

Spanish Public Broadcasting. Defining traits and future challenges following analogue television switch-off

Isabel Fernández Alonso*, Montse Bonet**, Josep Àngel Guimerà***, Mercè Díez****, Federica Alborch *****

* Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain)

** Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain)

*** Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain)

**** Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain)

***** Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain)

This article was written within the framework of RD&I Project: *Transformations of the Radio and Television Systems in Spain within the context of Digitalization (1997-2010)* funded by the Ministry of Education and Sciences (ref:SEJ2007-65109/SOCI), for the period 2007-2010.

Abstract

This article describes and analyses the defining traits of the Spanish public broadcasting system (radio and television stations with local, regional and national coverage) at a time when analogue television had been switched off and the digitalisation process of terrestrial radio was in a state of stagnation. The article also considers the future challenges faced by the sector in a country that, in the western-European context, has an unparalleled number of public operators.

Keywords: public broadcasting; history of broadcasting; terrestrial television switch-off; Spain

1. Introduction

Today's complex model of Spanish public broadcasting began to take shape after the most recent restoration of democracy in Spain,¹ coinciding, therefore, with the start of deregulation processes being implemented in other European countries. Until that time, and since the end of the World War II, these countries' terrestrial radio and television broadcasting models had been public monopolies.

Besides opening up broadcasting to private operators, deregulation implied "the waiving of public-service obligations for the new commercial sector; or the imposition of minimal obligations that do not conflict with economic requirements", and "a crisis of effectiveness of regulation as a result of new opportunities to evade or circumvent national regulation" (Humphreys, 1996, p. 160). In the 1980s, and as a consequence of this new, much more competitive context, public operators suffered crises of identity, funding, operation and even legitimacy (Richeri, 1994; Achille, 1994). These same crises still persist today, though they have not prevented public operators from continuing to play a central role in European media systems.

¹ This process began in 1975, after Franco's death, and was consolidated after the failed coup d'état attempt in 1981.

Moreover, the evolution of public monopoly systems towards mixed systems has generated significant tensions between the commercial and public operators that co-exist in them. These tensions have led commercial operators to make formal complaints to the European Union about double funding (public subsidies and advertising) and about public operators' multiplatform strategies. These strategies – a consequence of technological convergence – mean that reference to the system has shifted from Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media (Lowe & Bardoel, 2007)².

In this context, neither the variety of public broadcasting governance and funding models that can be found in Europe, nor the debate on what "public service" actually means, can be ignored, "since the traditional regulation is too static to cope with the rapidly changing context, new concepts such as 'self-' or 'co-regulation' and 'process regulation' are introduced". Furthermore, "as a result of a paternalistic tradition and an often all-too-close relation with politics, public broadcasters have kept citizens and civil society at a distance" (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2008, p. 351).

Taking account of these international trends in the sector, and starting with the idea that "communication systems remain, to a significant degree, national in organisation and orientation" (Hardy, 2008, XVI), this article presents the structural traits of the Spanish public broadcasting system following analogue television switch-off and expands on the underlying reasons that go to explain them. By way of a conclusion, it considers an ex ante analysis of the Spanish public broadcasting system's future evolution.

Analogue terrestrial television broadcasts in Spain ceased on 3 April 2010, almost two years ahead of European States with a predominantly terrestrial broadcasting model like the Spanish one (as is the case for Italy, France and the United Kingdom). In contrast, the digitalisation process of terrestrial radio is in a completely stagnant state in Spain, as it is in most other European countries.

The object of study is of particular interest due to the extraordinary size of the public audiovisual offering in Spain, a country that, surprisingly, only fits into the western-European public monopoly model (consolidated during the Cold War) for television, since commercial radio broadcasts have never actually ceased (though, obviously, they were subjected to very strict political control during the dictatorship) (Bustamante, 1982; Balsebre, 2001).

At the beginning of the 1980s, Spanish public press (resulting from seizures made under Franco's dictatorship) was sold off. In contrast, the Spanish media system still preserves a public audiovisual sector, whose size is particularly significant in the western European context. There is a State public broadcasting corporation (Corporación de Radio y Televisión Española) that, at the beginning of 2010, had five digital terrestrial television channels broadcasting across Spanish territory as a whole, four radio stations with the

² The complaints raised with EU competition authorities have so far been resolved fairly satisfactorily for public operators, provided that any money they receive from their respective States is used to fund public service activities (Humphreys, 2008).

same coverage, and special channels with international (via satellite) and regional coverage³. There are also regional public broadcasting corporations in almost all of the autonomous communities, some of which had, at the time of analogue television switch-off (April 2010), a significant number of channels like, for example, the one in Catalonia, which had five; or in the Basque and Valencian autonomous communities, which had three and one, respectively. Finally, there are public radio and television stations with local coverage, which are usually managed by town or city councils and, in exceptional cases, by provincial councils⁴. Something else worth recalling is the growing public audiovisual presence on the Internet (with portals and broadcasts specially designed for it) and other emerging platforms, such as mobile telephony. In addition, several channels of State and autonomous-community public broadcasting corporations form part of the basic offerings of multichannel pay-TV platforms (satellite, cable and IPTV).

This public broadcasting scene, which we shall expand on below, corresponds to the administrative structure of a highly decentralised State (divided into autonomous communities and municipalities), a process that began, fundamentally, after democracy had been restored and, in particular, after the 1978 Spanish Constitution had been enacted. The Spanish media system also – and quite substantially – matches some of the traits of polarised pluralist media systems, such as governmental intervention and a high degree of political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This fact, together with the mentioned decentralisation, explains, to a large extent, the size of Spain's public broadcasting system, given that the governments of the various administrations (central, regional and local) want to have public television and radio, which, as we shall see, they often put to use for partisan interests (Fernández Alonso & Santana Cruz, 2000; Blasco Gil, Fernández Alonso & Moragas Spà, 2009; Guimerà, 2006).

Other factors that go to explain the weight of Spanish public broadcasting, which we shall cover in greater detail in this article, are the incorporation of stations and frequencies of the "institutional channels" of Francoism, which had no *raison d'être* after democracy had been restored, first, into Radio Cadena Española and, after that one had become defunct, into the State network (Radio Nacional de España) from 1988 (Bonet, 1997; Aguilera Moyano, 1989). Public media also have a particularly considerable presence in autonomous communities that have a strong sense of identity, like Catalonia and the Basque Country, after four decades of cultural and language persecution under Francoism. It is for this reason that public broadcasting has also been considered a crucial instrument for shaping their own particular communication spaces, necessary, in turn, for the consolidation of what has often been described as the "process of national construction" (Gifreu, 2009; Zallo, 2005).

³ In this article, when reference is made to the regional context, it should be understood as being synonymous with coverage in the territory of one of the 17 autonomous communities into which, since the restoration of democracy, Spanish territory has been divided. These autonomous communities have gradually acquired greater powers over media issues, even though the 1978 Spanish Constitution in force sets out that the State has exclusive authority for basic norms on such issues, "without prejudice to the faculties which in their development and execution belong to the Autonomous Communities" (article 149.1.27).

⁴ Provincial councils are supramunicipal bodies. Although some autonomous communities are uniprovincial, most are divided into several provinces. Provincial councils are the governing bodies of these provinces.

2. State public broadcasting

State public radio broadcasting began in 1937, at the height of the Spanish Civil War, with Radio Nacional de España (RNE), whereas State television broadcasting began in 1956, at the height of the dictatorship, with Televisión Española (TVE). During Francoism (1939-1975), Spanish public broadcasting was an instrument for the propaganda interests of the regime, although the number of channels gradually increased, with secondary and tertiary offerings of a predominantly cultural nature. This was similar to what happened in other European countries. Thus, when the dictator died (1975), the public broadcasting corporation had two television channels (TVE1 and TVE2) and four radio stations (Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3 and overseas broadcasts) and, during the period of Spain's transition towards democracy (1975-1982), it set up a project to promote a new radio station in some territories that had their own languages other than Spanish (this was the case for Catalonia, in 1975, and Galicia, in 1985). During this period of Spain's transition towards democracy, the creation of another public radio network, Radio Cadena Española (RCE), was also significant. This and three other radio networks linked to the core ideologies of Francoism, which were Red de Emisoras del Movimiento (REM), Cadena Azul de Radiodifusión (CAR) and Cadena de Emisoras Sindicales (CES), shaped the "institutional radio network" scene at that time, which obviously became defunct with the fall of the regime (Bonet, 1997; Bustamante, 2006).

In 1980, the centre-ground party Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD), the governing political party, and the socialist Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), at that time the main opposition party, passed a bill, after lengthy negotiations, that gave rise to Act 4/1980, known as the Estatuto de Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE) (Spanish Broadcasting Corporation Statute). The Statute created three public companies (Televisión Española, Radio Nacional de España and Radio Cadena Española), to be managed by a Director General and a board of directors common to all of them. The Director General, who had wide-ranging powers, would be appointed from then – until 2006 – by the government for a period equal to a term of office (four years), which contributed to a considerable degree of government interference in Spanish public broadcasting for over a quarter of a century. At the same time, Act 4/1980 consolidated the already existing mixed funding model⁵, in which commercial revenue clearly had priority over public subsidies. Public subsidies were even withdrawn in the 1980s, until the corporation's indebtedness became apparent and shot up in a very short space of time, coinciding with the advent of private television in 1990 (Llorens & Fernández Alonso, 2010).

In the 1980s and 1990s, there were some new developments in the programmes offered by RTVE, for two basic reasons and at two particular moments in time. Regarding radio, in 1988, RCE broadcasts ceased and its frequencies were mostly allocated to the creation of new RNE stations, in this instance Radio 5, which

ended up opting for an all-news format (Bonet, 1997). Regarding television, in the 1990s, a number of different themed channels were launched, which were distributed via satellite, some of which were free to view at the beginning of the decade, though most were subsequently distributed via the multichannel pay-TV platform called Via Digital after its launch in 1997⁶.

In this context, in which the State public broadcasting corporation was systematically accused of folding under the pressure of the government in power, and of dragging a debt – guaranteed by the government – that exceeded €7 billion in the 2000s, ever greater insistence was placed on the need to reform the model established in 1980. Consequently, to solve the problem of government interference in RTVE, a bill was passed, which gave rise to State Radio and Television Act 17/2006. Among the new approaches taken in this Act,⁷ worthy of note is the reduction in powers (in relation to the board of directors) of the then chairman of the RTVE Corporation, who, moreover, would have to be appointed by a large parliamentary majority – and not by the government – for a period of six years. Consequently, the RTVE chairman's term of office would not coincide with the government's (Llorens & Fernández Alonso, 2010).

Regarding the debts, the new socialist governments (2004-to date) took several significant decisions. The first was the application of a financial clean-up plan that has since led to staff cuts, early retirements and programme cutbacks in channels aimed at specific territories (opt-outs). The second was the State's assumption of the accumulated debt. And the third was the modification of the funding model. This had not been changed under the 2006 reform, though it was radically changed in 2009. Consequently, inspired by the French policy, President Zapatero's government decided (Act 8/2009) to remove advertising from TVE, which had already been removed from RNE in 1993. As a result, the funding of national public broadcasting has, since January 2010, depended basically on public subsidies, on spectrum-use rights and on the gross operating revenue of free-to-air (3%) and pay-TV (1.5%) television operators, and of telecommunications companies (0.9%) (Zallo, 2010). However, this measure has been under examination since January 2010 by the European Union's Directorate General for Competition, which announced the initiation of violation proceedings against France for the application of its "telecommunications tax"⁸.

At the end of 2009, coinciding with the funding model reform, the chairman of the RTVE Corporation and journalist Luis Fernández resigned. Fernández, who had been appointed by a large parliamentary majority, managed to regain not only Televisión Española's audience leadership, but also the credibility of its news programmes, which won the 2009 Media Tenor Global TV Award.

⁵ A tax (fee) for owning and using television sets was in force between 1957 and 1965. Its budgetary contribution was minimal, mainly because the administrative system for collecting it was inoperative (Bustamante, 2006).

⁶ This platform –in which RTVE was a shareholder– was promoted by Telefónica, the former public company for telecommunications, which was undergoing a process of privatisation at that time. The Partido Popular conservative government unsuccessfully tried to develop a large communications group around the privatisation of Telefónica to compete with PRISA.

⁷ Inspired by work done by a panel of experts (a journalist, two academics and two philosophers) appointed by the socialist government in 2004. PSOE regained power in Spain after the Islamist attack on Madrid in March 2004, three days before the general elections.

⁸ *Expansión*, 28 January 2010.

His successor, Alberto Oliart, was a politician during Spain's transition towards democracy. In his eighties and with no experience in the sector, he has a really complex challenge ahead of him: directing a State public broadcasting corporation, with no advertising revenue, in the new digital context. TVE is facing up to the post-switch-off era with two digital terrestrial television (DTT) multiplexes⁹, accounting for 25% of the whole spectrum set aside for DTT broadcasts with national coverage. Meanwhile, RNE, despite having a high number of frequencies and major broadcasting power in terms of audience, is trailing quite a long way behind the big private stations (SER, Cope and Onda Cero) at a time when there are no clear signs to be seen of any transition from analogue to digital being made in the sector¹⁰.

3. Autonomous-community public broadcasting

With the restoration of democracy in Spain, the devolution of powers to the regions, as established under the 1978 Spanish Constitution, allowed autonomous communities and municipalities to start developing their own public broadcasting systems. At the same time, community radio stations and new commercial radio stations, such as Antena 3, Radio 80, Cadena Nova and Radio Color began to emerge, which, for the very first time, shattered the private sector oligopoly. That said, it would only take less than a decade for the oligopoly to rebuild itself (Prado, 1994; Bonet, 1997).

Three phases have been highlighted with regard to the development of autonomous-community public broadcasting: the first was the creation, in the first half of the 1980s, of public broadcasting corporations in the Basque Country (1982), Catalonia (1983) and Galicia (1985). The governing parties in all three autonomous communities were different from the governing party of Spain, and, in all three, the role of public broadcasting was considered crucial to the recovery of language and culture after the end of the dictatorship (Maneiro, 1990; Peñafiel, 1992). The second stage spanned the period between 1986 and 1989, during which second channels were launched in Catalonia and the Basque Country, and initial projects were promoted in another three autonomous communities, where, on this occasion, the governing party in all three was socialist (PSOE): Andalusia, Madrid and the Valencian Community. The third phase began at the end of the 1990s, coinciding with the advent of satellite television platforms, which would lead to the creation of specific offerings for distribution via this new system. Television broadcasting in the Canary Islands and Castilla-La Mancha was also promoted in the same, turn-of-the-century years. Finally, a fourth phase should be added, by that time in context of DTT rollout, which would be marked by the creation of

⁹ Eight out of 32 national coverage programmes. A digital audio broadcasting (DAB) or DTT programme is the equivalent of an analogue radio station or a television channel.

¹⁰ Though it should be noted that General Broadcasting Act 7/2010 of 31 March sets out that, within a period of 18 months from the effective date of the Act, the Government shall approve a technical plan for integral digitalisation of the terrestrial radio audio broadcasting service that shall respect – with any relevant adaptations – the licences in force for the provision of MW, FM and digital radio audio broadcasting services (15th transitory provision).

public operators in the autonomous communities of Murcia, Aragon, the Balearic Islands, Extremadura and Asturias. All of them were launched in around 2005, and most of them clearly opted to outsource management to private companies, despite the explicit legal ban on doing so.

Generally speaking, autonomous-community public broadcasting corporations copy the governance and funding models already described for RTVE and, consequently, suffer from the same problems of government interference and indebtedness. So, for example, it is not by coincidence that, to bring down costs, so many public broadcasting corporations have opted to outsource production (Fernández-Quijada, 2008). This phenomenon, which is more apparent for television than for radio, emerged at the end of the 1990s. It consists of the implementation of a new content management model, in which the production of all, or almost all, of its programmes is awarded to a production company through a process of tendering (Fernández Alonso, 2002).

At the beginning of 2010, there were 13 autonomous-community public broadcasting corporations in Spain. All of them had one or more television channels (with simultaneous analogue and digital broadcasts) and one or more radio stations (analogue). The only autonomous communities that did not have their own public media were Castilla y León, La Rioja, Navarre and Cantabria. Out of all of them, the autonomous communities that had more television channels and radio stations, distributed via a variety of platforms (terrestrial, satellite, cable and IPTV), were the first ones to forge ahead with their development after the restoration of democracy in Spain. Termed "historic nationalities", with a stronger tradition of self-government claims, these were: Catalonia (six television channels and four radio stations), the Basque Country (five and five, respectively), Galicia (four and two, respectively) and Andalusia (three and three, respectively).

In April 2010, regional public television became digital only, whereas public radio is still broadcast using analogue technology (Bonet, Corominas, Fernández Alonso & Díez, 2009).

In 1999, frequencies were planned for DAB with State-wide coverage (six programmes out of 18 for the public sector) and regional coverage. Regarding the latter, each autonomous community went on to have a single-frequency network (SFN) and a multi-frequency network (MFN)¹¹, with three programmes in each network (half of the available spectrum) set aside for the public broadcasting corporation. The rest of the programmes would have to be put out to tender in order to be awarded to the private sector, something that only happened in Catalonia, though it had no practical effect because of the total stagnation of DAB (Corominas, Guimerà, Fernández, Bonet, 2005).

Regarding regional television, the introduction of DTT means that each autonomous community has two multiplexes (eight programmes), with the potential for opt-outs within the regional territory itself. The

¹¹ An SFN does not allow for opt-outs within the autonomous community, though an MFN does.

programmes can be distributed, according to the wishes of each autonomous community, to the private or public sectors. In general, it could be said that there is a greater tendency to give priority to the public sector in the "historical nationalities", where public television has traditionally played a fundamental role in generalising the regions' own languages other than Spanish. Hence, for example, the Basque Country has so far chosen not to grant licences for DTT with regional coverage to the private sector, and Catalonia, which exceptionally has three multiplexes, has allocated two of them to the autonomous-community public broadcasting corporation.

In terms of audience, the shares vary considerably from one autonomous community to another, for both public television and radio with regional coverage. Thus, in 2009, the first television channels of the "historical nationalities" (Andalusia, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia) had audience shares ranging between 13.4% and 15.6%. This meant that they led the ratings, though only on certain occasions, in their respective territories. In contrast, others, such as the public television stations in the Balearic Islands or the recently created one in Murcia, hardly exceeded 5% of the share in the same year 2009¹².

Regarding radio, out of the 11 most popular talk radio stations across the State in 2009, six were public: the State radio station RNE had an audience share of 8.5% (lagging behind the top three stations, all of which are private: SER, 37.9%; Onda Cero, 15.9%; COPE, 15.4%), followed, despite their limited coverage, by autonomous-community public radio stations (Catalonia's Catalunya Ràdio, 3%; Andalusia's Canal Sur Radio, 2.9%; the Basque Country's Radio Euskadi and Euskadi Irratia, 1.9% and 0.5%, respectively; and Galicia's Radio Galega, 0.9%)¹³.

All autonomous-community public broadcasting corporations form part of the Federation of Autonomous-community Broadcasting Corporations (FORTA), which, among other things, offers an advice service for negotiating broadcast rights, programme buying, news services, programme exchanges and sales of joint advertising slots.

4. Local public broadcasting

Spain has 30-year tradition of local public broadcasting. In Catalonia, the first radio stations managed by town or city councils were launched in 1979, and the first municipal television operators emerged in 1983¹⁴, coinciding with the launch of the first autonomous-community public television stations (Moragas & Corominas, 1988; Bonet, 1997; Guimerà, 2006).

¹² Noticias de la Comunicación, January 2010.

¹³ EGM. Radio station ratings, October 2008 to May 2009 rolling year. Data from Monday to Sunday. According to the same source, in 2009 the audience for these regional public radio stations in their respective autonomous communities was: Catalunya Ràdio, 464,000 listeners; Sur Radio, 376,000 listeners; Radio Euskadi, 220,000 listeners; and Radio Galega, 122,000 listeners.

¹⁴ In Spain, the term "municipal media" is used to refer to local public media promoted by town or city councils.

The first local public radio and television stations did not arise from State or autonomous-community policies oriented towards the creation of these media. Quite the opposite, in fact. They emerged in a political context that ignored, not to say persecuted, the creation of local media, especially television, and particularly private television. In fact, the first local public radio and television stations emerged from the "municipalisation" of civil society initiatives, such as associations, which had sought institutional funding to face up to the bans imposed by the State government and to ensure that they had the necessary resources to survive. In this sense, it is possible to conclude that the origin of local public media in Spain lies in civil society initiatives and in the interest that various town or city councils had in them, without there being any kind of State public policy whatsoever to foster them (Moragas & Corominas, 1988 and 1992; Guimerà, 2006; Bonet, 2001; Esteve, 1982).

Consequently, in a context of political transition, the launch of local media was, for several social groups, a way of furthering the recently regained democracy: expanding freedom of expression, increasing media pluralism, encouraging citizen participation and fostering civil-society and political activism (Moragas & Corominas, 1992; Corominas, Díez & Bergés, 1996; Prado, 1983 and 1985). In addition, some town or city councils felt that they ought to support these incipient and under-resourced media as yet another of their functions in the new democratic context. That was how they assumed the management of community media or opted for the creation of new radio and television stations (Moragas & Corominas, 1988 and 1992; Guimerà 2006; Navarro Moreno, 1999; Badillo, 2003, pp. 39 onwards).

However, local public broadcasting was not regulated in Spain until the 1990s, and it varied significantly between radio and television. Radio was regulated in 1991 by an Act that allowed every town or city council to launch its own public radio station, setting aside a frequency for that purpose. In contrast, television was not fully regulated until the mid 2000s, by that time in the context of digitalisation. Although a bill was passed in 1995, which also identified local television with local coverage, the sector's regularisation was blocked because central government did not approve the required technical plan for frequencies. It should be underscored that Local Television Act 41/1995 favoured the public sector in the event of there being a limited number of frequencies. Nevertheless, legal insecurity concerning the sector's status prevailed until the advent of DTT.

There are no reliable data on the number of local television stations in Spain in the 1990s, since, from a business viewpoint, the sector was very unstable, partly because of the legal void in which it existed. That said, two studies carried out in 1996 and 1999 estimated that between 12% and 17% of all local television stations were promoted by the public sector (Guimerà, 2006, p. 163). These same studies pointed out considerable differences between the autonomous communities in those years. While local public television stations in regions like Catalonia and Andalusia accounted for up to 50% of the sector, in the Basque

Country and Navarre they hardly accounted for 10%. Another example: in Castilla y León, there was only one municipal television station, whereas there were over 30 private ones (Guimerà, 2006; Arana, Azpillaga, Narbaiza & Lazkano, 2003; Badillo, 2003).

Regarding municipal radio, the sector grew constantly throughout the 1990s and into the first few years of the 2000s. Consequently, while in the 1990s there were around 500 public stations, by the end of 2009 the figure had reached 1,194. Nearly all of them were managed by a single town or city council, although there were a few – very few – instances of joint management by several municipalities. Even though 17 autonomous communities have stations of this type, nearly half of all the stations in Spain are located in just two of them: Andalusia, with 305 and Catalonia, with 264¹⁵. Regarding television, it is impossible to provide data of this type for the same periods, because the sector was in the process of being reorganised due to the transition from analogue to digital, which, as already mentioned, does not affect radio yet.

In Spain, the rollout of DTT in the local context is being implemented on a new territorial basis termed “demarcation” (Corominas, 2009). Consequently, national territory has been divided into 283 demarcations, most of which include more than one municipality. Each of these demarcations has one multiplex, allowing four television programmes to be launched. An exception to this rule can be found in Andalusia, where, in 10 demarcations, up to five programmes can be created. Furthermore, six demarcations (in Catalonia and Andalusia) have two multiplexes, meaning that there are 289 multiplexes in total in Spain (Corominas et al., 2007).

According to the basic legislation approved by the Government of Spain, autonomous communities can set aside at least one and at most two programmes for each local DTT multiplex for the public sector. Therefore, a maximum of 578 local public television stations could be launched. However, for the time being, the number of stations in autonomous communities that have completed the processes of tendering varies substantially from one to another. Consequently, while Catalonia plans to create 37 public television stations out of a possible 96, the Basque Country only plans to launch one municipal television station out of a possible 60. As far as Navarre is concerned, it has not even started the process of allocating programmes to town or city councils, though the private ones have indeed been awarded.

The new local public television model represents a radical change in comparison to the analogue era for two specific reasons. First, because the potential number of local public television stations is reduced. Under analogue television legislation, it could have been one per municipality. The approach taken under the new system is to create stations with a wider reach. Second, because the new system establishes a new management model: in demarcations formed by more than one municipality, the respective town or

¹⁵ Source: Ministerio de Industria, Turismo y Comercio [online document]: “Emisoras municipales en Frecuencia Modulada”. <<http://www.mityc.es/telecomunicaciones/Espectro/RadioTV/FM/Paginas/FMmunicipales.aspx>> [Accessed: December 2009].

city councils must agree to jointly manage the public stations, thus giving rise to supramunicipal management of programmes (channels) (Guimerà, 2006; Corominas, 2009).

In regions that have a long tradition of local television, such as Catalonia, the new model is hindering the continuity of the experience, because town or city councils have serious problems when it comes to jointly managing programmes. This is due to all sorts of disagreements, such as who ought to fund local television, how it ought to be funded, where its headquarters ought to be located, who controls it politically and what presence the various municipalities will have in the joint programmes (Guimerà et al., 2009).

Regarding the governance model, the organisation and operation of local broadcasting depends on municipal councils (and on supramunicipal consortiums for local DTT), and it suffers from governmental and political interference, which is a characteristic trait of Spanish public broadcasting in general.

Regarding management, in the last five years of the 1990s, several approaches were taken, including indirect management of the service and/or a high degree of production outsourcing, particularly for television. The first television station to opt for this model was Barcelona TV in 1994, followed by several Catalan local television stations. Since 2005, in the context of migration to DTT, several public corporations have opted for ever greater outsourcing. The reason for this is always financial; it allows them to minimise their own resources and to bring down general production costs (Guimerà, 2006).

As happens in the autonomous-community context, and until recently in the State context, local public media are funded through a combination of municipal budgets and advertising revenue (double funding). Regarding television, the proportion of advertising revenue is generally very low; television stations located in municipalities of a certain size are the only ones able to get significant amounts from this source. Very few public television stations generate revenue from selling their productions, mostly to other local stations (Bonet, 1997 and 2001; Corominas, Díez & Bergés, 1999; Guimerà, 2006).

The evolution of local public media has given rise to a phenomenon termed "multimedia local council". Over the years, many town or city councils have taken on the role of managing municipal press, radio and television. In fact, more than a few television stations were created through initiatives taken by municipal radio professionals, for whom the new medium represented a professional challenge and a way of providing a better public service (Guimerà, 2006). In addition, from the end of the 1990s, the advent of the Internet meant that many medium and large town or city councils were able to create their own news portals. In this context, the latest multimedia phenomenon to take hold in town or city councils is the creation of webcasting channels via their websites. For some councils, this tool opens a new audiovisual window for their relationships with citizens, allowing them to get around the problems caused by the rollout of DTT (Guimerà et al., 2009).

Finally, it is worth bearing in mind that local media also receive financial and/or institutional support from autonomous-community governments and supralocal bodies. For example, Catalan provincial councils have lines of support for these media. Thus, for example, for both radio and television, they have created and funded low-cost programme distribution networks to bring down the production costs of media of this type, which, generally speaking, have limited resources (Guimerà, 2006).

Barcelona Provincial Council, one of the most important ones in Spain in political and economic terms, has managed to create a radio network that covers the whole of Catalonia, a territorial area that is much bigger than the one it administers. Through an association of around 100 municipal radio stations across the autonomous community, Barcelona Provincial Council manages a generalist network that competes in the same market as Catalan autonomous-community radio stations. This network was launched in the mid 1990s, as a political instrument of Barcelona Provincial Council (controlled by socialists at that time) to compete with the autonomous-community public radio stations (managed by a nationalist government at that time) (Cóppulo, 2006; Guimerà, 2006).

5. Outlook and future challenges

Given the considerable number of media and the problems that Spanish public broadcasting is currently experiencing, it is necessary to consider what the outlook is and what future challenges it faces.

Spanish public and private terrestrial radio will continue to be, at least for the time being, an analogue medium and business, which faces the tough challenge of deciding how and when to become part of the digital landscape, and what to do with the digital licences already granted though not exploited due to the failure of DAB.

Meanwhile, State and regional public radio stations are facing a model-related crisis (including the legitimacy of the model) that has nothing to do with the digitalisation process. Its decline falls within a context of general crisis among European public radio broadcasters, which has given a new impetus to the private sector and consequently encouraged greater competition. In Spain, this decline is very evident, since public radio has a significant (in terms of the number of stations) and varied (in terms of the type of stations) presence on the airwaves, and has led the ratings for many years in some autonomous communities. Local public radio, whose rollout and presence (in terms of the number of stations) across Spain is uneven, probably does not show as many signs of fatigue, though it has also had to adapt to the crisis using a variety of formulas like, for example, the syndication of content. Regarding funding, even though RNE has not allowed advertising since 1993, only a few autonomous communities, such as Catalonia, are considering putting limits on advertising though not removing it altogether.

Television is a very different matter, because it is undergoing deep-seated structural changes in the context of digitalisation. Consequently, TVE, deprived of advertising revenue, is facing up to the challenge of offering eight DTT programmes responding to the interests of an ever more fragmented audience, and of maintaining its generalist channel's leadership (TVE1), which it regained in 2009 (before advertising had been removed from its programming).

Discontent with the change in the funding model has been expressed in various scholarly articles and observations (Zallo, 2010; Bustamante, 2010; ULEPICC, 2010). In them, the socialist government is accused of making a neoliberal about-turn in its broadcasting policy, by making RTVE's funding dependent on the operating profit of private television operators, which, moreover, have asked for their percentage contribution to the funding of Spanish public broadcasting to be reduced. A major risk in this respect is the European Union's anticipated resolution not to allow RTVE to be partly funded through the 0.9% levy on the gross operating revenue of telecommunications operators. In fact, the public operators' new funding model has already led to some quite unfortunate decisions, like pulling-out of Euronews, which may imply the disappearance of news programmes in Spanish on that pan-European channel.

Regarding autonomous-community public television stations, they undeniably face important challenges in a new context where television offerings are much more plentiful, although it would seem that none of them are going to opt for the removal of advertising. The rollout of DTT is the beginning of a new era for autonomous-community broadcasting in general, and public broadcasting in particular. Firstly, because new public channels are being launched. And secondly, because autonomous-community private television is emerging; in other words, it is a new stakeholder that forces public providers to compete in a market that they have so far exploited in a monopoly situation. This is something that will probably reinforce the tendency to outsource production to bring down costs.

However, it is local public television that finds itself in the most fragile position. The fact that coordinated management between several town or city councils – often without any experience in the analogue context – has been chosen as a general formula, together with the complex financial moment that municipal councils are currently experiencing, points towards a generalised impediment for the progress of the sector. The local television stations of large towns or cities may be an exception to this rule; this is particularly so for those that provided a service prior to the rollout of DTT and, above all, if the respective councils can manage them independently, without having to share a programme with other adjacent municipalities.

In general terms, there should be an insistence, whether from academic, professional or political fields, on the need to remove governmental interference from public media, and particularly from regional and local media, establishing terms of office in their governing bodies that do not coincide with a government's term of office, something that, on a regional scale, has only been implemented in Catalonia. In contrast,

depoliticisation appears to be something that is unlikely to be achieved in the short term. This is due to the role that governments play in the shaping of the governing bodies of the various public broadcasting corporations in, it is worth recalling, the context of a polarised pluralist media system.

However, at the height of the current economic crisis, the debate about the size of the Spanish public broadcasting system and its financial sustainability has resurfaced, particularly since the autonomous communities decided to offer more channels. In this context, the historic lack of collaboration between the different public broadcasting corporations (national, regional and local) makes even less sense, especially when considering that collaboration on a regional scale has indeed been possible.

6. References

Achille, Y. (1994). *Les télévisions publiques en quête d'avenir*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.

Aguilera Moyano, M. de (1989). De la autarquía a la democracia: La radio española en los años sesenta y setenta. In J. Timoteo Álvarez (Ed.), *Historia de los medios de comunicación en España* (pp. 289-303). Madrid: Ariel Comunicación.

Arana, E., Azpillaga, P., Narbaiza, B. & Lazkano, Í. (2007). *Panorama de la televisión local en Euskal Herria 2003* [unpublished document].

Badillo, Á. (2003). *La desregulación de la televisión local en España: el caso de Castilla y León* [doctoral thesis].

Balsebre, A. (2001). *Historia de la radio en España* (vol. 2). Madrid: Cátedra.

Bardoel, J. & d'Haenens, L. (2008). Reinventing public service broadcasting in Europe: prospects, promises and problems. *Media, Culture and Society*, 30 (3), 337-355.

Blasco Gil, J.J., Fernández Alonso, I. & Moragas Spà, M. de (2009). Les polítiques de comunicació. In M. de Moragas i Spà, I. Fernández Alonso, N. Almiron, J.J. Blasco Gil, J.M. Corbella Cordoní, M. Civil i Serra et al. (Eds.), *Informe de la comunicació a Catalunya 2007-2008* (pp. 233-249). Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya.

Bonet, M. (1997). La neo-regulación radiofónica en España. Un proceso de transformación abierto al futuro. *Telos*, 48, 13-22.

Bonet, M., Corominas, M., Fernández Alonso, I. & Daudiez, M. (2009). Keys to the failure of DAB in Spain. *Journal of Radio and Audio Media*, 16 (1), 83-101.

Bustamante, E. (1982). *Los amos de la información en España*. Madrid: Akal.

Bustamante, E. (2006). *Radio y televisión en España. Historia de una asignatura pendiente de la democracia*. Barcelona: Gedisa editorial.

Bustamante, E. (2010, February). Deterioro democrático en España. La contrarreforma audiovisual socialista. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 1, 4 and 5.

Cebrián Herreros, M. (1992). Radio pública/Radio privada. In B. Díaz Nosty (Ed.), *Comunicación Social 1992/Tendencias. Informes anuales de Fundesco (pp. 215-228)*. Madrid: Fundesco.

Cóppulo, S. (2006). *Com neix COM Ràdio: el naixement d'un nou model de xarxa local de ràdio*. Barcelona: Angles.

Corominas, M., Guimerà, J.À., Fernández Alonso, I. & Bonet, M. (2005). Políticas públicas de ràdio i televisió local en l'entorn digital a Espanya (1997-2004). *Trípodos*, 2 (special issue), 639-650.

[English version online: http://www.structuracom.com/eng/pubs/tripodos_eng.pdf]

Corominas, M., Díez, M. & Bergés, L. (1996). *Llibre Blanc de la radiodifusió municipal a Catalunya* [unpublished document].

Corominas, M., Bonet, M., Fernández Alonso, I., Guimerà i Orts, J.À., Sanmartín, J. & Blasco Gil, J.J. (2007, May). Televisión digital terrestre local (TDT-L) en España: los concesionarios privados. *Zer*, 22, 69-95.

Corominas, M. (2009). *Televisió local a Catalunya*. Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans.

Esteve, A. (1982). Les ràdios municipals a Catalunya. *Arrel*, 3, 3-43.

Fernández Alonso, I. & Santana Cruz, F. (2000). *Estado y medios de comunicación en la España democrática*. Madrid: Alianza.

Fernández Alonso, I. (2002). La externalización de la producción de los operadores públicos de televisión de ámbito autonómico en España. Los casos canario y extremeño [online article]. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 46. <http://www2.ull.es/publicaciones/latina/2002/latina46enero/4604isabel.htm>

Fernández-Quijada, D. (2008). *Las industrias culturales ante el cambio digital. Propuesta metodológica y análisis de caso de la televisión en España* [online doctoral thesis]. <http://www.tdx.cat/TDX-0523108-151341>

Gifreu, J. (2009). TV3 i Catalunya Ràdio: 25 anys de servei al país. In M. de Moragas i Spà, I. Fernández Alonso, N. Almiron, J.J. Blasco Gil, J.M. Corbella Cordoní, M. Civil i Serra et al. (Eds.), *Informe de la comunicació a Catalunya 2007-2008* (pp. 339-351). Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya.

Guimerà i Orts, J.À. (2006). *La televisió local a Catalunya: gestació, naixement i transformacions (1976-2005)* [unpublished document].

Guimerà, J.À., Bonet, M., Domingo, D., Rabadán, J.V. & Alborch, F. (2009). *La comunicació local a Catalunya. Informe 2008* [online document]. Belleterra: Institut de la Comunicació de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. http://www.portalcomunicacion.com/ocl/down/infome_comloc_2008.pdf

Hardy, J. (2008). *Western Media Systems*. London: Routledge.

Hallin, D. C. & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Humphreys, P. (1996). *Mass Media and Media Policy in Western Europe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Humphreys, P. (2008). The Principal Axes of the European Union's Audiovisual Policy. In I. Fernández Alonso & M. de Moragas (Eds.), *Communication and Cultural Policies in Europe* (pp. 151-182). Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya.

López, B., Risquete, J. & Castelló, E. (1999). España: consolidación del modelo autonómico en la era multicanal. In M. de Moragas, C. Garitaonandía & B. López (Eds.), *Televisión de proximidad en Europa. Experiencias de descentralización en la era digital* (pp. 141-191). Bellaterra, Castelló de la Plana, Barcelona, Valencia: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Servei de Publicacions; Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I; Universitat Pompeu Fabra; Universitat de València. Servei de Publicacions.

Lowe, G.F. & Bardoel, J. (Eds.) (2007). *From Public Service Broadcasting to Public Service Media*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

Llorens, C. & Fernández Alonso, I. (2010). The Reform of the Public Radio and Television System in the United Kingdom and in Spain (2004-2007). In B. Dovek-Ostrowska, M. Glowacki, K. Jakubowicz, & M. Sükosd (Eds.), *Comparative Media Systems. European and Global perspectives* (pp. 97-114). Budapest: CEU Press.

Maneiro, A. (1990). Las televisiones autonómicas en España. *Situación 1990/1. Informe sobre la información*, 151-173.

Moragas, M. de & Corominas, M. (1988). *Local communication in Catalonia (1975-1988). Media spaces and democratic participation*. Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona.

Moragas, M. de & Corominas, M. (1992). Spain, Catalonia: Media and democratic participation in local communication. In N. Jankowski, O. Prehn & J. Stappers (Eds.), *The people's voice. Local radio and television in Europe* (pp. 186-197). London: John Libbey.

Navarro, J.A. (1999). *La televisión local. Andalucía: la nueva comunicación*. Madrid: Fragua.

Peñafiel, C. (1992). *Las radios autonómicas y transformaciones de la radio entre 1980-1990*. Bilbao: Servicio Editorial Universidad del País Vasco.

Prado, E. (1983). Las radios municipales entre la alternativa y el tedio. In M. Carrillo (Ed.), *Informació i política* (pp. 157-166). Barcelona: ICSDB.

Prado, E. (1985, April-June). Televisión comunitaria en Catalunya. *Telos*, pp. 53-58.

Prado, E. (1994). El nuevo sistema radiofónico y la configuración del Estado: la sintonía de la radio española. In B. Díaz Nosty (Ed.), *Comunicación social 1994/Tendencias. Informes Anuales de Fundesco* (pp. 235-239). Madrid: Fundesco.

Richeri, G. (1994). *La transición de la televisión*. Barcelona: Bosch.

ULEPICC (2009). *Reforma y contrarreforma en la política de comunicación audiovisual* [online document]. <http://www.ulepicc.es/> [Accessed: February 2010].

Zallo, R. (2005). Revisar el sistema comunicativo audiovisual en las nacionalidades históricas: el caso vasco [online article]. *Observatorio Galego dos Medios*.

<http://www.observatoriodosmedios.org/mediateca/observatorio/mediateca/>

Documentos/Dosieres/Novo_Modelo_de_Medios_Publicos_Galegos/casovasco_ramonzallo.pdf> [Accessed: May 2007].

Zallo, R. (2010). La política de comunicación audiovisual del gobierno socialista (2004-2009): un giro neoliberal [online article]. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*.

http://www.revistalatinacs.org/10/art/880_UPV/RLCS_art880.pdf [Accessed: April 2010].