

The impact of independent producers in television broadcasting

06/2012 - **Communication Studies**. Television programmes we watch every day at home are broadcast by television channels but are mainly produced by independent producers. These firms are the result of a regulatory decision taken two decades ago at the European level: to impose television operators broadcast quotas for this independent production. An UAB researcher compares the result of these policies in the UK and Spain, illustrating the consequences of dissimilarity in the national application of a common European policy.



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Communication policies play a central role in the shaping of the television market; the independent production sector is one of its best examples. Besides, when talking of European policies, the national sphere of these policies becomes relevant; that is, how different national governments transpose norms and regulations and adapt them to its national reality. This study about the UK and Spain shows the consequences of this diversity in terms of balance between broadcasters and producers, their impact on the appearance and consolidation of new players and in regional diversity.

Through an original sample of prime-time television programmes in the main television channels of the UK and Spain, data about the presence of these producers were obtained. This was qualitatively complemented with 24 in-depth interviews held with practitioners in both countries.

The results show that independent production has been heavily fostered in the UK through higher requirements for broadcasters and the involvement of public operators. The more relevant differences appear in the application of independent production quotas: while in the UK regional quotas allow regional diversity to access national television screens and distribute the investment throughout the country, in Spain regional diversity is only shown in regional television, while its industrial focus is paradoxically put on the cinema industry but not on the television industry.

The independent production market has natural boundaries if UK-type policies are not applied. These policies grant default ownership rights to producers instead of broadcasters, who pay the cost of the program. This gives producers the opportunity to resell the same program in new national and international markets. The result is the growth of the independent production sector and the appearance of new players, like television distributors, who have stimulate the whole sector by capturing new revenue sources for producers.

Definitively, this research illustrates the essential role played by regulation in the shaping of the independent production industry for television and the centrality of the political direction to boost dynamism on it.

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"Quoting television: a cross-national analysis of regulatory intervention in the independent television production industry in the UK and Spain". Fernández-Quijada, D. (2012), *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 18(4), p. 378-397.