

Catalan netlabels and music discovery in Catalan public libraries

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Abstract: *Netlabels are Internet music labels that release music under open licenses, usually on a compressed audio format with a minimum bitrate of 128 kbps and under non-commercial rules. On this paper a quantitative analysis of Catalan netlabels scene is described as there are some ideas for dissemination of netlabels music information using Web 2.0 services like RSS, Twitter and blogging. In spite of some unavailable data, a survey consisting in online data collecting and questionnaire sending has been conducted to achieve outcomes that show an average profile of an active group of netlabels releasing works mostly on the electronic and experimental side of genres, releasing digital music freely downloadable as MP3 320 kbps files with Creative Commons BY-NC-ND licenses and prominent presence on social networks like Twitter and Facebook and audio platforms like Internet Archive, Bandcamp or Soundcloud. As a conclusion, a quite illustrative picture of the Catalan scene of Creative Commons music publishers arise while the necessity of further research is realized, and some examples of work about it, like collaboration between netlabels and public libraries as a not only curatorial but also sustainable practice and an online music discovery tool called Observatori de netlabels catalans, are introduced.*

Keywords: Music discovery, Music curation, Intellectual property, Free music, Public libraries, Web 2.0

Introduction

This paper is intended to study quantitatively the very particular case of Catalan netlabels and to apply this knowledge to make some proposals about integrating recordings published by Catalan netlabels in public libraries collections as a local information resource for music discovery.

Summarizing, netlabels can be defined as platforms or virtual record labels for online distribution and promotion of music released under Creative Commons or similar licenses. Much of this material remains almost hidden in the Long Tail (Celma, 2009). There is a previous quantitative study about netlabels from an international point of view, the one by Galuszka (2009), but no academic research about Catalan or Spanish scene as a specific issue has been done thus far. Anyway, there are some library experiences happening around this issue. We may find remarkable examples in Ziklibrenbib¹ or Pragmazic², Creative Commons and public domain music services managed or hosted by many French public libraries. It is also needed to say that the Catalan netlabels list has been initially compiled as a subset of a former personal research on Spanish netlabels. This research obtained a total number of 68 netlabels, most of them active in August 2012. It is remarkable too that more than a third of Spanish netlabels were Catalan then (26).

Methodology

Methodology employed for the detection of Spanish netlabels has been developed on, first, examination of *Acts of silence* netlabels list³, which has to be acknowledged as the most reliable and updated list of worldwide netlabels and, then, with the Phlow.de catalog⁴, not so updated and with lacks of information.

From here, work was done over the almost seventy labels under Spain tag, verifying following data on each one of them. After establishing a list of 36 Catalan netlabels based on geographic location of the Spanish ones, a questionnaire -asking years of activity, name, URL, location, genres or styles, licenses, filetypes, bitrate, number of artists, number of albums, audio platforms and social networks profiles- was sent to the 31 netlabels that have been detected with an e-mail address available on their websites and, by the time of the writing of this paper (December 2013), 9 have answered and 2 have not because of mailbox unavailability. This represents a

1 <http://www.acim.asso.fr/ziklibrenbib>

2 <http://www.pragmazic.net>

3 <http://www.actsofsilence.com/netlabels>

4 http://phlow.de/netlabels/index.php/Main_Page

29% response rate on the questionnaire. When available, remaining data has been collected directly from each netlabel's website.

Observing that a great number of netlabels had the Internet Archive as their main releases repository, next came developing of a service to be user-friendly, interactive and web-based. RSS feeds from the Internet Archive Catalan netlabels sub-collections were identified as a structured and quite reliable information source. Therefore, Yahoo Pipes appeared to be the most reliable and flexible free online tool for processing these feeds, while Dipity provided interactivity and a user-friendly platform with its appealing timeline feature while Twitter provided a social network connection. On the other hand, as long as all these tools are being used with non-premium profiles, there are some restrictions in terms of full data output, but they have been considered not enough to restrain, at least, the completely operational prototype presented in this paper under the Blogger platform named *Observatori de netlabels catalans*⁵, a system that provides information and access to Catalan netlabels music, using information available on the Web gathered from related RSS feeds.

Findings

Active and inactive netlabels

There is a main division between active and inactive labels. Active netlabels have been considered all those that released at least one work during the last year. In general, netlabels do not share uniform or conventional patterns or standards and some of them have experienced a kind of transition from being a netlabel to adopt characteristics more likely of a commercial record label. In the case of Catalan netlabels, there are some that offer works published under copyleft licenses -as Creative Commons are- and copyright, being the active Discontinuu Records an extreme example of paying business model for almost all its albums under copyright and we may find another case of that transition in Discordian Records, another active netlabel that have changed almost completely its rights policy over time, from copyleft to copyright.

Table 1. Catalan netlabels (December 2013)

Total number of netlabels	36
Active netlabels	17
Inactive netlabels	19

The oldest netlabel is Hazard Records⁶, that began its operations back in 1998. Largest group of active netlabels (5) is working since 2010. And along past year no one netlabel seems to have been created.

Table 2. Active and inactive netlabels (December 2013)

Active netlabels	Inactive netlabels
Audiotalaia, Bestiar, Day of the Droids, Daxa Music, Discontinuu, Discordian, Doma Musique, Espais, La Gramola, Hamsterloco, Hazard, inoQuo, Lowtoy, Parf, Soisloscerdos, Störung, tecnonucleo	16RPM, Abdicate Cell, Costellam, Disconinjaz, Error! Lo-Fi, Hipi Duki Muzik, Ignored, Imaginary Nonexistent Records, Música Vermella, Neovinyll, Op3n, Pendrive, PulseWith, Rithmomachia, Rithmus, Roterfleck, Solyaris, Subsistemas S6T+, Subversive Media

Place and styles

Regarding to the data obtained about the geographic location from which they operate it is possible to point that a vast majority of them are in Barcelona or its surroundings, the most populated area of the country. Data collected confirmed that Catalan netlabels do not show stylistic patterns away from the general keynote of international netlabels scene, as reflected in Galuszka (2009) survey. There is a clear bias towards electronica and experimental genres. But is to take into account that style and genre denomination is the one -in every case-

5 <http://www.netlabels.cat>

6 <http://hazardrecords.mydocumenta.com>

provided by netlabels and the cited *Acts of silence* list, which offers a lack of proper indexing assignment and no use of any controlled vocabulary.

Licenses

There is no significant differentiation by license type between active and inactive netlabels. However, this should not hide some differences concerning licenses elections. Discordian is selling its releases under Creative Commons and Hazard is publishing under public domain. Anyway, in both cases, Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license is the prevailing one, followed by BY-NC-SA.

Audio formats

Even though is a proprietary format, the most used by its huge popularity is MP3, followed from afar by open-source compressed audio formats Ogg Vorbis or FLAC -a lossless format- and non-compressed formats like WAV, that even so have wide distribution. Most used bitrate is 320 kbps, achieving a sound quality level virtually equivalent to a CD Audio with the advantages of audio data compression and digitization.

Audio platforms and social networks

Regarding to the most popular social networks -Facebook and Twitter- use there is a shared intercourse possibly due to the popularity, closeness, agility and synthesis features of these platforms. Because its immediacy, many active netlabels use Twitter as a channel for spreading news and releases. Catalan netlabels make use of these networks for promotion tasks of their activities and releases and to enhance direct communication with their public. The Internet Archive⁷ is clearly preferred as an alternate or first downloading and streaming repository for 22 netlabels, that have their own sub-collection in the site's Netlabels collection.

Discussion

Why Creative Commons? And why on public libraries?

Creative Commons⁸ is a non-profit organization based in California, that since 2001 promotes and encourages the use of its six licenses. These licenses aim to preserve some author's intellectual property rights while giving away to the public some others. And next comes a personal choice, indeed. General acclaim and consensus have been widespread about the benefits of this new conception: “music released under Creative Commons licenses may be used as a kind of promotional vehicle that allows artists to reach those listeners who would rather not pay for their records in the hope that at least some of listeners will become their fans” (Galuszka, 2012, p. 71). This makes easier to publish all kind of works under different circumstances for every author. In the field of music, in spite of well established traditional publishing routines under the copyright model and the legitimate but immense rule power of the recording industry majors, there are some examples -netlabels model showing up as the most concrete- of noticeable success or, at least, good practice about joining up Creative Commons licenses for recorded music into the real world. Against why Creative Commons licensed contents should be available and diffused from the public library, we may claim for a lack of credence because their nature of non-conventional published or non-professionally treated material. But, in fact, frequently there is no guarantee of any minimum quality requirement or backing authoritative entity or person in the copyright world either.

At the inception of the netlabels phenomena we may find characteristics that have been transferred to the mainstream, prefiguring in advance basic aspects of today's digital music business models (e.g. Spotify), as suggested by Ghosemajumder (2002) with his Open Music Model. In that model, customary netlabels policies were to be condensed into five requirements: open file sharing, open file formats, open membership, open payment, open competition. Since its publication, a number of these principles have been eventually adopted by the recording industry, which has implicitly agreed with Ghosemajumder prediction that online music distribution services based on digital rights management were going to be a failure.

7 <http://archive.org/details/netlabels>

8 <http://creativecommons.org>

If we take a look at netlabels activity and releases as a desirable batch of material worth of investing some work on it to be assimilated as a special digital collection (Overholt, 2013), we will realize that netlabels music are a real content discovery experience to offer to our current and potential users. While there is a clear bias toward electronica or experimental genres, we may find music for everyone's taste: from the multinational Kazoomzoom⁹, a netlabel centered on children music, to Bestiar¹⁰, a Catalan netlabel that publishes rock, pop, jazz and experimental music. Because the worldwide netlabels scene have been inextricably linked to the emergence of Internet and personal computers, it shows some special features brought by this conditioning. Internet ubiquity allows netlabels to have people working from diverse locations. Surely, isolation favoured by laptops mobility and process power are two other reasons for the predominance of musical genres and styles attached to technological innovations.

Results

The main proposal of this paper is the deploying of a music discovery tool, an online music discovery service about Catalan netlabels designed as a mashup of some different sources of information with online Web 2.0 tools and sites like Yahoo Pipes, Twitter, Dipity, Blogger, the Internet Archive and the Free Music Archive. Yahoo Pipes is used to merge the 22 active and inactive studied netlabels RSS feeds from the Internet Archive netlabels sub-collections, filtering results by descending publication date. Dipity provides interactivity and a user-friendly platform with its timeline that works as a discovery tool to explore last 150 albums published from the Pipes RSS feed output, limited to 100 items per feed. To solve partially this issue, a second page of results from the Pipes RSS output was added as a second content source to Dipity timeline.

There are two more key components of the system. First, the @netlabelscat Twitter account, that has a list of Catalan netlabels Twitter accounts -now 14- and serves with two widgets as a curatorial tool for selecting and recommending valuable records -a kind of tertiary information source- onto the blog. This very last element acts as an embedding container for the rest. Second, a playlist from Catalan netlabels artists present in the Free Music Archive¹¹ and an international RSS feed, the one from the Global Netlabel Community Report¹².

Further work

There are some possibilities to expand the research and work presented on this paper. For instance, search and discovery platforms could be designed for retrieving Creative Commons music and related information, in the way exposed by two Portuguese researchers (Ricardo & Serrao, 2013). To index properly all the information displayed from the blog would be another remaining goal much as how to explore contents metadata to integrate all this information with a Linked Data approach, to ride the wave of the Semantic Web for a better music information retrieval. PADICAT, the institutional Catalan Web archive, has been contacted to point out for Catalan netlabels information and music digital preservation (Serra, 2013). In addition, to identify all Catalan artists publishing recorded music under Creative Commons licenses in other platforms like Bandcamp¹³ or Jamendo¹⁴ would be another task to accomplish, as much as it was tried some years ago with a couple of compilations¹⁵ or the way MusicaLliure.cat¹⁶ website is working on.

Cooperation between public libraries and netlabels

A first attempt has been made to make possible Creative Commons music presence in our public libraries and that effort implies the search of synergies with agents in the netlabels scene. Josep Janés Library¹⁷ has been the first of the libraries of the Xarxa de Biblioteques Municipals¹⁸ -the Barcelona province public library network-

9 <http://www.kazoomzoom.com>

10 <http://bestiar.wordpress.com>

11 <http://www.freemusicarchive.org>

12 <http://netaudio.netlabels.org>

13 <http://bandcamp.com>

14 <http://www.jamendo.com>

15 <http://www.lafarga.cat/culturalliuere>

16 <http://musicalliuere.cat>

17 <http://www.l-h.cat/biblioteques/josepjan.es.aspx>

18 <http://bibliotecavirtual.diba.cat>

to become first clearinghouse for a sample of CD releases published by one of the best and most active netlabels of the Catalan scene: La Gramola Netlabel. And this collaboration is complemented by a related project about library music services upgrading. This will involve a downloading and listening service of children music from the specialized netlabel Kazoomzoom, adding donated and selected LP and cassettes to the collection and the availability of a record player and a physical listening point for the *Observatori de netlabels catalans*.

Conclusion

Necessarily, netlabels sometimes elusive nature has evidenced some unavailable data. Nevertheless, this is no hurdle to prevent an enough accurate quantitative insight into the Catalan netlabels scene nowadays. Findings have been useful to understand better sociological, musical and technological aspects of this phenomena and to design some kind of service departing from this acquired knowledge. Although there is going on some controversy and debate on the definition, nature and direction of netlabels (Folguera, 2013), it appears that is needed, as well, to perform further research on this subject because the scarcity of academic bibliography (Galuszka, 2012, p. 72) both from local and international landscapes and the information science field. Finally, this paper would like to represent a new approach to netlabels music from a curatorial, sustainable and preserving perspective that has as a strategic objective in granting access to every library user to a whole new world of music.

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