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## **The challenge of diversity in public service media: A case study of Spanish regional Broadcast Video on Demand portals**

### **Abstract**

As European public service media (PSM) corporations adapt to the platformed context, the challenge of preserving diversity, one of their essential elements of public value, has become increasingly complex, especially in the case of regional corporations. In this context, this article focuses on a Spanish case study and examines how the four Spanish regional PSM with Broadcast Video on Demand (BVOD) services – EITB (Basque Country), CCMA (Catalonia), CSAG (Galicia), and RTVA (Andalusia) – integrate diversity in the design and management of these portals (Primeran, 3Cat, AGalega and CanalSur Más). For an empirical and comparative analysis of the strategies, constraints, and tensions that are developing, the study draws on twelve in-depth interviews with the BVOD managers, content directors, and innovation officers of these PSM online services, conducted between 2023 and 2024. The findings show that online portals offer new opportunities to promote diversity as a multidimensional element of public value that goes beyond cultural representation to encompass governance, production, and programming. The study identifies two diversity management strategies – visible and invisible – each reflecting different operational logics that contribute to the renewal of the social contract between PSM and the societies they serve.

**Keywords:** public service media, diversity, public value, regional PSM, BVOD services.

## **Introduction**

Public service media (PSM) are facing new challenges in the platformed media landscape, which is dominated by global digital platforms – primarily from the US and China – that concentrate power and operate with monopolistic tendencies, cross-subsidisation models, and user-centric design strategies, which also shape communication practises. Nieborg and Poell (2018: 4276) describe the platformisation of communication “as the penetration of digital platforms’ economic, infrastructural, and governmental extensions into the cultural industries, as well as the organization of cultural practices of labor, creativity, and democracy around these platforms”. This shift has reshaped the processes of media production, distribution, and consumption around the logic of platforms. As a result, traditional media are increasingly dependent on digital platforms not only to distribute their content but also to maintain audience engagement and visibility in a highly competitive and algorithm-driven environment (Poell et al., 2022).

In response to this evolving ecosystem, where previous scholarship highlights clear risks to the sustainability of traditional liberal democracies and the representation of pluralism in modern societies (Sehl et al., 2017; Martin, 2021; Iordache et al., 2025), PSM corporations are forced to rethink their mandate through the lens of public value (Cañedo et al., 2022). There is no doubt that PSM in Europe are structural actors of the welfare state to articulate participation in a democratic society, especially due to their role in reflecting and promoting the cultural and social diversity of the territories in which they operate (Bengesser & Sørensen, 2024). However, while diversity is still a core value of PSM, it has become more complex in the platformed context, in which Broadcast Video on Demand (BVOD) services have increasingly displaced traditional

media infrastructures in the distribution of audiovisual content (D'Arma et al., 2021; Bruun & Lassen, 2023).

Despite the historical importance of diversity as a public value in regional and proximity-based media, most scholarly attention has focused on international subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) services operated by private companies. In contrast, less attention has been paid to BVOD services launched by PSM, even though prior research suggests that their approaches to diversity, characterised by local perspectives, may differ significantly from those of globally dominant over-the-top (OTT) platforms (Cañedo et al., 2023). To address this gap, we present a case study that focuses on the Spanish context and examines how the four regional PSM organisations that operate their own BVOD portals – EITB, CCMA, CSAG, and RTVA – integrate diversity into their design and operation. Specifically, this study investigates how diversity is conceptualised within the public value mandate of Spanish regional PSM in the platformed context and analyses the strategic and operational measures these broadcasters undertake to promote diversity through their BVOD services.

The selection of Spain as the case study is due to its distinctiveness, as it shares with Germany the highest degree of media decentralisation in Europe. Likewise, its public broadcasting systems are independent from one another, governed by their own regulatory frameworks under regional governments, and exhibit substantial diversity in both structure and programming (Moragas et al., 1999; Richeri, 2005; Campos-Freire, 2016; Cañedo & Rodríguez-Castro, 2023). Moreover, previous literature highlights their value in promoting and safeguarding diversity by reflecting the lifestyles and patterns of social coexistence within the territories in which they operate and by broadcasting in languages not officially recognised at the state level, as well as their ability to promote

employment and stimulate the audiovisual industry (see e.g. Miguel de Bustos & Casado del Río, 2012; Marzal, 2015; Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2024).

### **Theoretical framework**

#### ***Diversity as a core value of public service media***

PSM are emblematic players of the European media system. Entrusted with the Reithian mission to inform, educate, and entertain, they have historically been understood to ensure citizens' access to essential services in European democratic societies (Murdock, 2020). However, the transition from traditional broadcasters to online media has placed them at a crossroads where they must legitimise their remit after decades marked by a triple crisis of identity, legitimacy, and finances (Brevini, 2013). It is in this context, the paradigm of public value was introduced into the PSM narrative (Túñez-López et al., 2021).

In parallel with the implementation of public value strategies adapted to each corporation (Połńska & Beckett, 2019), the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) established six core values of PSM in Europe: Universality, Independence, Excellence, Diversity, Accountability, and Innovation (EBU, 2012). Cañedo et al. (2022) extended the theoretical framework by proposing a conceptualisation based on 12 components that are integrated into the configuration of the public value of PSM, with diversity also understood as a core value.

The value of diversity in PSM is traditionally associated with the presence of a variety of content offered, in terms of genre or pluralism (Price & Raboy, 2003; Horsti et al., 2014; Mangani & Tarrini, 2018). However, following McQuail (1992) and Napoli (1999), the findings of Cañedo et al. (2022) indicate that diversity should be understood as a multi-layered value element linked to programme design as well as to production sources and consumption. Their qualitative analysis of PSM legislation and grey

literature across 14 countries, complemented by an expert focus group, updates the international theoretical framework for public value and observes that diversity is often associated with territorial identity, culture, and the needs of culturally diverse citizens. This aspect is particularly emphasised in regional media due to their inherent cultural proximity. As Picard (2008: 199) notes, “the more local content is produced, the more likely it is to be diverse”.

In this context, diversity in PSM extends beyond pluralism (Napoli, 1997) and involves the relationships between actors across the media ecosystem: legislators, producers, broadcasters, and citizens (Napoli, 1999). This perspective is particularly relevant here, as the article examines not only catalogue diversity but also how diversity in production and decision-making shapes content and distribution.

Napoli’s (1997, 1999) work marked a key theoretical and methodological shift by defining diversity through three dimensions: 1) sources, understood as the variety of content providers, ownership forms, and organizational structures in the media system; 2) content, understood as the variety of genres, viewpoints, and demographic representations available in media output; and 3) exposure, understood as the extent to which audiences actually consume a diverse range of content. We analyse diversity from this multidimensional approach, in which source diversity, linked to governance and production, is characterized as an “invisible” form of diversity that shapes the two more visible dimensions: content diversity and its reach.

Drawing on Napoli’s framework and research arguing that media diversity cannot be reduced to representation or content choice but must engage with governance structures, commissioning practices, workforce composition, and the distribution of communicative power (e.g., Helberger et al., 2018; Saha, 2018; Horsti et al., 2014; Raats et al., 2014; Karppinen, 2013), this article proposes a visible/invisible heuristic.

Rather than introducing a new theoretical model, this distinction maps the causal link between upstream institutional choices (invisible diversity) and observable catalogue outcomes (visible diversity) in BVOD environments.

Apart from the theoretical propositions, there have been limited attempts to quantify diversity in PSM. van der Wurff (2005) states that maintaining or increasing diversity in a media ecosystem will depend on the specific characteristics of each media context. In this sense, a large theoretical tradition (see e.g. Lund & Berg, 2009; Engelbert & Awad, 2014; Valcke et al., 2015; Mangani & Tarrini, 2018) argues that public media play a special role compared to private media when it comes to contributing to diversity.

The EBU has also developed its own line of research on diversity and European PSM, closely linked to their social value<sup>1</sup>, in line with prior research that indicates that European PSM are adopting a more inclusive approach in their daily operations (Horsti & Hultén, 2011; Horsti et al., 2014; Panis et al., 2019; Kerrigan et al., 2023). In addition to the long-standing focus on content diversity, the EBU (2022) has recognised the importance of diversity as a cross-cutting aspect in European PSM activities, linking it to the need to incorporate diversity into both production and consumption processes. The latter is particularly relevant in the platformed context, where diversity is increasingly undermined by the operational logic of the platforms that dominate the market (Sørensen & Hutchinson, 2018; Martin, 2021; Iordache et al., 2025).

The four cases under study – CRTVG, CCMA, EITB, and RTVA – reflect how European sub-state public service media develop BVOD strategies under shared constraints like small markets, varying degrees of linguistic minoritisation, and resource asymmetries. Studies on the UK's BBC ALBA and S4C or Ireland's TG4 reveal that

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<sup>1</sup> See more at: <https://www.ebu.ch/topics/diversity-equity-and-inclusion>

these corporations rely on content exclusivity, partnerships, and co-productions to sustain minoritised audiences (Willis, 2024). Comparative research on European digital markets (Iordache & Raats, 2023; Iordache et al., 2025) and recent EBU (2025 & 2026) reports enable an analysis of these Spanish cases in light of other studied models (such as VRT, DR, YLE, RAI, and the BBC), confirming diversity as a pivotal strategic element for regional PSM.

### ***Reaching out for PSM diversity in the platformed context***

In 2004, the European Parliament encouraged PSM to cultivate digital media services to reach audiences through multiple distribution networks to promote diversity. Early digitisation generated optimism about the opportunities these services offered, particularly through multiple channels supporting diversity and innovation and through new interactive relationships with users (Debrett, 2009). However, as PSM organisations are fully immersed in the platformed context, there is a consensus that core values such as diversity are under threat (D'Arma et al., 2021).

The platform ecosystem is characterised by an abundant offer of content but also by a structural imbalance in source diversity and discoverability due to power concentration in transnational digital companies (Martin, 2021). In this context, PSM are reasserting their role as primary providers of programme diversity while adapting to new online content arrangements that move away from traditional linear logics (van Es & Poell, 2020; Kelly & Sørensen, 2021; Stollfuß, 2022). Bruun and Lassen (2023) point out that diversity is central to discussions about the challenges PSM face when providing streaming services, requiring PSM to balance commercial pressures with their public value mandates (Bonini & Mazzoli, 2022; Reviglio, 2021).

Rather than treating diversity in isolation, its relationship with universality becomes paramount in digital environments (Donders, 2021). In platformed ecosystems,

universality is increasingly defined as the capacity to reach fragmented and underrepresented audiences through prominence and personalisation (Raats et al., 2022; Iordache et al., 2025). Diversity thus becomes a prerequisite for universality: content that fails to reflect linguistic, territorial, generational, and ideological heterogeneity cannot fully represent the public (Bengesser & Sørensen, 2024; Urbániková & Smejkal, 2025).

In this platformed scenario, diversity is interpreted as a multidimensional element of public value. In this article, we examine diversity in BVOD services along the three classical axes proposed by Napoli (1999) – source, content, and exposure – which we synthesise into two interrelated layers:

- Invisible diversity (source): Encompasses governance and the production process and structures, including workforce composition (age, gender, territorial precedence, religion, linguistic diversity, etc.).
- Visible diversity (content & exposure): Encompasses the content provided (linguistic, territorial, cultural, genre, and ideological and social pluralism) as well as its distribution and consumption (audience composition, accessibility, and participation).

Rather than treating the invisible layer as a separate category, we argue that it directly conditions and shapes the visible one.

### **Problem statement**

In the case of Spanish PSM, previous research has been centred on the basis that diversity is a core value of PSM (Túñez-López et al., 2021). Although this value dimension has been little studied, recent studies confirm the promotion and protection of diversity by the Spanish regional PSM. Closely related to proximity, Cañedo and

Rodríguez-Castro (2023) point out that the implementation of the diversity principle in these companies concerns governance, production, and content. In addition, within a more targeted conceptualisation of this value, there is a large body of work that links Spanish regional PSM to the provision of content that reflects social diversity and promotes minority languages (see e.g. Navarro, 2016; González Saavedra, 2021; Junguitu-Angulo & Osuna-Acedo, 2023).

However, the emergence and consolidation of BVOD services pose new challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the diversity principle in regional PSM. While diversity is becoming a core value, prior research has shown that these corporations are beginning their platformisation journey with some difficulty: Although there is a clear intention to move forward, limited budgets and resources, along with employee resistance to change, hinder the development of strong on-demand services (Cañedo et al., 2024). To succeed, PSM organisations must embrace diversity not only in content but also strategically by investing in innovation, preserving audiovisual heritage, and creating inclusive portals that represent the richness of their communities (Cañedo et al., 2023). On this basis, we pose the following research questions:

RQ1: How is diversity conceptualised as part of the public value mandate of Spanish regional PSM in the platformed context?

RQ2: What strategic and operational measures are undertaken by Spanish regional PSM to manage and promote diversity within their BVOD services?

## **Methodology**

A qualitative research methodology based on interviews with media managers is used to answer the research questions posed. However, before developing and explaining the

methodological design, the case study dimension of this research is emphasised. This decision stems from the phenomenon under investigation, as it is a contemporary reality where contextual conditions are of great importance (Yin, 2003).

Based on the configuration of the regional PSM system in Spain, a multiple case study with a holistic approach is applied. This makes it possible to analyse each case as a whole and simultaneously compare the results to identify common patterns and distinctive differences, where applicable. The four PSM organisations operating a BVOD service were selected (Table 1).

Table 1. PSM objects of study

| Corporation                                      | Abbreviation | BVOD service |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Euskal Irrati Telebista                          | EITB         | Primeran     |
| Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals      | CCMA         | 3Cat         |
| Corporación de Servicios Audiovisuais de Galicia | CSAG         | AGalega      |
| Radio y Televisión de Andalucía                  | RTVA         | CanalSur Más |

It should be noted that the corporations under analysis created on-demand websites as embryonic initiatives of their current BVOD services. Table 2 synthesises key information and characteristics of this platformisation process across the cases studied.

Table 2. Spanish regional PSM platforming process

|         |                             | EITB | CCMA | CSAG | RTVA |
|---------|-----------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| History | Launch of on-demand website | 2011 | 2004 | 1997 | 2016 |

|         | Launch of BVOD service    | 2023                                           | 2023                                           | 2024                                           | 2021                                           |
|---------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Access  | User access cost          | Free                                           | Free                                           | Free                                           | Free                                           |
|         | Mandatory subscription    | Yes                                            | No                                             | No                                             | No                                             |
|         | Scope                     | International (with geographical restrictions) | International (with geographical restrictions) | International (with geographical restrictions) | International (with geographical restrictions) |
| Content | TV/Radio                  | TV                                             | Both                                           | Both                                           | Both                                           |
|         | Live/Catalogue            | Catalogue                                      | Both                                           | Both                                           | Both                                           |
|         | Digital-exclusive content | Yes                                            | Yes                                            | Yes                                            | Yes                                            |

We conducted 12 structured in-depth interviews with Spanish managers of regional PSM. The decision to rely solely on expert interviews relates to the exploratory nature of the study, as this technique provides access to direct managerial reasoning and interpretive meanings that are not documented in policy or organisational materials. While we acknowledge the limitations inherent in using interviews as the only data source, the study is conceived as an analysis of the interviewees' discursive constructions, consistent with established practice in media management research.

All interviewees, who gave their verbal consent at the time of the interviews, hold positions of responsibility related to the management of the PSM online service (Table 3). Thus, the sample, which varies according to the organisational structure of each

corporation, includes heads of innovation, content, and BVOD service management. It should be noted that gender balance was not achieved, given the traditional structures of the media industry, where men predominantly occupy positions of power (Beard et al., 2020). In Spain, only 25% of top editorial positions are occupied by women (Ross Arguedas et al., 2025). The interviews took place between October 2023 and September 2024, were conducted face-to-face (N = 5) or via video call (N = 7), and lasted between 27 and 68 minutes.

Table 3. Profile of Interview Participants

| Interviewee    | Corporation | Position (at the time of the interview)           |
|----------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Lontzo Sainz   | EITB        | Head of Strategy and Research                     |
| Izaskun Ozerin | EITB        | Digital Development Manager                       |
| Alex Gibelalde | EITB        | Head of Digital Television and OTT Platforms      |
| Cristina Villà | CCMA        | Head of Innovation, Research and Digital Strategy |
| Maties Ramos   | CCMA        | Head of Innovation and Knowledge                  |
| Adrià Serra    | CCMA        | Head of Digital Content and Transmedia Strategy   |
| José Pereira   | CSAG        | Head of Innovation and Business                   |
| Esther Medina  | CSAG        | OTT Project Manager                               |
| María Sabucedo | CSAG        | Head of Content for the OTT                       |
| Juanma Blanco  | RTVA        | Head of Canal Sur Media                           |
| Pablo Sánchez  | RTVA        | Coordinator of Canal Sur Media                    |
| Antonio Vera   | RTVA        | CTO of Canal Sur Media                            |

The interview guide was divided into five blocks. Before starting the questions, all interviewees were given an overview of the concept of diversity used in the study<sup>2</sup>. The first part of the interview then served to familiarise the participants with the topic of the study: diversity as an element of public value in PSM. Blocks two, three, and four focused on the dimensions of diversity mentioned by Napoli (1999): source, content, and exposure. Within the source block, questions focused on aspects such as workforce composition and PSM governance, among others—elements that remain largely invisible yet fundamentally shape content design and audience exposure strategies. Finally, the fifth block was a concluding block. It asked for a general and explained assessment of whether diversity as an element of public value is strengthened or threatened in the platformed context.

After each interview, the recordings were manually transcribed to carry out a thematic analysis. The six-step process described by Braun and Clarke (2021) was used to systematise the empirical evidence.

## Results

This section addresses how regional PSM organisations operationalise diversity as a dimension of public value in the platformed environment. The thematic analysis identifies three overarching analytical themes that respond to the research questions:

- (1) Platformisation as a structural transformation of diversity as public value,
- (2) Invisible diversity through governance, workforce, and audiovisual production.
- (3) Visible diversity through catalogue design, content strategies, and accessibility.

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<sup>2</sup> All interviewees were contextualised with the definition of diversity in PSM proposed by Cañedo et al. (2022), which is based on Napoli (1999), who understands diversity as an element of public value of audiovisual services, present throughout the value chain of the product. It is understood as a multidimensional concept, linked not only to programming design, but also to production sources and audience engagement, focusing on the importance of reflecting on territorial identity and culture.

### ***Platformisation as a structural transformation of diversity as public value***

Rather than replacing traditional broadcasting, platformisation is described as generating hybrid ecosystems that expand the reach and operational meaning of diversity.

#### ***BVOD services and cultural identity***

The four PSM organisations are positioning diversity as the cornerstone of public value in the reformulation of their remit as they transition into the platform era. Our findings confirm that diversity is embedded in all four PSM portals, although we distinguish between the commitment to content diversity (thematic range and representation) and the diversification of distribution strategies designed to ensure universality. The digital environment is seen as a major opportunity to enhance the accessibility and circulation of content. As Esther Medina (CSAG) notes, platformisation allows PSM to reach broader audiences by making content “multiplatform, multiscreen, and multiformat”, approaches that, while focused on distribution, are essential to fulfilling the mandate of reaching a diverse and fragmented public.

All interviewees agreed that their video on-demand services have broadened the concept of diversity as a public value. Thus, one of the main characteristics emphasised by the managers interviewed is the ability of PSM portals to expand the visibility of regional identity. According to José Pereira (CSAG), “territorial representation and accessibility” are central to AGalega, while Juanma Blanco (RTVA) highlights “cohesion” as a key aspect of CanalSur Más. In the breadth of the concept, Lontzo Sainz (EITB) claims that they work “for territorial cohesion and inclusion”, while Maties Ramos (CCMA) appeals to the “foundational mandate” of promoting regional identity.

All four entities emphasise cultural and identity uniqueness as an integral part of their practised diversity. In this sense, linguistic diversity is at the heart of the Catalan, Galician, and Basque regions, where a co-official language of the territory exists alongside the Spanish language. As Álex Gibelalde (EITB) emphatically asserts: “If we don’t set up a portal in Basque, there will be no content in that language”. In the same vein, Pereira (CSAG) emphasises that “our principle is Galician culture and language, which is why we do everything in Galician”. Cristina Villà (CCMA) shares this approach: “Catalan is the driving force behind the CCMA’s existence”. However, linguistic diversity is not the only element of identity, as Blanco (RTVA) confirms: “We don’t have our own language. [...] The important thing is that Andalusians realise that television appeals to an increasingly diverse audience”. The latter confirms that diversity is becoming a public value that serves as a strategic pillar to reach different audiences and promote territorial cohesion.

### ***Expansion of audience diversity***

Interviewees emphasised that BVOD portals offer significant potential to broaden the exposure dimension of diversity (Napoli, 1999) by enabling users greater control over what they watch and when. As Lontzo Sainz (EITB) and Pablo Sánchez (RTVA) noted, platformisation facilitates content diversification to reach wider and more heterogeneous publics. Adrià Serra (CCMA) reinforced this perspective, arguing that while core public values remain constant, online distribution allows PSM to tailor formats and channels to “resonate with the broadest layers of society.”

However, expanding audience diversity presents distinct operational challenges across regional contexts. Although PSM portals aim to attract younger demographics, age rejuvenation remains uneven. For instance, Primeran (EITB) and AGalega (CSAG) encounter difficulties in consistently engaging viewers under 30. Furthermore,

technological barriers and legacy linear habits still hinder older demographics from accessing these portals, as Pablo Sánchez (RTVA) noted.

Finally, specific contextual challenges persist: the risk of excessive audience segmentation at CSAG, the need to reflect Catalonia's full social complexity at CCMA, broad demographic inclusion at EITB, and over-reliance on linear TV at RTVA. Despite these limitations, managers view BVOD portals as a key opportunity to broaden demographic diversity (in terms of age, ethnicity, and religion) expecting audience reach to expand as the services mature and the user base grows.

While the general framework of diversity often focuses on cultural identity and audience reach (Túñez-López et al., 2021), our research shows that diversity is a multidimensional element of public value in the platformed context. It goes beyond representation to encompass governance models, production processes, and programming strategies. By addressing these key dimensions of diversity, these BVOD services can contribute to renewing the social contract between PSM and the societies they serve.

We identify two types of diversity management strategies, which we label invisible and visible diversity (Table 4). These categories reflect interconnected operational logics: invisible diversity encompasses the structural and procedural choices that serve as a necessary foundation. In contrast, visible diversity is the external manifestation of these internal processes. Rather than separate categories, they represent a causal flow where institutional arrangements (the invisible) directly shape and enable the representational outcomes (the visible) observed in the platform environment.

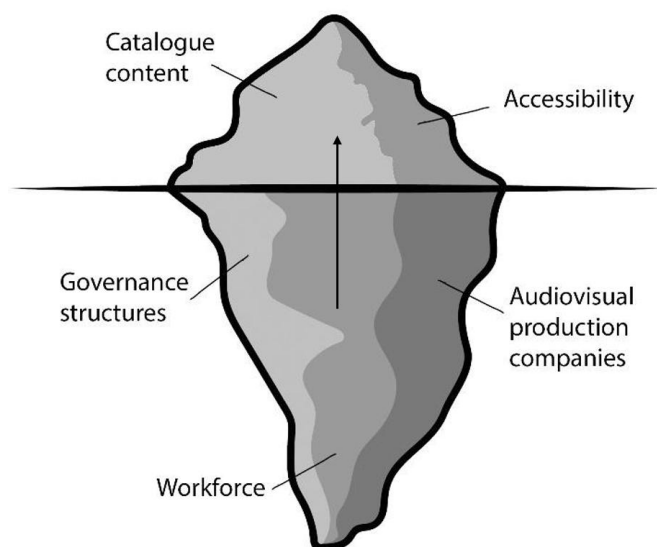
Table 4. Invisible and visible dimensions of diversity and the main challenges

|                          |                          |                                                                     |                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Visible diversity</b> | <b>Catalogue content</b> | Representation<br>(age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, | More representation allows PSM to reach more audiences, including minority ones (e.g. through niche, experimental, and/or inclusive content). |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                            |                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                            |                                         | geography, plurality of ideologies, regional identity, culture)                                                                                                                          | Challenge to attract young people while avoiding age discrimination.                                                                                         |
|                            |                                         | Languages                                                                                                                                                                                | Catalogues exclusively in their own co-official languages, except RTVA, in which the Andalusian accent is shown (competition with state-level broadcasters). |
|                            |                                         | Audiovisual genres                                                                                                                                                                       | Entertainment and educational genres are predominant, instead of informative ones.                                                                           |
|                            | <b>Accessibility</b>                    | Underdeveloped in the BVOD services: Audio description is still a challenge, as well as interaction with the portal for everybody (e.g. blind people), while subtitles are available.    |                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Invisible diversity</b> | <b>Governance structures</b>            | Younger age groups and racial diversity are not represented enough in governance.                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                              |
|                            | <b>Workforce</b>                        | Recruitment policies in public companies are an obstacle to implementing diversity in the workforce (guarantee of equal opportunities).<br><br>Male predominance in technical positions. |                                                                                                                                                              |
|                            | <b>Audiovisual production companies</b> | Restrictions imposed by public procurement rules.                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                              |

The two dimensions of diversity (visible and invisible) can be represented through the iceberg model (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The iceberg model: Visible and invisible diversity in PSM



### ***Invisible diversity: Governance, workforce, and audiovisual production***

The analysis carried out allows us to identify a first type of diversity management, invisible to the audiences but with strong repercussions on the overall diversity: that present in the governance structures of the media, the workforce, and the audiovisual production companies contracted for content production.

#### ***Governance***

First, in terms of governance, the four PSM corporations identify gender and territorial diversity as key criteria for the composition of their boards. However, in the context of Spain's decentralised competence system, there are significant differences in the way PSM corporations structure their governance diversity, reflecting both the legal framework and the socio-cultural realities of their regions. EITB, for example, takes a broad and inclusive approach by including “political, social, cultural, gender, and sexual representation” in its governance bodies. In contrast, CCMA and CSAG emphasise gender diversity, which is consistent with their regional commitments to equality. As Blanco notes, RTVA ensures territorial representation and includes “representatives

from all Andalusian provinces” in its governing and executive bodies, which reinforces the role of the PSM as an instrument of cohesion in the region with the second highest number of provinces in Spain.

Yet, in all four companies, younger age groups and racial diversity are not represented in governance. Although the managers interviewed did not elaborate on the reasons for this absence, they are aware of it. Moreover, Sainz highlights the lack of French representation on EITB’s boards<sup>3</sup>, while Medina and Ramos point to racial diversity gaps at CSAG and CCMA: “racial and age diversity remains an unresolved challenge” (Medina, CSAG). In this dimension, it becomes clear that diversity is determined by the socio-political characteristics of the territory in which each PSM operates and underlines the multidimensional nature of public value in a decentralised state.

### ***Workforce***

Second, deficiencies are mirrored in the workforce diversity of the four corporations. At EITB, Gibelalde acknowledges diversity in local origin, gender, and sexual orientation but identifies gaps in functional, racial, and age diversity, with the average employee age exceeding 55 years. Comparing this to the Galician case, CSAG shows an even more uncoded scenario, as “none of the principles of diversity (age, gender, origin, etc.) are part of the worker selection process” (Pereira, CSAG). However, institutionalised gender diversity acts as a shared baseline across all entities, in line with national regulatory frameworks that mandate the inclusion of a gender perspective in public institutions. Regional Spanish PSM have recently implemented equality plans,

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<sup>3</sup> The French Basque Country, or Iparralde, is the part of the historic Basque territory located in southwestern France, that belongs to the department of Pyrénées-Atlantiques. It consists of three provinces: Labourd, Lower Navarre, and Soule. Although it has no official administrative recognition, it is a region with a strong cultural identity, where the Basque language is spoken and Basque traditions are preserved.

though male predominance in technical positions persists identically across cases, as admitted by both Cristina Villà (CCMA) and Juanma Blanco (RTVA).

The difficulty of implementing diversity in the workforce arises from the public nature of these corporations, whose recruitment policies are governed by Spanish public procurement laws: “We would like to have more diversity, but the public recruitment regulations are an obstacle”, says Sainz. Similarly, Pereira and Blanco argue that the public selection processes used by CSAG and RTVA do not take diversity perspectives into account. However, the managers agree, as Blanco also emphasises, that a public company has a fundamental responsibility to actively promote equal opportunities. Paradoxically, Spanish public sector rules meant to guarantee equity inadvertently create rigid barriers that obstruct proactive diversity hiring within these corporations.

Although there are challenges to overcome, this obligation is embedded in the mission of PSM. At CCMA, for example, where specific diversity plans have been introduced, there are still strict legal requirements that need to be navigated “for better inclusion” (Ramos). This situation reveals the tensions between institutional ambition and systemic inertia and emphasises the need for a more flexible environment that can support the evolving diversity priorities of PSM in the platformed context.

### ***Audiovisual production***

Third, and finally, outsourcing to companies producing audiovisual content also encounters restrictions imposed by public procurement rules. In all four cases, corporations can determine the type of content they source from external producers, but there is a lack of explicit diversity requirements in these contracts. According to Serra, this is not due to an omission: “In productions with external companies, we emphasise that the diversity factor is not only present in what we show on screen, but also in the composition of the teams”.

This gap is therefore rooted in the laws that protect open competition between companies and is further complicated by the inclusion of intellectual property, which adds another layer of complexity. Overcoming these difficulties would allow for a “stronger representation” of society, according to Pereira. Decisively, Sainz states that “public hiring rules are an obstacle”.

Invisible diversity is a less evident approach but crucial for decision-making and production of content in the public service corporations. Therefore, it affects the more evident and studied dimensions of diversity, shown in the catalogue offered and the way audiences access these services. As Serra points out, diversity cannot be treated solely on the basis of what is shown, arguing that it must be integrated into production teams, the selection of subject matter, and the editorial approach to ensure it is authentically reflected in the content.

### ***Visible diversity: Content strategies, catalogue design, and accessibility***

Visible diversity refers to explicit representational strategies embedded in content catalogues and programming decisions. Across all cases, it serves as the final interface where diversity mandates are translated into content selection, thematic coverage, and audience targeting. Our analysis confirms that these visible strategies are not standalone efforts but the direct output of the underlying commissioning and production cultures previously identified. Thus, the catalogue’s design (visible diversity) acts as the tangible manifestation of the organization’s internal structural choices (invisible diversity).

### ***Content strategies***

The strategy of defining the public value of diversity, alongside existing diversity in governance, staffing, and procurement, shapes the way diversity is approached in content, what we refer to as visible diversity management. Sabucedo advocates for

diversity as a “fundamental axis” in the design of portal catalogues. The main objective, as previously mentioned, is to offer a “window of opportunity” to all viewers (Pereira, CSAG). In this regard, Serra emphasises the inclusion of niche content enabled by video-on-demand services, as it “enhances our ability to support new audiences, who may be more transient, but also more diverse”. This is crucial because, as Gibelalde describes, linear television is more “restrictive” compared to the greater flexibility and “experimental content” enabled by PSM portals (Ozerin, EITB).

In this landscape, a key difference lies in the ability to produce exclusive content for their BVOD portals: While EITB and CCMA have a strategy that focuses on producing native digital content to promote diversity-specific efforts to diversify programming, including Primeran’s weekly update with “five new diverse contents”, as Gibelalde notes, CSAG and RTVA have a hybrid approach that combines both linear and digital formats. In this context, Antonio Vera (RTVA) notes that most BVOD content reflects the linear Andalusian programming but leaves room for original content on important Andalusian themes, “such as Holy Week and bullfighting” (Sánchez, RTVA).

In all cases, however, news content originates from linear television and is transferred to the online services. This content adheres to established norms of political representation, emphasising that a key issue in terms of content diversity is the commitment to pluralism that stems from the traditional PSM mandate and remains enshrined in broadcasting standards. Therefore, the managers interviewed consider that the BVOD they represent are “globally orientated and ideology-free” (Ozerin, EITB), although they “strive to cover different ideological perspectives, from ground-breaking series to more conservative ones” (Sabucedo, CSAG).

### ***Catalogue design***

Closely related to the above, diversity in terms of religion, gender, and sexual orientation is an explicit goal in the programming of content in the BVOD catalogues. In terms of sexual orientation and gender identity, Gibelalde recognises that “the online portal allows for greater freedom”. Thus, EITB is characterised by offering thematic categories, including an LGTBI-specific section, and CCMA emphasises the gender perspective, while CSAG and RTVA deal with these topics more generally, often in the form of documentaries and fiction series. Nevertheless, “we avoid stereotypes in the portrayal of these topics” (Medina, CSAG). Here, too, we recognise a dynamic related to the region: In the two contexts with strong pro-independence tendencies – Catalonia and the Basque Country – where identity in terms of territory has reached a more consolidated stage, the debate is now shifting to social progress.

Another point of friction regarding catalogues relates to geographic diversity, particularly the rural/urban dichotomy. Pereira underscores that “the representation of rural areas has always been essential to our audience”, while at RTVA they stream “programmes that reflect the reality of all Andalusian provinces on a daily basis” (Vera). At Primeran and 3Cat, strategies are being developed to “give greater visibility to areas that are less represented than the more populated ones” (Vilà, CCMA).

On the other hand, with specific attention to minority audiences, diversity is implemented in terms of age, language, and accessibility. First, age diversity is both a challenge and a limitation, as the four PSM organisations aim to target younger audiences, but with different strategies: EITB and CCMA focus on viewers under 30, also known as “young adults”, while CSAG and RTVA try to avoid age discrimination in their content. In terms of specific content, Medina (CSAG) highlighted AGalega’s educational offer with examples such as *Dígocho Eu*, a programme about the region’s

language that has caught the attention of Galician youth, whereas Villà highlighted 3Cat's efforts around "youth series".

As far as linguistic diversity is concerned, this dimension plays a central role in the video-on-demand services of Galicia, Catalonia, and the Basque Country, as they offer catalogues exclusively in the regional language. The particularity of the Andalusian case lies in the fact that there is no language other than Spanish, which is a drawback: "RTVA does not have the advantage that broadcasters with a co-official language have. We broadcast everything in Spanish and are therefore in direct competition with the national broadcasters" (Blanco).

### *Accessibility*

Finally, on a negative note, accessibility mechanisms remain underdeveloped in the PSM portals analysed. In all cases, subtitles are already available, while audio description remains the biggest challenge due to "production complications" (Ozerin). Gibelalde expresses his dissatisfaction, and all interviewees agree that "we still have a very long way to go before this works properly". The challenges are numerous, such as "enabling a blind person to interact easily with the online portal without any problems" (Gibelalde, EITB). For this reason, it will also be important to "keep an eye on new technologies that can help us with this task" (Serra, CCMA). Meanwhile, initiatives with associations and private companies are being identified, as CCMA and EITB note. As far as sign language is concerned, RTVA has set up a special section on CanalSur Más that contains all accessible content under the heading 'Más Accesible'.

## **Conclusions**

This study investigated how PSM organisations integrate diversity into the design and management of their online services, based on an expanded conceptualisation of the

principle of diversity (Napoli, 1999). Given that diversity has long been a characteristic feature of regional PSM corporations, resulting from their territorially rooted operational logic, this study selected Spanish regional PSM corporations as a case study, specifically the four corporations operating BVOD services (EITB, CCMA, CSAG, and RTVA). Based on 12 in-depth interviews with managers, we confirmed that diversity remains a core value in regional PSM portals in Spain, even though its implementation varies across corporations reflecting the flexibility of Spain's decentralised model.

The analysis demonstrated that online portals created new opportunities for diversity and expanded distribution, rather than fundamentally redefining diversity as a public value. Our findings showed that these services enhanced the visibility of regional identities, linguistic plurality, and cultural specificities while broadening audience reach. Despite ongoing challenges, video-on-demand services presented a strategic opportunity to promote territorial cohesion and strengthen the public service remit.

Another key contribution of this study lies in the explicit portrayal of the multidimensional nature of the diversity principle in the operation of PSM portals. The analysis confirmed that diversity operates through two interlinked dimensions: one visible to the audience, and another invisible yet structurally significant. On the one hand, visible diversity on regional BVOD services was primarily reflected in content catalogues through pluralistic, inclusive, and experimental programming, alongside efforts in linguistic preservation and accessibility. On the other hand, invisible diversity referred to internal governance structures, workforce composition, and contractual partnerships with external production companies. Crucially, across all four cases, the analysis revealed a shared institutional paradox: public procurement frameworks designed to guarantee transparency and equal opportunities *de facto* acted as a

bottleneck constraining diversification in both workforce recruitment and commissioning.

Despite the shared opportunities BVOD services offer regional PSM, persistent challenges vary across contexts, and addressing them requires moving from diversity as rhetoric to diversity as a system. Specifically, strengthening representation in governance and the workforce (source) is essential to diversify programming (content) across all entities. Meanwhile, bridging the generational gap (a primary hurdle for EITB and CSAG) and leveraging technology for accessibility (a universal deficit) remain crucial to broaden reach across all audiences (exposure).

While the duality of visible and invisible diversity is present in other research (Garzón Castrillón, 2024; Ullah, 2021), this study offers an original approach by examining it specifically through the lens of public media organisations as social value actors (Cañedo et al., 2022).

As previously noted, the limitations of this study lie in its focus on the discursive constructions of managers. While this is a key starting point, the findings should be complemented in future research with additional analyses based on PSM digital content and audience perceptions. Future research should also further explore the impact of algorithmic recommendation systems on public value and distinguish between inherent catalogue diversity and the effectiveness of multiplatform distribution strategies. Ultimately, aligning internal institutional choices (invisible) with external cataloguing strategies (visible) proved essential for regional PSM to fulfill their public service mandate in the digital era.

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