

EDITORIAL

1 History of Private and Commercial Television in Europe

The perception of television and the media landscape in Europe has been traditionally shaped by contrast and constant comparison with American television: state-run stations or public service broadcasting (PSB) in Europe versus commercial networks in the US. However, in most European countries in the last third of the 20th century, commercial television stations got their broadcasting licenses and started their activities by establishing a new editorial and economic model complementary or in direct opposition to the PSB model. As a result, to date, the structure of every European media system is characterized by the coexistence of public service and commercial stations as part of a mixed system which only later became open to pay services and over-the-top operators often managed by commercial companies.

The history of the commercialization of television in Europe is, however, much less linear and more complex than the picture described above and it has taken different paths across different nations. Early attempts to launch some form of private television - at a local, national or even supra-national level - date back to the first years of television, while the road to the liberalization of the different markets has been bumpy and contradictory. Public-service stations themselves have often been subject to the principles of commercialization: most of them have broadcast commercials from early on and/or had to buy broadcasting rights (e.g. for feature films or TV series, sitcoms and formats) at international markets, thus establishing other kinds of competition. The latter phenomenon even affected state-run television systems in Eastern Europe. The process of commercialization was part of television's implementation from the very beginning. Moreover, the emergence of consumer societies in post-war Europe and the dissemination of private television have been deeply interwoven.

This issue may help to deepen our understanding of how the commercialization of television has shaped media culture in Europe. It offers a scholarly view on the history of private and commercial television in Europe, addressing institutional, technological, political, and cultural perspectives, and their entanglement, so as to allow for transnational comparison.

The shift towards commercial models of television has often been national, grounded in every local media system, following (or escaping) national or regional laws and limitations. Nonetheless, on the one hand, this segmentation has allowed the emerging private commercial networks to model themselves not only after the American channels, but also after previous experiences with commercial television in other European countries (from the UK to Italy, etc.). On the other hand, commercialization has also been the battleground for the setting up in Europe of larger transnational companies and editorial groups, such as Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest attempts in France, Germany and Spain, or Canal+'s expansion in Spain. Such examples help us break down the classic dichotomy between Europe and the US, and understand how different countries have learnt from other European experiences with commercialization. They also help us understand that at times commercial television in Europe has helped spread and localize global trends, as in the case of original fiction, sports programming, or music television. Furthermore, according to regulatory, industry or audience needs, over time a hybrid culture has developed, in ways much more complex than just the classic opposition between state and private television. The overarching idea that all this puts forward is that there are many different shades of commercialization.

2 The Issue

This issue reveals first and foremost the variety of case studies and scholarly perspectives on commercial television at a national and regional level.

The issue presents several national case studies from Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Estonia, Russia), which discuss how private networks entered the television space following the breakdown of communism and the consequent transformations of state-owned television systems. In the light of post-communism, these countries introduced new television formats, whilst at the same time drawing upon existing genres and programming to negotiate new consumer values and standards.

The major European television markets have been represented by Italy, Spain and the UK and different articles in this issue focus on how commercialization in these countries has impacted television genres and original productions, such as soap operas, live sports broadcasting and peculiar forms of television advertising. Several topics are introduced in this issue through national lenses. Television commercials are discussed in the context of the UK, but also in the context of the Netherlands, where this type of television content that has been remembered and archived better than the shows it was featured on. Music television is discussed in the context of the Netherlands. The example of Norway shows how the issue of commercialization did not only have an impact on broadcasters, but also on production companies. This issue makes a rich and complex display of methods, perspectives and case studies that bring new insights on the establishment and the development of commercial networks across Europe.

By looking at regional case studies, one can see the importance of transnational influences in television. The dual-structure of television broadcasting is characteristic of countries across Europe: dual systems consisting of PSB on the one hand and commercial television systems on the other have developed across the continent, first in Western Europe in the 1980s and later, in the late 80s-early 90s in the post-communist Eastern Europe. In many cases, PSB and commercial players also joined forces in productions and broadcasts. Alongside these similarities, the studies presented in this issue also highlight a variety of national features. Television formats and content from one country were not simply transferred to another. These transfers have usually brought about issues of translation, adaption and also rejection. Even investments implemented by seemingly mighty and globally acting media enterprises in national markets were not automatically successful. Although at first sight the concept of commercialisation overcame national borders and seems to be a result of globalisation, European television with its strong national states is still following national regulations to a great extent.

All these discussions are introduced through a series of Discovery and Exploratory articles, which we proudly present in this issue.

3 Discoveries

In their article *East Meets West: The Cultural History of Television in Bulgaria*, Elza Ibroscheva, Maria Raicheva-Stover talk about the Bulgarian case to show how television during and after communism was not a monolithic entity that went from Soviet influences pre-89 to a popular television culture modelled after western European examples post-89. On the contrary, television in Bulgaria negotiated its own identity at the intersection of influences from the Soviet Union, Romania and also Italy.

Daniela Cardini's article *A slippery slope. The Rise and Fall of the Domestic Soap opera in Italian Public and Commercial television* deals with the Italian transition towards a mixed system of both public and commercial television through the lens of a single fictional genre, the Italian-made soap opera. The paper demonstrates how, as soon as the national media system has found a new balance, these extremely long forms of original seriality were

broadcast first by the PSB, and later by the private network Mediaset, with the birth of a new production system modelled on the UK and Australia. Cardini also shows how the original production has been a peculiar phase of important investments and careful image-building, situated in between two periods where a cheaper import of foreign ready-made soap operas, from the US, Spain and Latin America, was considered successful enough by national commercial broadcasters.

In their article *Canal + Spain and Live Football Broadcasts: A Whole Different Game*, Vicente Rodríguez Ortega and Rubén Romero Santos reconstruct the chaotic end of the public service monopoly in Spain, marked by the emergence of regional and private channels together with the establishment of the main national commercial networks. In the context of this broader discussion, they mainly focus on the specific case study of pay television Canal+ Spain, modelled on the previous French counterpart, broadcasting cinema and sports to its subscribers. The article shows how both free-to-air and limited-access channels helped to overcome the previous monopolistic market, despite their different goals and strategies. At the same time, the article suggests that different economic models have had an impact on content and televisual imageries, through the example of the live broadcasting of football matches on Canal+, which was able to develop distinct ways of visualization and storytelling, slowly building towards a new aesthetic.

TV commercials from the past are often not archived, and if so, they are hardly recognised as parts of the culture of remembrance. In her contribution *TV Commercials: Second Life. Commercials as Remembrance Culture in the Netherlands*, Krystyna Biernawska-Mattirolo raises this particular issue and pleads for a 'second life' of TV commercials, discussing how they can be kept and preserved and how they should be read as cultural indicators of the past. Through the lens of different case studies, she sheds a light on the varying strategies adopted by different companies in their use of Dutch food commercials to evoke nostalgic emotions in their audiences.

In *'Remember, It's Just Television'. Rubicon TV and the Commercialisation of Norwegian Television* Eva Bakøy and Vilde Schanke Sundet are looking at the corporate strategy of Rubicon TV, a small, yet one of the most successful television production companies in Norway. Their strategy is described as strictly opportunistic, mainly aimed at satisfying the desire for entertainment and thus maximizing profit. The success of Rubicon TV is shown to be proof for an active Norwegian media landscape made up of both commercial and public-service players. Innovation is discussed at the intersection of players, and what began as a strong competition between a commercial station and a public service broadcaster, it developed into close cooperation in the field of television production.

4 Explorations

One of the stereotypes of European media history is 'Americanization' which describes a transfer of televisual culture and know how from the US to (backward) Europe. In her contribution *The Growing Practice of Calling in Continental Film Groups: The European Influence on Production of Early British TV Advertising*, Alison Payne questions this established narrative through the lens of television commercials, one of the central aspects of the commercialised US-American media culture. After the introduction of TV commercials in Britain during the 1950s commercials had been initially produced in France before local producers started to become active in this area and were able to dominate the market after a few years.

Jeffrey Raymond Brassard discusses Russia's *STS Television Network as a Cultural Window to the West*. In this context, he discusses the case study of a relatively new commercial television station in Russia, which partnered with Sony and soon became one of the most popular TV stations in Russia. Brassard draws attention to entertainment programming being able to create a counter narrative to scholarly work on Russian television, which has mainly

focused on news and propaganda. Through his analysis of popular fiction programming, he shows how much private television in Russia has been appropriating formats and genres from the globalized television industry, at the same time though catering for specific local cultural trends.

In his article, titled *We Want Our TMF. The Music Factory, MTV Europe, and Music Television in the Netherlands, 1995-2011*, Jaap Kooijman reconstructs the complex story of a Dutch commercial music television channel, which has been in direct competition with the local branch of MTV. Zooming into the case study of TMF – The Music Factory, discussing its independence at first and then its acquisition by the competitor's conglomerate Viacom, the author points out to the issues of globalization and Americanization - often connected to the commercialization process of European television - as multi-layered, complex, and sometimes contradictory. The article puts into the spotlight one of the genres through which, in the late eighties and the nineties, commercial television in Europe made way to thematic channels targeted at specific audiences: music television, featuring pop and rock video clips broadcast one after the other aimed to attract a younger audience.

Theodora Maniou addresses the complex history of Greek-Cypriot television broadcasting, in its transition from a state-owned public service to a privatised television system. She emphasizes the historical evolution of television in Cyprus as being a reflection of state-informed media policy and Cypriot cultural history. Maniou shows, focusing on the period after 2000, how political decisions on public broadcasting have had an impact on private television as well. Political reluctance toward investments in television, both technologically and formally in terms of regulations and professional development, attests for the very slow acceptance of television as a medium of information, if at all. Maniou's article reveals a paradox by shedding a light on how television has remained under political control despite changing political regimes, whilst at the same time it was apparently not considered a medium worth the investments to professionalize broadcasting under the EU directives.

After the collapse of the USSR, Estonia went a similar way like many other post-socialist states: the monopolistic state-owned media system transitioned into a liberal system. As in Western Europe a dualistic structure of commercial and public service broadcasters was established. In his article *The Winding Road on the Media Landscape: The Establishment of Estonian (Television) Broadcasting between 1992 and 2016* Andres Jõessaar analyses this transformation by looking into the activities of companies and the legal framework behind this transformation. He shows how the concept of a free market, as represented by the government in accordance with the EU, has not led to a stable broadcasting system in Estonia. On the contrary, several international investors have withdrawn from the local market due to a lack of profit. The scope of a national media policy drafted post-USSR has proven to be more limited than assumed at first.

Luca Barra, Christoph Classen and Sonja De Leeuw

Biographies

Luca Barra is senior assistant professor at Università di Bologna, Italy, where he teaches Radio and Television History and Digital Media. Before, he has been a post-doctoral research fellow at Università Cattolica, Milan. His research interests mainly focus on television production and distribution cultures, comedy and humour TV genres, the international circulation of media products (and their national mediations), the history of Italian television, and the evolution of the contemporary media landscape.

Christoph Classen is senior researcher at the Department "Contemporary History of Media and Information Society" at the Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam, Germany. His main areas of research are the history of modern mass media, their impact on social and cultural changes, cultures of remembrance, and political cultures in Europe.

Sonja De Leeuw is professor in Media Culture at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. Her research and teaching interests are centred around the topics of Dutch and European television and media culture in an international context. She has been coordinating European research projects focusing on exploring and contextualising digital audiovisual heritage across nations, working towards a European television historiography and the development of appropriate tools to explore this in the field of Digital Humanities.