio station.**

cator that confirmed CEPRA's suspicions. Furthermore, the results were similar in the four ideathons held, which supports the research even more and is a specific guide for the areas in which the *Colaboratorio* is considering working.

This activity confirmed the disconnect between the media and their communities, as well as low citizen participation. Although this had been evident during each ideathon, it was much clearer when we compiled the conclusions of all of them, showing the same central problem: **low audience participation in the radio programs.** Furthermore, they identified four main causes common to all diagnoses:

– *The programming does not respond to the community's communication demands.* They do not address topics that are of interest to them. Most of them prioritize the dissemination of information from government sources instead of including the community and social organizations in their information agenda. They also do this with very traditional and aged formats, they are monotonous and repetitive, lack innovation and are oblivious to new trends.
– *There is a low analytical and critical capacity of journalists on strategic issues.* They make a superficial approach or repeat what other media outlets say. They do not make a critical analysis on the causes and impacts of the problems that arise in their region. This is partly due to the lack of training offers on strategic and journalistic issues, some journalists are reluctant, and radio stations have few personnel and insufficient economic resources.
– *Little use of ICTs.* Community radios are limited to using instant messaging and do not explore other tools that could lower operating costs and offer permanent contact with the population. For example, moving a transmitter or mobile unit to broadcast shows from the street is no longer necessary. We can do a complete show outside with a mobile phone with Internet access and a microphone. There is software to record interviews with multiple guests from different locations. During the pandemic, many stations stopped broadcasting because they did not know how to use remote desktop software to manage the radio computer from home.[22]
– *Radio stations are self-absorbed.* According to the diagnoses, community radios are trapped in their comfort zone and in the whirlpool of their daily activities, which prevents them from having the necessary vision of the need to invest in the renovation of the radio station. Some directors see training as something useful to train new workers, but they train them to continue doing the same. Also, under the pressure of the economic sustainability of the station,

they neglect their communication work and their key role as intermediaries between the different social actors. This prevents them from creating alliances with other people or community sectors to strengthen each other. These alliances could enhance their programming with specialized information, multiple perspectives, and greater elements to inform the population.

These are enlightening and worrying results. With this data, CEPRA was able to confirm its suspicions about the divide between many community media and its audiences and thus confirmed the need for a space such as the *Colaboratorio*.

With a much clearer picture, thanks to the diagnoses, and with a good number of ideas and proposals received from the participants, the *Colaboratorio* moved on to the third stage of the process, the *Innovation Laboratory.*

Stage 2: *Innovation laboratories:* producing new radio formats

The diagnosis analysis shows that "the radio formats used in radio stations are monotonous and repetitive, they are very trite and there is no renewal to make them more dynamic and attractive."

To face this problem, following the diagnoses, the *Colaboratorio* continued to carry out participatory meetings, but this time it convened an innovation laboratory. The creative part was about to start!

If the aim of the diagnoses was to find out what the audience thinks, the most logical step was to continue involving them in the next stages of the process. Usually, audience studies get the information, then the media outlet interprets it and finally adjusts the programming based on those interpretations. The station's team designs the new spaces, and these are rarely tested with a focal group of listeners before going on the air to find out if this new approach meets the demands expressed in the audience studies.

This is precisely the approach of the *Colaboratorio*: to detect the existing deficiencies in their media outlets together with the audience and build the possible new productions with them. Ultimately, the *Colaboratorio* aims to make listeners a part of the entire process of rethinking the station, including its communication project and programming.

To this end, a few months after the conclusion of the diagnoses, in August 2019, the *Innovation Laboratory* convened a hackathon. The staff of different stations and social actors of some communities met to create proposals that invited radio stations to renew their shows with new participatory formats.

---

[22] Know some of these software for your radio in the manual Radio in a post-pandemic world: Tools and strategies for the 'new normal' (2020), published by DW Akademie: https://akademie.dw.com/en/radioin-a-post-pandemic-world-tools-and-strategies-for-the-new-normal/a-55718936

What is participation and how is it measured?

Community media have wanted to increase participation since their inception, and this is a constant concern of DW Akademie's work with its partners in Latin America. However, to evaluate its decrease or increase, we must measure it. This is a complex task, mainly because we must first establish what we mean by participation and what we are going to measure. But there are no unified definitions or criteria for measuring these aspects.

Taking advantage of the diagnoses made with the community radio stations in the framework of the *Colaboratorio*, with CEPRA we wanted to further delve into this topic. The advantage of working participation with an organization like CEPRA is that it is not only a production and training center, but it is a radio network and has three stations of its own. This allows posing the problems with a broad and cross-cutting perspective. According to Juan Ordoñez, director of CEPRA, his organization does not only reflect on these topics in isolation but does so together with its own and partner radio stations.

"We realized that, for many people, participating is calling the radio station or sending a message through social media. That's all. They used to visit the station more. So, if people don't come to the radio, the radio must go to the people. With the *Colaboratorio* we want to encourage radio stations to leave their encapsulated buildings and meet their audience and the different social actors. But not so that they participate only during the shows: we want them to participate in the production too."

During the diagnoses we were able to verify that, in fact, community radios focus on quantifying the number of listeners or the number of people who follow or comment on their social media accounts. However, is this only the participation that community media should encourage and measure? Are we only interested in measuring how many people follow or listen to us? Don't we also want to know who they are and find out whether they are in fact a diverse audience?

To answer these questions, CEPRA and DW Akademie are working together to develop a pioneering instrument in community broadcasting that measures participation. It is true that there are manuals to apply audience studies, but they do not mention how to measure other ways in which audiences are involved in a station's programming or management, nor do they focus on the quality or pluralism of their programming, both factors that directly influence the number and type of listeners.

The preliminary results of this tool will be shown in 2022 and will be available on CEPRA website. This way, we want to know what community radios think of participation and then agree on levels to measure it; above all, we aspire to answer some of the most frequent questions by the media in general, but especially community radios: How do we get them to listen to us more? What channels can we open to participation? At what times do we want the community to be involved in the project? How and who develops the communicative project of a community radio?

Juan Ordoñez, director of CEPRA, explains why social actors were also involved in this creative stage: "If we want the new formats to respond to the needs of the different sectors and appeal to the entire public of the radio station, the call for the *Innovation Laboratory* should be diverse and representative in terms of gender, social status, ethnic origin, age, training, work history… We invited journalists, a former ombudsman, teachers and students, social media experts, translators, columnists, consultants, feminists, rural producers, a former deputy and an environmental engineer with experience in participatory research methodologies in rural and urban areas. In short, a variety of profiles that enriched the resulting radio formats."

Laboratories, not workshops

When we name things, we also build preconceptions. Since the famous *Power Point* became fashionable in training sessions, it seems that attending a workshop is just about sitting in a chair and observing an endless presentation of slides with very long texts. Many community communication organizations that come from the tradition of popular education have been infected by this *disease*.

Until the word is re-signified, the collective imaginary assigns a passive role to workshop participants. This is why the *Colaboratorio* chose to convene an *Innovation Laboratory.* This way, attendees receive a very different type of instruction. Although they may not know very well what it means, the word refers to a space where people experiment, try and do things. In other words, a much more active and provocative imaginary that elicits a certain attitude.

Furthermore, experiments are conducted in laboratories. The products do not have to be finished, as we are not looking for perfectly finished solutions but proposals to replicate and test in other spaces. We can even make mistakes! It is a space in which we will discard many ideas and let ourselves be surprised. Some of the best inventions we currently enjoy, such as penicillin or the microwave oven, were achieved by *failures* or accidents in a laboratory.

To achieve these objectives, it is important to design a strong methodology and force ourselves to devise inviting activities, involve all the participants, do not lose the playful spirit, and make it feel like a fun game. Even the place chosen for the event can allow us greater flexibility when it comes to creativity in designing the activities. Having not only classrooms, but large and open spaces such as gardens greatly facilitates the expansion of groups and more energetic activities. It may even be a good idea to sleep in the same place! Participants will be isolated from daily concerns and tasks and can focus on their work. Moreover, the downtime is used to strengthen relationships and forge friendships, which always has a positive influence and enriches the interaction of the work groups.

The *Innovation Laboratory,* convened as part of the *Colaboratorio* to renew the programming of community radios with new formats, lasted for four days. After the usual introductions and the collective creation of the ground rules for the event, the results obtained in the diagnosis were presented. As you can imagine, CEPRA did not use a Power Point presentation, but created a specific narrative using the metaphor of a train trip. For this, they built three railroad stations to symbolize the axes on which the diagnoses were based: the reality of participation in community radio stations in Bolivia, the topics they deal with in their programming, and the use of digital technologies. And to go from one station to another, the Colaboratorio built a train that took the group from one place to another. The InnovaTrain started the trip with a voice-over announcing the stops while El ferroviario, a typical Bolivian song by the group Llajtaymanta, played on the background: "Attention, passengers of the InnovaTrain. We will pass through stations with a lot of emotions, creativity and new experiences. We are about to embark on a journey, don't get too comfortable!" Upon arriving at each station, the facilitator explained the results of the diagnosis on that thematic axis and the par-

ticipants discussed whether they agreed with those opinions.

The Innovation Laboratory continued with a talk by the Bolivian theater director, actor and radio producer Alejandro Marañón, who presented different examples of innovative productions, some of them represented live, which led to a debate on creativity with the participants.

This was the start of the production part, which was conceived as a talent show using the hackathon methodology. The four teams had two and a half days to develop and produce a prototype, that is, a proposal for an innovative radio format. After a day of work, each group presented the idea of their format and a preliminary script, received feedback from the jury and the other participants and, after adjusting their proposal, went out to the street to produce their prototype, that is, to record the interviews and the sounds they needed to have a finished production to present on the last day. Furthermore, each group was asked to develop a recipe that would guide any other media outlet that wanted to replicate that new format on their station.

The criteria to evaluate the journalistic formats were:

– Strengthen the work of the radio station.
– Help to carry out collaborative work.
– Motivate the participation of citizens of different sectors, guaranteeing gender and generational parity.
– Applicability in community radio stations with technical limitations and where only one or two people work.

Prototypes

After the four days of work, the different groups presented their results: four original formats that could be adapted and implemented by any other media outlet following certain guidelines. The proposals included:

– *Entrecleta.* Interviews in which the protagonists ride a bicycle to promote environmental awareness. It is a pre-produced program that requires previous research of the area to be visited. It serves as an intermediary format between the citizens and the authorities.
– *Parlatón.* A format that collects and highlights the testimonies and life stories of the protagonists, narrated from the scene. In the background, listeners hear the sounds of the environment where they carry out their activities. This format can be broadcast in a single chapter or converted into a series.
– *Entre hoy y ayer.* This format brings the messages and interaction of youth from social media to the radio. Here, young people question the system established by adults, who rarely listen to the thoughts or consider the initiatives of young people.

© Colaboratorio

facebook.com/watch/?v=1087337004989894

– **Mosaico Radiofónico.** This format recovers testimonies for the information genre and tells stories in a short time. It is composed of four to six testimonials from different people around the same theme. The story is told with the voices of the protagonists and whoever narrates only intervenes to introduce or end the show.

Recipes to replicate

Cooking recipes, initially transmitted orally and later written, have kept the gastronomic tradition of families and entire countries alive. This detailed list of ingredients, with their amounts and the steps to mix them, allows different people to replicate a dish in different places.

But in many cases, a specific ingredient is not available in a country, or its residents do not like a special flavor. For example, it is unimaginable to eat a Peruvian ceviche or a *pepián* in Guatemala without adding a little coriander, but this aromatic herb is not a common flavor in other countries. Therefore, many recipes have evolved, taking out or adding new ingredients or spices, or have changed unintentionally due to misunderstandings, by leaving them in the oven for longer than necessary, or because the milk goes sour, resulting in a dish different to the one originally intended.

Talking about Cochabamba, Bolivia's gastronomic capital, is hard without making an analogy with food. The *kallu con llajwa* are also a great incentive for creativity in the workshops held by CEPRA[23].

This preamble serves to say that the recipes created during the *Colaboratorio* are intended as a guide and instructions. The quantities and cooking times can be adjusted. In other words, the number and duration of testimonials, sound effects or musical introductions can be adapted according to the resources available or the audience. The objective is to achieve a pleasant taste, that does not upset the stomach or leave you hungry, and that makes the listener look forward to coming back for another serving of radio.

Acknowledging that the recipes are not written in stone and that each media outlet should adopt them to their reality, each experiment developed in the *Colaboratorio* had an instruction manual for replicating. Each group created their own, but also received suggestions from the other participants. Fur-

[23] Kallu is a typical dish of Cochabamba, which mixes boiled potatoes with onion, tomato and cheese. Like other dishes of Bolivian cuisine, it is accompanied by llajwa, a traditional spice made with tomato and locoto, a chili also known as rocoto elsewhere.

thermore, some were later adjusted by CEPRA and other radio stations to come up with a final proposal that would serve as inspiration. As an example, below we present the recipe for the *Mosaico Radiofónico*, as originally developed during the Innovation Laboratory.

Stage 3: Assistance: the waves experiment

Remember that the *Colaboratorio* is the result of a project implemented by DW Akademie in Bolivia due to a specific concern of the CEPRA team, which had seen that workshop participants do not always apply what they have learned in their media. That is why the first prototype of the *Colaboratorio* proposed that the process would be incomplete without an assistance stage. Diagnosing the reality, experimenting with possible solutions by developing new formats, and posting their instructions on the web or simply distributing them through community radio stations is not enough. There should be a plan for implementation, support and incentives so that radio stations can replicate and test these new prototypes and formats in their programming.

Certainly, the ideal process would be to replicate all the stages in each place where there is a radio station wishing to reformulate its programming to connect with that specific community, bring it together, know what they would like to hear through the radio station, and produce programs with it. In fact, there are many community radio stations that have editorial boards or audience committees in which the audience participates or makes programming suggestions. However, the *Colaboratorio* is aware of the time or personnel limitations that many radio stations have and that prevent them from implementing such a process. Therefore, the *recipes* allow them to adopt ideas that have been tested and reproduce them as intended to see whether they work or adapt them as necessary.

The assistance is not exclusively conceived as a process that guarantees the inclusion of the format in the radio stations' programming; the objective is rather to know the different ways of adapting the format to each context to enhance the recipes with more variety. For example, the bicycle can be substituted for a donkey in places where the slopes make pedaling unfeasible for many of the possible interviewees. After all, these formats aim to involve the audience more and encourage their participation in the media.

In this stage, the *Colaboratorio* faced the complex reality of the media during the pandemic. Many radio stations in Bolivia stopped broadcasting due to economic and personnel problems; some even closed down permanently. Of the six radio stations with which this stage began, only three continued and a fourth joined along the way. Radio Andina, Originaria Raqaypampa, Radio Uncía and Comunitaria de Morochata received assistance from the *Colaboratorio* in the tests for achieving formats that improve plurality and participation in their programming.


David Huanca, Colaboratorio Coordinator during the *Innovation Laboratory*

How to produce a mosaico radiofónico?

1. Identify a current topic that interests your audience.

2. Map the people who will be the protagonists of the mosaic (sources). Participants should be diverse. Interviews can also be conducted through social media.

3. Develop a guide with specific questions for each protagonist.

4. Make sure that the recorder has enough battery. Check that the interviewee is not too close to the microphone and that he/she does not saturate the sound. The objective is to record the testimony with the best quality possible.

5. Record the testimonies.

6. Direct the interviewee to begin the testimony by stating his or her full name, institution or organization and position, or neighborhood if he/she is not an authority or representative.

7. Edit each testimonial separately, deleting your questions so that each testimonial lasts about a minute.

8. Record a voice-over to place at the beginning. Introduce the topic to be covered. Add a final message or short conclusion at the end.

9. Add musical transitions or sound effects to separate one testimony from the other.

10. The mosaic will last a maximum of five minutes and will ideally contain between four and six testimonies from different people, covering various approaches to the subject matter.

11. The testimonials will also be edited separately to be disseminated individually through social media or the station's website. It is advisable to distribute them next to a graph or image, for example:
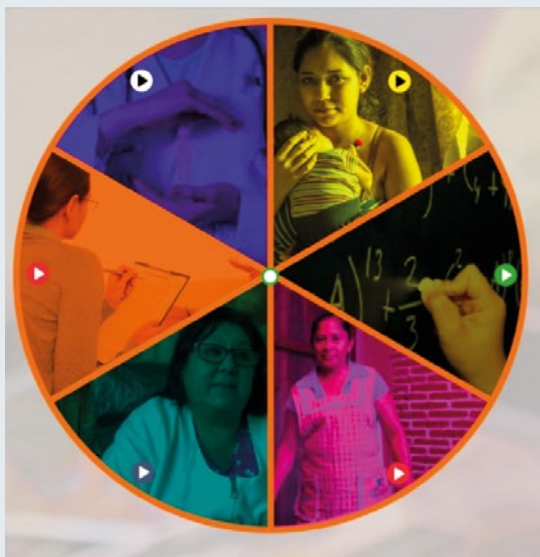
You can listen to a sample of the *mosaíco radiofónico* and the other formats created during the *Innovation Lab* on the *Colaboratorio's* website.

ceprabolivia.org/blog/colaboratorio/

Stage 4: Reflect, document, socialize and evaluate

As we have mentioned, the *Colaboratorio* is not conceived as a production center to develop new formats, but as a space for reflection that assists and advises community media to produce new communication proposals.

Therefore, systematizing, documenting and evaluating the process is key to expanding the number of stations that can adopt these new formats. After providing the assistance, the process must be reflected upon and documented so that other stations can replicate it, using open recipes and flexible processes—as we explained above—that allow adapting each process to different regions.

This stage should not be seen as the end of a project, but as the necessary beginning of a cyclical process and, therefore, should be considered as an initial stage. As we have seen throughout this book, any reflection process always goes hand in hand with an evaluation, which allows refining and improving methodologies, introducing new elements, and thinking of new proposals. For example, this first experience focused on the production aspect, but the diagnosis revealed many uncertainties and possible lines of work, so that future Innovation Laboratories could invite radio stations to experiment with the use of ICTs in the media or to search for possible strategies for the long-awaited sustainability.

CEPRA not only socializes and shares the lessons learned with different radio stations in activities and workshops, but also applies them internally. Note that it has three stations of its own and facilitates virtual courses under the VirDual platform. The next chapter, which will focus on community radio management, has already incorporated a large part of the *Colaboratorio's* experiences, lessons learned and recipes for increasing participation and plurality in community radio programming.

© Colaboratorio

The *Choriván*: in search of participation

In order to better accompany radio stations in their processes of change and to address possible requests from other media outlet to the *Colaboratorio,* CEPRA bought a vehicle named *Choriván*. This mobile unit, conceived in the framework of the DW Akademie project in Bolivia and financed by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), receives its peculiar name from a play on words that adds the *choripán*, a typical bread and chorizo sandwich, and the word van. The name, which initially emerged as a joke, with the idea that the arrival of CEPRA to the communities should be accompanied by a party to promote local commerce, selling chorizos produced in the region, gives meaning to the initiative, as Juan Ordoñez explains:

"The *Choriván* is a mobile unit with radio equipment. The *Colaboratorio* is now mobile and allows us to bring the radio to these people, to showcase their customs and allow them to become the ones who produce the messages they want to have broadcast. We want the host to talk less and the population to talk more. The *Choriván* is also conceived to generate income by selling *choripanes*, in addition to supporting the local economy by buying raw materials from local producers. It came out half-jokingly, half-seriously, but eventually the idea came to fruition."

This video shows the *Challa del Choriván*, a ceremony of the native peoples of the Andes in which the locals ask the Pachamama and the ancestors to bless the workplace.

facebook.com/watch/?v=3963103660413356

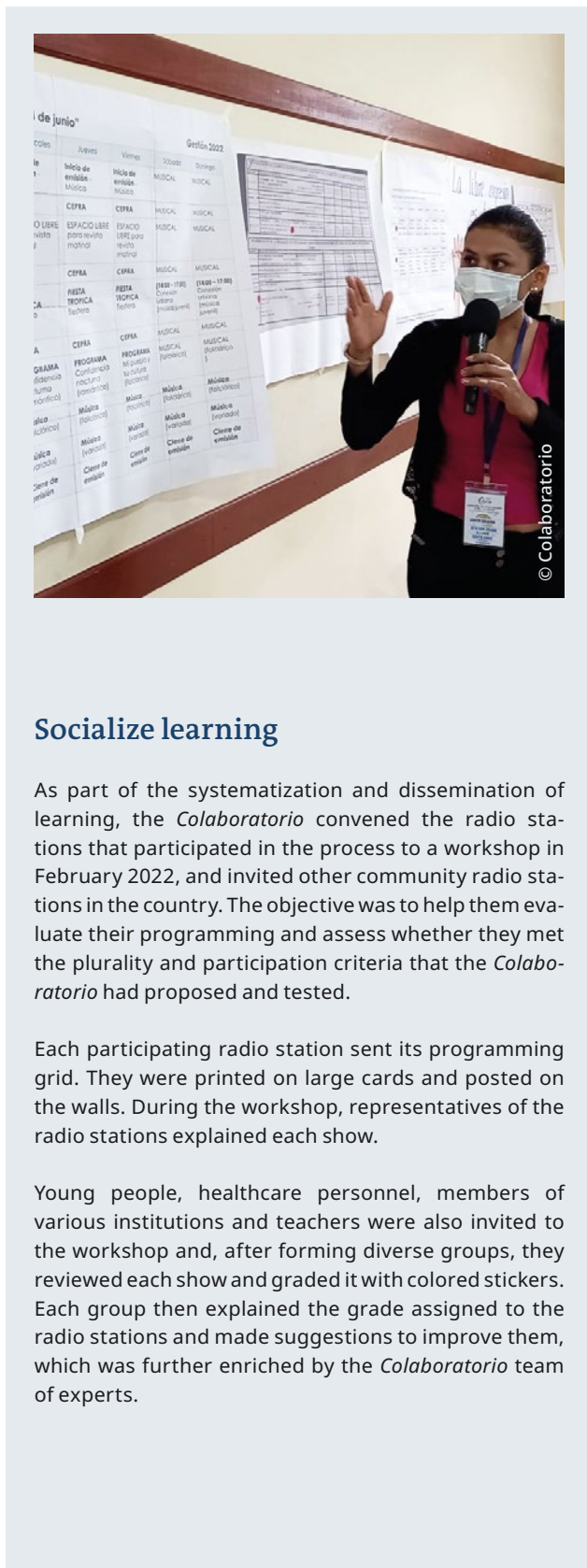## 5.2 Ideas to replicate a *Colaboratorio*

Diverse calls

If we want diversity of criteria, opinions and perspectives on how to achieve greater participation, as well as a radio station that is accepted by most of the community, the calls to these events must be as representative as possible and include all sectors. Participants should include people of all ages, religions, persons with disabilities or members of sexual diversity organizations. In other words, the more varied the ingredients in our kitchen, the more likely we are to create recipes that are attractive to a great majority, or at least we will be able to prepare different dishes to please all diners.

Conceive the *Colaboratorio* as a process

We have insisted a lot on this point, but it is worth stressing it again. CEPRA's experience shows that these processes are successful if they are designed based on the needs detected during the diagnoses. Starting with activities designed before knowing the needs of the radios or the audiences would be repeating the same error that the *Colaboratorio* seeks to correct.

And we must not forget that the process does not end with the

© Colaboratorio

Socialize learning

As part of the systematization and dissemination of learning, the *Colaboratorio* convened the radio stations that participated in the process to a workshop in February 2022, and invited other community radio stations in the country. The objective was to help them evaluate their programming and assess whether they met the plurality and participation criteria that the *Colaboratorio* had proposed and tested.

Each participating radio station sent its programming grid. They were printed on large cards and posted on the walls. During the workshop, representatives of the radio stations explained each show.

Young people, healthcare personnel, members of various institutions and teachers were also invited to the workshop and, after forming diverse groups, they reviewed each show and graded it with colored stickers. Each group then explained the grade assigned to the radio stations and made suggestions to improve them, which was further enriched by the *Colaboratorio* team of experts.

proposals but continues with the support in their implementation and the systematization of the *recipe book.*

Resources for mobility

Although a mobile unit is better, having a *choriván* is not necessary; in any case, the resources to move are required. It is always more convenient to have the *Colaboratorio* team move. It is possible to organize a national meeting where several people from different regions get together, but it is much better if the activities are held where the radio station that will benefit from the process is located. Besides strengthening the station before its community, the meeting's methodology can be adapted to the particularities of the area or region and thus will be more familiar to the participants.

A provocation to constantly rethink ourselves

The *Colaboratorio* is not a finished idea; the processes designed are constantly reviewed, adapted, and transformed. "It is a way of life of the journalist; always keep thinking how to innovate," said Juan Ordoñez, "there is no magic formula or someone who tells you what to do. It must be a constant dynamic of breaking the radio fad to incorporate new ways of doing things."

Learn by doing

Media outlets such as CEPRA that come from the tradition of Popular Education in Latin America have incorporated the action-reflection-action participatory methodology. It is also the way DW Akademie works in its training: focusing the learning on the participants. Based on what we know, we put this into practice, reflect on it and see what we can improve to continue doing what we have learned. Therefore, it is a cyclical process of constant learning.

Open spaces that enable innovation

There is no innovation without collaboration, whether direct or indirect. Even inventions attributed to a single person feed on pre-existing notions. That is why the *Colaboratorio* is conceived as a space and not as an institution. An open space for collaboration to achieve innovation and increase participation in radio stations.

Colaboratorio / Benedikt Borckes

" In the media we constantly need to adapt to new technologies, innovate, and be more creative. Engaging social actors has been a bonus that has helped us a great deal in this regard. Young people, for example, have many good ideas. They may not know how to produce a radio program, but we are there to give them certain guidelines. However, they are the ones who know the topics they want to address, and the interests of young people like them. The same with social organizations: they want to deliver their message and their perspective regarding a social problem. And radio must be there for that.

Álvaro Benjo Cruz, Radio Cultural Café de Caranavi

Unafraid of making mistakes

Gabriela Calle, of Radio Pachamama in Tarija, thinks that one of the main reasons for radios to be reluctant to innovate in their programming models, is the "fear that people won't accept them, that they won't go well".

Just like Juan Ordoñez, her invitation is to take risks trying something new and do it without being afraid of making mistakes. "Of course, this does not mean that there are processes where ideas must be approved. But if we assume that we are going to be wrong, we are already closing ourselves off. When we want to create new ideas, we will always carry out previous surveys, diagnoses in which the audience will tell us what interests them. This makes it much easier to get it right."

5.3 Lessons learned from the *Colaboratorio*

Community radio is done with the community

Once again, the experience of the *Colaboratorio* confirms that if a local or community radio station leaves its context behind and does not encourage participation, it will gradually distance itself from its audience. These spaces encourage dialogue with the audience, not only to get involved in the programming of the station, but to establish a relationship that guarantees its sustainability.

> **❝** Under this perspective, efforts have been made to engage young people, professionals, doctors, etc., and we have taken small steps. For example, one of the doctors who participated in the national diagnosis now visits the radio in Comanche to host preventive health programs. A dentist speaks of dental health on another somewhat neglected radio station in rural areas. Small producers of Villa Abecia, in Chuquisaca, are interviewed to offer their natural products promoting healthy food. And this was achieved only with the excuse of the diagnoses, facilitating dialogue between the different actors with the radio stations. Some said that it was the first time they met after so many years. They passed each other on the street but had not taken the time to get together and analyze the role of radio in the town.

Juan Ordoñez, director of CEPRA

Breaking traditions

Provoking innovation experiences is no easy task. Especially if the appearance, the packaging of the activity, is not inviting.

The *Colaboratorio* project promoted by CEPRA and DW Akademie has taken participants out of their comfort zone and provoked their imagination.

Sometimes this is achieved with inviting activities such the *InnovaTrain*. The CEPRA team took a few minutes to cut out and paint the locomotive and a few more to record the initial speech and add music. But the time invested to prepare the Innovation

Laboratory served to elicit different sensations in the participants once the activity began.

On the one hand, they experienced movement, which not only helped awaken the body and mind, but invited them to change places and not to speak/think from the same place.

Thus, the participants were prepared to go from station to station. It was a journey similar to the one made during the diagnosis. It is very different to sit people in a chair and have them look at tables on a blackboard or look at Power Point presentations for an hour, than to invite them to go through the diagnoses and represent the same data with drawings and concepts. The information transmitted will be the same, but the form will be different. Thus, the attitude of the participants will also be different when in the next activity we ask them to develop creative proposals to solve the problems detected during the diagnosis.

Besides the train, other strategies were also used. For example, the room of the place where the *Innovation Laboratories* were held was full of messages such as: "In this space it's forbidden to say, 'it's too bold' or 'it's too risky', 'it's impossible' or 'it can't be done'."

This way, the place already conveys a clear idea: this is not a traditional training space, but a place to create and experiment.

In the *Innovation Laboratory,* the participants were not told directly to develop creative formats. Instead, it used a talent show in which each team had a name, a mentor who assisted them, and there was a jury to evaluate the proposal. These methodologies propose other ways of interacting and working; they provoke motivation, add playful components and healthy

competition, and encourage the groups. In the end, these factors have a positive impact on the results. The *Colaboratorio* team thinks that formats such as the *Entrecleta* or the *Parlatón* would not have been possible in more traditional workshops.

To encourage people to develop their ideas, each person receives a match during the round table discussion: they can talk for as long as the match is lit.

In short, if we aspire to achieve a meeting where we obtain very creative ideas, this creativity must also be reflected in the methodology. Play is, in many cases, the best means to learn and create.

Narratives as a guiding thread

Besides the *InnovaTrain* or the use of rejuvenating creams for the radio, CEPRA and DW Akademie have used other narratives in their activities to help develop workshops in a playful and creative way. Another good example was VirDual. This *Specialization Course in Digital Radio Journalism for Community Radio Broadcasters* was designed entirely from a superhero narrative. During the opening event, the room was decorated with posters reminiscent of powerful characters. The inauguration invited participants to be superhumans who, throughout the course, would acquire superpowers to save the radio from the villains who threatened it: boredom, monotony, or lack of participation. This aesthetic was maintained throughout the course's videos and contents, in which Camila and Mateo, two real life superheroes who worked in a Bolivian radio station, joined the participants through the eight modules of the course. In addition, the participants were divided according to their region of origin and each group had to choose a name. The groups received points for each activity and there was a ranking showing their progress.

Although the course could have been developed without using this narrative, it was well received by the participants. "It was fun and encouraged us not to drop out of the course. When someone was about to give up, the tutor reminded them: 'the radio needs you, heroes don't give up', and we laughed together, but in the end, it was a way to feel motivated and most of us completed all the modules," said Aurelia, one of the participants, with a smile on her face. CEPRA combined these gamification components with the constant support of regional tutors who met with their groups every two months. The rest of the time, the learning was done through a website and the LMS Chamilo platform. With these strategies, **83%** of the participants completed the course.

Inauguration of VirDual. In the foreground, Juan Luis Gutiérrez, academic coordinator. In the background, on the course banner, Camila and Mateo.

All the videos were presented with a comic book aesthetic and were created by Benedikt Borchers, Program Director of DW Akademie in Bolivia.

4. *Space Booth*
Guatemala

The multimedia project Sónica 106.9 FM is part of Asociación de Servicios Educativos y Culturales (ASEC) in Guatemala City. It is a youth radio station produced by youth. And we highlight the radio because, although it is true that it broadcasts in the 106.9 FM frequency, its broadcasting means go far beyond the Hertzian waves.

They are very active in social media, the channels preferred by their young target audience: high school students between 13 and 18 years old. The 20 members of the Sónica team are also in their teens. Their average age is 21 years and many of them were trained in workshops taught by the station. For example, Jennifer Velásquez signed up for the *CreActivos* summer courses when she was 17, and four years later became the director of Sónica.

The station used to be named *Uy, Uy, Uy* and had regular programming for an adult audience. However, since it became Sónica in 2015 with the support of DW Akademie, the station has not stopped innovating by creating strategies to connect with its young audience. This chapter will focus on one of them: the Space Booth, a fun way to educate people in the responsible use of media while opening the microphones of the station so that the young people can speak freely.

This text was elaborated with the contributions of Jennifer Velásquez, director of Sónica radio; Sara Martínez, editor-in-chief of the station; Edgar Zamora Orpinel, director of projects of Sónica; and Patricia Noboa Armendáriz and Julia Manske, Program Directors of DW Akademie in Guatemala and Mexico, respectively. We also want to thank the students who have participated in the different visits of the *Space Booth.* We have included some of their testimonials in the following pages so that their personal experience is also present.

© Space Booth

José Alberto Fajardo
Space Booth participant

" It was my first time ever as a radio host. At first, I was very nervous, but eventually you get over it. I'd like to work at Radio Sónica someday.

You can hear more testimonials at:
youtube.com/watch?v=Xf1RprPPMDM

Astrid Sapón
Space Booth participant

" My experience talking today was great. When I started talking, I felt nervous, but as I talked about the subject, I gradually became more confident. Having the Space Booth here, in our school, was awesome. We all had the opportunity to speak. It's something we've never felt before.

youtube.com/watch?v=Xf1RprPPMDM

6.1 The *Space Booth* experience

A *Space Booth* is a mobile radio studio equipped with everything needed to make a radio program from a school, a sports field or any other place away from the station. It has microphones, an audio mixer—or console—and mobile broadcasting equipment that sends the signal to the central Sónica studios, from where it is broadcast over its frequency, 106.9 FM, and over the Internet.

The Space Booth, as if it were a cosmic journey, gravitates around educational centers, flying from school to school to amplify the voices of the youth. "If the boys or girls don't go to the station, then the booth goes to them," explains Jennifer Velásquez, the very young director of Sónica.

From the booth you can sing and talk. The microphones are open to share their stories, comment on the situation of the country, play the flute or curiously ask about topics that are still taboo in Guatemalan society. This is about creating a safe space where they exercise their right to speak their minds freely.

Chavos and *chavas*, as young people in Guatemala are affectionately called, face the "lack of opportunities, insufficient attention, a missing father," as José Luis Escobar, from the INEB educational center, in Zone 21, one of the neighborhoods with the highest poverty rate in the city, tells us. Sónica was founded in 2015 as a communication project aimed at adolescents who reside in marginal zones, where precariousness, insecurity and poverty are exacerbated, and the possibilities to speak in the media are scarce.

But, although the doors of the station are always open, getting there is not easy, especially for poor young people. In a city as large as Guatemala, with chaotic traffic and poor public transport, a trip from Zone 21 to Zone 2—where the station's studio is located— can take the same time as an intergalactic trip.

Therefore, from Sónica's cosmic shuttle, the *Space Booth* regularly takes off and heads to a new educational center. There, a mobile studio where everything is possible and where dreams can come true, lands.

First version of the Space Booth

Second version of the Booth, much more mobile and lighter.

The booth's evolution

The first *spacecraft* that Sónica chartered was literally a radio booth: a soundproofed room, a huge bucket that had to be moved in a truck to the educational centers. Upon entering, the young people had the feeling of being inside a radio studio: it was acoustically conditioned, had the professional equipment necessary to broadcast a program, and there was a host who they had previously listened to through their radio sets and who was now their co-host.

It was a very special feeling for the students, since most of them had never stepped on a radio or television studio. But that first version of the booth had a problem: it wasn't really mobile. It had small wheels, but moving it was very difficult and required five or six people to load it and unload it from a truck.

Sónica's team soon realized that such a large and heavy booth was not operational or functional. The moving costs and the installation time were very high, and they could not visit all the schools who wanted a visit from them.

In addition, the physical structure greatly conditioned the way students interacted with it. The radio booth invited broadcasting, so at first the school visits only consisted of that: open the microphones and let the students say whatever they wanted.

Initially this was the project's objective. The problem is that these long broadcasts—some lasting more than four hours—were very fun for the students participating but were not as attractive to the public listening to them on the radio.

To complicate things, not all the students at the school participate in the activity. While 50 or 60 of them played an instrument, recited a poem or rapped a song, others received a workshop in a classroom by the Sónica team. However, the workshop was not as fun as what their classmates were doing in the schoolyard inside the booth.

If anything characterizes the energetic Sónica team, it is the evaluation, self-criticism, adaptation and improvement of the projects. With the support of DW Akademie, Sónica is conceived as a *media laboratory* and applies an *action-reflection-action* methodology. For this reason, from this experimental logic, after orbiting more than 30 schools with the first version of the *Space Booth* for a year, they thoroughly evaluated the experience and concluded that it had to evolve. As Edgar Zamora Orpinel, Project Director of Sónica and part of the DW Akademie team, points out, "projects are alive, especially if you work with young people. They need constant review and evaluation. This feedback is what helps us reformulate our processes."

After an evaluation process, Sónica was convinced that the *Booth* had to evolve. It had to be lighter and more mobile. And not just physically. On the one hand, it had to be transformed into a truly mobile facility that could be moved and installed more easily to visit a greater number of schools. On the other hand, the methodology of the visits had to change to involve more participants, offer them a comprehensive training experience—not only with radio and games—while engaging and inviting the public that listened to the station during the visits to participate.

Concurrently with these reflections, DW Akademie in Guatemala started incorporating a new line of work focused on Media and Information Literacy (MIL) into its projects. Sónica was not left out of this trend: "Why not bring MIL and the *Booth* together to reach the schools with a completely special and spatial proposal?" they asked from the project.

And that's how the second generation of the *Booth* was born, where *radio astronauts* would teach MIL in their space expeditions to schools in Guatemala.

Media and Information Literacy

Since 2018, DW Akademie has been developing different Media and Information Literacy projects in Latin America.

The MIL projects promoted by DW Akademie strengthen the capacities of young people so that they can make critical, safe, intelligent and responsible use of the different media, especially social media.

Through different games and activities, they learn to analyze media content and reflect on the dangers of the Internet. They also learn about digital security measures to protect themselves on social media, tips to verify information and not share dubious news, or ways to recognize memes and images that may seem innocent and funny but that other people could find offensive.

And while they train their critical thinking, in the MIL workshops they learn to create and distribute their own messages through different media.

Schools in several countries now teach media literacy. "Because media technologies develop rapidly and media systems are complex and ever-changing, media and information literacy has become an essential skill all over the world," notes the *Media and information literacy: A practical guidebook for trainers* published by DW Akademie and available on the website.[24]

This is why Sónica is not the only one to incorporate MIL into its projects. ASEC, the association to which the station belongs, is also including content on Media and Information Literacy in *Home Teacher*, a distance education program through the radio of the Guatemalan Institute of Radio Education (IGER). Every year, nearly 15,000 students in the country who do not have the possibility of attending face-to-face schools graduate from primary, secondary and high school at this institute.

Beyond Guatemala, DW Akademie promotes the transmission of media skills in El Salvador through the innovation laboratory "Alfabeta Media Lab" together with Escuela de Comunicación Mónica Herrera and Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas Central.

---

[24] https://akademie.dw.com/en/media-and-information-litera-cy-a-practical-guidebook-for-trainers-third-edition/a-42423367

Dialogue between different social actors, training offers in MIL, multimedia productions and playful formats are some of the activities of this laboratory to position Media and Information Literacy on the public agenda.

DW Akademie also began working with MIL in Mexico from different areas, as explained by Julia Manske, Program Director of DW Akademie in Mexico: In collaboration with our partner *Alianza de Medios de Periodistas A Pie,* we encourage audiences to participate in the production of media content and to reflect on the critical use of media. We also partnered with leading actors to promote the MIL agenda in the country and in 2021 we jointly founded the *Red Ami México*, made up of eight organizations: UNESCO, the National Electoral Institute, the Mexican Radio Institute, Tomato Valley, Social-TIC, Universidad Veracruzana, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León and DW Akademie.

One of the first activities of Red AMI México was a *hackathon* with young people on the five MIL competencies: access, analyze, create, reflect, and act. The event was attended by the MIL heroes and heroines, illustrations originally developed by the Namibian team of DW Akademie and adapted to the Mexican context. This group of characters with superpowers show how to defend our media and informational environment against the four threats that seek to devastate freedom of expression: Usurper, Wounder, Rioter and Manipulator.

p.dw.com/p/480jO

A new Space Booth, a new special experience

In 2019, Sónica's staff was determined to try a new way of flying with the *Space Booth*. Patricia Noboa Armendáriz, Program Director of DW Akademie in Guatemala recalls that "in the *Space Booth* the whole team saw an ideal opportunity to work with MIL in schools while reinventing their visits."

It was clear that, for this new adventure, the ship needed some adjustments. And not just for aesthetic reasons or to make it lighter and easier to transport. These changes were aimed at transforming the experience, which would now be much more focused on MIL training.

The first step was to lighten the booth: simplify it as much as possible. It was no longer necessary to transport an entire radio studio because the broadcasts would not be the protagonists of the meetings with students.

The new *Space Booth* was reduced to a table to place the sound and broadcasting equipment and panels with the icons of the station and the project. Today, more than a booth, it is a *space stand*. It can be transported in a small van... and there's plenty of space left! It is a place occupied by a lot of games that fill the courtyards of schools and institutes, such as giant Jenga, roulettes, and huge dice. When the *Booth* arrives, participants can speak in front of the microphones and receive a comprehensive media education experience.

Jennifer Velásquez
Director of Sónica

" **Unfortunately, classical education considers you an 'antenna': you are passive, receiving. The idea of the Space Booth is that you are the protagonist of the games and activities. We avoid the 'today you're going to learn about media' narrative. We believe this approach makes it a very special.**

sonica.gt/

The *Space Booth* visits were transformed into interactive MIL training meetings where young people learn about media and social media, but not in a traditional way. Sónica avoids sessions that resemble traditional lessons. The challenge is to have fun and learn by playing with the other students.

In this new stage, the *Booth* has a secondary role within the playful experience and is no longer the core of the visit. Students continue to approach the microphone to speak their minds on the radio but, at the same time, they participate in a competition called Reto 106.9, which we will explain below.

Once Sónica arrives and installs the booth and the games, the teachers and the students go out to the schoolyard. The youthful music of Sónica 106.9 FM is already playing through the speakers. The host in the *Space Booth* welcomes them. It's all being broadcast on the radio. Participants are grouped by grades, forming five teams that will face each other in a kind of *yincana* that takes about an hour. All the groups take turns play-

ing the different *analogue* games of the circuit. Although the games are about the Internet and the media, there are no computers or mobile phones in the courtyard.

This recreational circuit has five games on Media and Information Literacy. Each group of ten participants plays each game for five minutes. During this time, they try to score as many points as possible competing against another group. The group leader wears a helmet of the color that identifies each team.

As the groups go through the circuit and get the right answers, they score points. At the end, the group with the most points wins the activity: "We quickly realized that the challenge factor, which presents the game as a competition, is something that excites the youth," said Edgar Zamora.

The students who win the challenge receive promotional gifts from the station, although the grand prize is an exclusive inter-

– *Manipulation Memory.* A giant memory game, where players must put pairs of images together. One is the original version and the other, a manipulated version. The group must guess the type of manipulation by choosing between the different types presented on the board.

© Space Booth

– *Information Jenga.* Participants remove blocks and answer questions about the information they share and consume on the Internet.

© Space Booth

– *"PO" Network.* The acronym stands for *"Target Audience"* in Spanish (Público Objetivo), which is how they named one of Sónica's pets: a snake. This activity is like the classic snakes and ladders game that runs through different squares. In this case, some boxes represent risks and other actions that are carried out in social media. The participants roll the dice and move accordingly. For example, they can lose a turn because their account was hacked or they do not have an Internet connection.

© Space Booth

– **Cosmic mini football.** It's a trivia on MIL issues. The facilitator reads a sentence, and the participants must "score" in one of the two goals in front of them: one has a "false" sign, and the other has a "true" sign. The groups take turns and each participant answers a question. The facilitator then explains the answer. No points are awarded if the group fails to score a goal or if the answer is incorrect.

– **Trivia.** A classic question-and-answer game about media use. In the new version they have incorporated a giant roulette wheel to assign questions to each group.

view in the Space Booth with the Sónica host, who has been reporting all the emotion of the *Reto 106.9 FM* live.

This new formula adopted by the *Space Booth* is also more attractive to its audience. Now the broadcasts are not continuous, but sporadic throughout the visit. The public follows the progress of the teams during the competition, and they can call the station to participate in a *porra* (a kind of bet without money) choosing their favorite team to win the *Challenge* and listen to the interview with the winning team.

The visits now combine two crucial components for the education of adolescents: participants embrace their right to freedom of expression, doing so through a radio station, and they develop critical thinking towards the media. All while having fun with their classmates!

As in any training process, the results are not evident in the short term, although, as Sara Martínez, Sónica's editor-in-chief, says, during the visits they can notice some changes in attitude or reflections that demonstrate a basic understanding of the subject and point to an intention to incorporate what they have learned into their communication and technological habits: "This whole circuit allows them to get fully involved in the operation of social media and, suddenly, they begin to question: 'That's true! I'd never thought this could happen on the Internet.' You realize that they are thinking about it, that they are already analyzing things. You can see that they are reflecting, that there are results. They tell you: 'I won't share that because I can offend someone. 'It's like planting the seed of MIL in them.

At the very least, they are expressing their intention to change certain attitudes."

Continuity: creating a community around Sónica

The visits are the beginning of a training process that teachers can continue in the classroom with the help of Sónica. At the request of the schools, the station sends new materials to enhance the participants' learning about MIL.

Sónica also stays in touch with the *chavos*. There is a Facebook group that students can join after the *Space Booth* visits their school. This way, Sónica opens its doors for them to participate in other activities such as the *CreActivos* summer courses.

Sónica Team on one of the Space Booth visits

Statistics

Since the experience began in 2016 and until 2021, Sónica has worked with about 20,000 young people from Guatemala City and neighboring municipalities in nearly 200 visits to schools, universities, special events, or when installing the *Space Booth* in streets or neighborhoods of the city.

During 2019 alone, Sónica's *Space Booth* visited about 80 schools, reaching over 5,000 young people and 3,000 more people through different activities.

In 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were six visits with more than 1,000 participants. Then, the in-person visits were suspended.

The *Space Booth* did not travel in 2021 either. There was an attempt to move the project to videoconferencing, but their target audience had limited Internet access. Even so, the virtual aspect allowed Sónica to work in ten remote workshops of *Cazamentiras* (Lies Hunters, verification of information in the media) with university and school students in Honduras and El Salvador. During these workshops, the digital version of some of their games made it possible to achieve online playful experiences that elicited reflection.

6.2 Ideas to replicate a *Space Booth*

Equipment required

Developing a stand-type Space Booth does not require a lot of equipment.

The first is the furniture: a large folding table that is easy to transport.

The banners and other decorative elements are part of the booth and set the scene for the visit. When Sónica was traveling with the cube, it was easy to identify it. Now that the structure has been reduced, the number of decorative elements with the station's logo has increased. A background that serves as a photocall, will encourage young participants to take selfies. This is an ideal way to promote the radio station.

A console or mixer is required, but it does not have to be big or sophisticated. We recommend at least two microphone inputs—preferably four—to allow for greater flexibility when interviewing several people at the same time without having them pass the microphone to each other. An alternative to mixers are external sound cards, also known as audio interfaces. They have less features than consoles but are more than enough for these events.

As for consoles, there are cheap Behringer models that cost around USD 100. For the same price you can get external cards such as the M-Audio M-Track Duo or other Presonus models.

It is convenient to have at least two microphones, although, as with the mixer, four would be ideal. There are some models that cost less than USD 100 and have a more than acceptable quality: Marantz MPM-1000 or Shure PGA48 are two good options. If the interviews will be exclusively conducted in the booth, a dynamic model such as Shure is always convenient, as it is more resistant to shocks.

No computer is needed if the booth will only to be used for interviews and not to play music. However, since amplification equipment is needed so everyone in the schoolyard can hear, you can always bring a computer to broadcast audio. Usually, during Sónica's visits, the radio station plays through the speakers while the facilitators are not giving instructions for the games.

Regarding the amplification equipment, some speaker or loudspeaker models have a built-in amplifier. This makes transporting them easier and more convenient. Since the speakers will be used in open spaces such as schoolyards, we recommend a potency of at least 200 RMS watts.

Graduation of the third cohort

Fifth cohort in the booth

CreActivos: semillero de jóvenes comunicadores

During the school holidays in Guatemala, some ASEC employees had to take their sons and daughters to work with them or sign them up for vacation courses (which are extremely expensive) to keep them occupied during working hours. This real need of parents to have options for their kids, led to the development of a new way to introduce new young talent to the radio station.

This is how *CreActivos*, Sónica's free radio production holiday workshops, was born. These workshops are held while schools are closed in Guatemala. Over two weeks, young people between 14 and 18 years learn to write scripts and news reports or speak in front of the microphone. Sónica convenes at least two *CreActivos* courses a year.

These workshops are an exercise in media appropriation. They began in 2015 and since 2017 they incorporate a Media and Information Literacy component. Besides teaching how the radio works, they also give training on the critical use of social media. During 2020 and 2021, due to the pandemic, seven courses were held virtually with young people from El Salvador and Guatemala. Those planned in Honduras had to be canceled due to a tropical storm that damaged the Internet connection and prevented students from participating.

Since the *CreActivos* workshops began until December 2021, Sónica has taught 22 holiday courses to 446 young people. Some of them have kept in touch with the station, producing programs, participating and even directing

CreActiva in the Booth

some of the events it organizes. As we already mentioned, Jennifer Velásquez, the current director of Sónica, is a graduate of the first *CreActivos* cohort of 2015.

If you want to know more about this activity, visit:
youtube.com/watch?v=rIWWatGTtz0

Finally, in order to transmit the signal produced in the schools to the transmitter, some type of remote connection equipment is required. There are radiofrequency units — the classic mobile units — but a radio link authorization is required to use them, which is granted by the same departments or ministries that award AM or FM radio licenses. To avoid this, most media outlets, including Radio Sónica, use remote broadcasting equipment via the Internet. They use a Portable Comrex Access that, through a cellular chip, connects to the receiving equipment in the radio station. The cheap version of this equipment would be to use a phone with an application to stream audio.

Plan the visit

Contact the schools: always choose institutions or schools whose student body falls within your target audience. For example, Sónica focuses on young people aged 13 to 20 from working class sectors. Obviously, you can be visit schools that fall outside that audience, but if you want to reinforce interaction with your audience to increase participation, visiting the potential audience is always advisable.

Although the contact usually begins with the school's principal, the teaching staff should always be familiar with the activity. The principal always transmits the objective and how the event will be organized, but offering a previous meeting with the teachers is a good idea since they will be a fundamental ally for the success of the initiative and they will coordinate the participation of the different groups of students.

School events or festivals are great opportunities for planning a visit. In Guatemala, Sónica has held several meetings when a *kermesse*, an outdoor party with games, food and music, is held.

The radio station must deploy at least three people, especially if the event is designed with interactive games, as Sónica does with the *Reto 106.9 FM*.

Each challenge with two groups takes just under an hour to complete. Usually, Sónica holds two challenges with four groups of students in total, so the activity lasts for about two hours, including the welcome and farewell meetings, the final interviews, and the assembly and disassembly of the equipment. You should calculate about three and a half hours for the visit.

The Space Booth visits a school

General considerations

The planning of the program should consider the participation of the audience during the event. Although they will not be present in the schoolyard, but listening to the radio, creative ways of involving the listeners so that they feel that they are part of the *Space Booth* must be implemented. In addition to messages on social media or phone calls, they can participate through surveys on who will win, answer puzzles about MIL presented by the hosts, suggest songs to make a *chant* and cheer for one of the teams... Let your imagination run wild!

Sónica has confirmed how the visits are more entertaining for the youth now that they have other incentives beyond speaking on the radio. They chose to train students on Media and Information Literacy, but in your case, you could choose any other topic: the *Antibullying Booth* to prevent bullying, the *SexEd Booth*, which focuses on sex education, the *Literary Booth*, which encourages reading, or the Brico Booth, with games to learn basic house repairs. Our recommendation is to incorporate an educational component that is taught playfully and that enriches the contribution of the station to young people.

Pedro and Ana: personifying our target audience

One of the challenges that most concerns the media is knowing their target audience. In fact, many stations invest a lot of resources in surveys and research with focus groups to analyze their audience and offer programming that fits their tastes.

Sónica has also done audience studies but has gone further with projects such as the *Space Booth or CreActivos*, which are another way to approach high-school students and learn how they listen to radio and their perception of the media in general. In addition, they symbolically invite young people to their weekly editorial meetings. How do they do it?

After profiling their target audience and departing from statistical tables and data visualizations on their tastes, habits and consumption, they imagined it, drew it and named it. This *chavo* and this *chava*, who generally represent and summarize the profiles of the potential audience of the radio station, were called Pedro and Ana (although, after getting to know them more closely, Sónica's team renamed them Omar and Rosita) and were endowed with specific attributes, characteristics and tastes.

Thus, when Sónica thinks of a new section or program, they wonder if Pedro and Ana (or Omar and Rosita) would like it, if the product *would fit* within their target audience and if it is related to their reality and context.

"It worked for us to give them names so we could picture them, feel closer to them and know their particular profile: What does Pedro like? What bus

SOY PEDRO Y TENGO DE 13 A 20 AÑOS

EL COLEGIO ME SALE BARATO
ME LEVANTO TEMPRANO
GASTO Q100 O MENOS EN UNA SALIDA EVENTUAL
ME GUSTA LA MÚSICA
ME GUSTA EL DEPORTE
UTILIZO EL SERVICIO DE BUSES
HABLO ESPAÑOL

VEO TV, USO REDES SOCIALES, ME GUSTA EL VOLUNTARIADO.

© Space Booth

SOY ANA Y TENGO DE 13 A 20 AÑOS

ESTUDIO EN INSTITUTOS PÚBLICOS
TRATAME DE VOS
ME GUSTA LA MÚSICA
NO TENGO UN ALTO PODER ADQUISITIVO
MI AUTOESTIMA ME AFECTA
ME GUSTA LA MODA
ME GUSTA LEER POCO
USO LAS REDES SOCIALES

DE LA RADIO ME GUSTAN LOS PROGRAMAS ENTRETENIDOS Y DIVERTIDOS

© Space Booth

does Pedro take? Does he get a weekly allowance? What is Pedro worried about? Where does he study? What is Ana worried about? Does Pedro feel like Ana? What clothes does Ana wear? What events do they attend? Pedro and Ana have helped us feel closer to our audience and always keep them in our minds," explained Jennifer.

For the feedback to be constant, during each weekly planning meeting a person is assigned the role of Perry the Platypus, the secret agent of the Disney series *Phineas and Ferb*.

Every week, someone on the team assumes the role of spy incognito. He becomes the *audience's attorney* and, over the next seven days, listens to all of the station's programs and checks the social media accounts. At the next writing team meeting, *Perry's* iden-

tity is revealed and he/she presents his/her assessment of what worked, the content that could be improved, and what had the most impact or acceptance.

"He or she wears Ana and Pedro's shoes and reflects with the team: 'This wasn't for my age' or 'we didn't like the video because it was too long' or 'this meme wasn't funny enough'. So, in the editorial board we always have a space to evaluate our programming by imagining what the two of them would think, which is, in fact, what our audience might be thinking. It is a good way to stay on track with our objectives," explains Sara Martínez, Sónica's editor-in-chief.

6.3 Lessons learned from the *Space Booth*

With the *Space Booth*, Sónica seeks to engage its target audience in its programming while educating Guatemalan adolescents in Media and Information Literacy. But instead of opting for a more classic training, it is committed to innovation, daring to create a process that is constantly evolving.

Participant-focused

At first, the visits focused on the participation of young people in the station as a means for them to exercise their right to freedom of expression. The teenagers became protagonists of the programming. But with the evolution of the project, they also became protagonists of their own learning process.

As they were used to being mere recipients of knowledge, the *Space Booth* invited them to reflect and, with it, build their own learning in a guided way.

Recreational component

Another component that characterizes all the experiences studied, including this one, is games as a means for learning or to create communicative processes. *Learning by playing* is something that both DW Akademie and the Sónica team apply constantly. These methodologies are undoubtedly successful, especially when they are intended for young people: "They feel that we are not teaching them, that it's a game. Additionally, they have the microphones at their disposal, so they can speak their minds whenever they want," said Jennifer emphatically.

Media access

This experience also realizes the citizens' right to freedom of expression. Sónica always has its doors open to participation, but, when working with young people, it is not always possible for them to get to the radio station, or when they do, they might be too shy to speak on the radio. That is why the radio visits them, goes to their schools—their space—where they feel safer to speak their minds freely.

Ever-evolving process

Any project that prides itself on being innovative should be kept alive and constantly evolve. The Sónica team is very inquisitive, perhaps because it is made up mostly of young people. As they themselves say, "we cannot stay idle." And their inquisitiveness is what drives innovation, the best seed for creativity to flourish.

Collaborative laboratory

Sónica is also conceived as a laboratory. That is why each initiative that is implemented is conceived as an experiment that needs to be constantly evaluated and adapted. This is how the *Space Booth* evolved over the nearly five years that it has been visiting schools, and not only physically, but also in its objectives.

The interesting thing about a laboratory is that it has many people. The more diverse the team, the more productive the creation process will be. There is never only one single person planning or evaluating: it is a collaborative effort. This way multiple ideas, perspectives, and approaches are included. The project is enhanced by all perspectives, while the discussion process itself strengthens the team with the experiences and contributions of each team member.

Edgar Zamora
Project Director
of Sónica

❝ The *Space Booth* is a project in which we have experimented. It is much more than a radio booth. There are also games and music. It's another way to have fun. In the end, the fact that a person talks through the microphones is just a small portion of several activities.

sonica.gt/

Closing remarks

Innovating is no easy task. Especially if this innovation is aimed at promoting the participation of citizens to engage in constructive and respectful dialogue.

❝ Innovation requires constant creative processes. Above all, they should be participatory!

This is the main lessons that we, as authors, have learned at the end of this book. The four experiences presented did not choose to experiment alone in the search for innovation to increase participation. Rather, these radio stations and media development organizations invited the people, who at times remain anonymous behind words such as "audiences," "public," or "communities," to participate in the project design and experimentation, and collectively created, imagined, and produced.

Although it may seem like an obvious idea, we don't always involve beneficiaries from the beginning of the process. This is a fundamental to innovation. CORAPE did not develop an *app* on its own and then invite the Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador to upload their contents to the Documentation Center, but invited them to a Hackathon so that they could design the app accor-

ding to their requirements. The community radios of Bolivia did not think of the new programming grid and the radio formats on their own. Instead they invited the communities to the CEPRA *Colaboratorio* and asked them what topics they would like to be discussed on the station and collectively elaborated proposals that later went on the air. Vokaribe did not broadcast the Carnival with its communication team alone, but invited the people of the neighborhood to a *Reporterathon* to interview their neighbors, street vendors, and the dancers of the parades. Likewise, Sónica did not just open the phone lines or promote their social media for young people to participate, they took the Space Booth to the schools and universities and encouraged them to speak.

Rather than innovating for dialogue, dialogue was used to innovate. The experiences were conceived together with the communities, from the territories. Considering these experiences, collaboration guarantees that more people will want to participate, creating new constructive dialogue and a more inclusive, diverse, participatory and horizontal communication.

Santiago García Gago and David Olmos, authors

© Reporterathon

DW Akademie

DW Akademie is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer.
Our projects strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information. DW Akademie empowers people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue.

DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in approximately 70 developing countries and emerging economies.

DW Akademie

Made for minds.