

Public TV Networks in Europe's regions

The Institute for Media and Journalism (IMeG) carried out a comparative survey on models of public regional television networks in 21 European countries. An Institute of the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Università della Svizzera Italiana (USI), IMeG is directed by Prof. Giuseppe Richeri. Funded by RAI (Italy's state television), the study was commissioned by Circom (an Association of European public regional televisions companies). Its results have shown up a striking diversity between regional public-television activities across Europe. Digital terrestrial television deserves a mention as the most topical aspect examined by the study.

In Europe, public television production at the regional level varies considerably from country to country. This depends on several factors, ranging from the size of the area and population it covers in a given state, to its administrative structure, not to mention the role played by historical, political, and cultural elements. The research pursued by the Institute for Media and Journalism (IMeG) of the Faculty of Communication Sciences, USI, headed by Giuseppe Richeri, Faculty Dean and Professor of Media Strategy, brings out the greatly disparate nature of the products broadcast by regional public television companies. "Our first task was to ascertain whether it even makes sense to speak of 'models' of regional public television. Secondly we had to define the terms of the problem for the various countries, and the different solutions adopted; finally we identified what is being done to improve coordination and cooperation between regions", explains Professor Richeri. Since regional public television companies operate in very different environments, the study pinned down a few parameters which, combined, would create a single framework of analysis. In particular, the analysis has revealed the relations between independent or decentralised, regional broadcasting stations and national public television; the contribution of regional television to national programming; the relation between regional public TV companies and local institutions; the range of regional programming; the funding of regional public television companies; and, lastly, technological innovation, defined as the development of digital terrestrial television regionally. The study allows us to conclude that in Europe we cannot really talk of models of regional public television as such. And yet, there is a pertinent element of comparison through which each country can be identified, namely the degree of independence of the regional public TV networks from the national broadcasting corporations. In Germany or Denmark, for instance, some television activities are altogether unrelated to any central national corporation. In addition, the question of cross-border cooperation is quite crucial: in some cases,

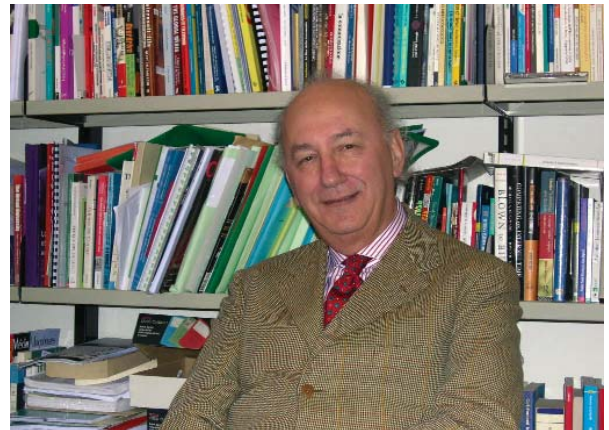


Madrid's "Torrespaña", which houses repeaters for radio and TV broadcasting in Spain (copyright RTVE).

regional public television companies belonging to two neighbouring nations cooperate very closely in managing certain scheduling bands (see the examples of France and Germany, Germany and Denmark, Slovenia and Hungary); in other countries, however, this form of programme sharing does not exist. Something else came to light through this research: the typology and size of regional programme schedules, which vary a good deal from country to country. Here is what Professor Richeri told us by way of illustration: "In a few States, regional programming consists of a 20-minute news bulletin, whereas in others it covers the entire 24 hours of broadcasting; hence the typology of television genres is a good deal richer". Finally, we must not forget that in some countries regional programmes are broadcast nationwide. "In Germany, for example, anyone who lives in Munich, Bavaria, and happens to transfer temporarily to Hamburg for work reasons, can continue following the news and other television programmes broadcast by their Bavarian TV channels", concluded Prof. Richeri.

Digital terrestrial television at the regional level

One of the facets examined by the comparative study on the models of regional public television in Europe is technological innovation, especially as related to the launch of digital terrestrial television, currently a very popular topic. "Digital television", explains Professor Richeri, "is a new technique of broadcasting that enjoys a number of benefits, including a better quality of sound and image, a greater range of television channels inside a lower number of frequencies (where a frequency may be occupied by one analogue channel, the same may accommodate four or five digital ones), while enabling different forms of interactivity". Socially speaking, the most important 'plus' of digital television is the chance it affords to interact. By connecting your television to a telephone line, you may use your television set either to interact with the central television centre or to navigate on the Internet. Internet access is one of the factors that drove several European countries to switch faster to digital TV. The United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, and Germany have already experimented in this field. Take the case of Britain: there are some interactive services that have been a remarkable hit with viewers, notably betting on dog or horse races, and on-line games. Digital television, however, is not limited to this, but it enables other forms of interaction, such as the opportunity offered to TV viewers to personalise any information they want, by looking for and selecting the aspects that are of greatest interest to them. By pressing a button on your TV screen, in fact, you may find out more details about a certain news item, to which your News programme devoted only a few minutes; alternatively you may obtain information on your favourite foot-



Professor Giuseppe Richeri, Dean of the Faculty of Communication Sciences, USI, and head of the research project.

baller, say, on the team he has played with, the club he has played for and the price that was paid to 'buy' him. This way, each TV viewer is able to build his/her own television menu. Such interactive services are very useful also for public television companies, since they contribute to improving relations between citizens (users) and institutions. "In many countries, public administration looks very favourably on digital television, which hands it the means to supply a whole series of services through the Internet at a cheaper rate, but also more efficiently, round the clock", declares Richeri. Ultimately what a great many governments (and Switzerland's is one of them) aspire to these days is to set up an electronic desk, what is now known as e-government. If we want these services to be delivered on line, families - above all those in the lower-income tier, who cannot afford buying a computer - must be able to access Internet. "In this sense, a television set may be seen as the most appropriate means toward a universal access to these services", are Professor Richeri's concluding remarks.

A survey covering public-television activities in Europe

With funding from RAI, commissioned by Circom Regional (an Association bringing together 376 regional public televisions from 38 European countries), the study has analysed 21 States. Research was divided into two successive stages. In the first place, in 2003, Italy's four major partners (France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Spain) were surveyed together with three other European countries exhibiting interesting features (Poland, Romania, Switzerland). Subsequently, in stage two, which took place in 2004, the survey was extended to 14 other European countries (Albania, Belgium, Bosnia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden and Hungary). The survey has now been published, under the title: Richeri, G. (ed.), *Le televisioni pubbliche nelle regioni d'Europa*, RAI, 2005.

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