



European  
University  
Institute

MAX WEBER  
PROGRAMME FOR  
POSTDOCTORAL  
STUDIES

# WORKING PAPERS

MWP 2020/12  
Max Weber Programme

How European public broadcasters favour programme homogeneity: the (in)effectiveness of Public Broadcasting Service regulation

Pauline Trouillard



European University Institute

**Max Weber Programme**

**How European public broadcasters favour programme homogeneity: the (in)effectiveness of Public Broadcasting Service regulation**

Pauline Trouillard

EUI Working Paper **MWP** 2020/12

Terms of access and reuse for this work are governed by the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY 4.0) International license. If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author(s), editor(s), the title, the working paper series and number, the year and the publisher.

ISSN 1830-7728

© Pauline Trouillard, 2020

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY 4.0) International license.  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Published in October 2020 by the European University Institute.  
Badia Fiesolana, via dei Roccettini 9  
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)  
Italy

Views expressed in this publication reflect the opinion of individual author(s) and not those of the European University Institute.

This publication is available in Open Access in Cadmus, the EUI Research Repository:  
<https://cadmus.eui.eu>

## **Abstract**

The end of the monopoly and the liberalization of the sector have seriously challenged the content and the quality of the programmes displayed on public service television. Public television's programme schedule is now at the heart of a permanent dialectic between compliance with legislative obligations and appeal to the largest number of viewers. This article makes a case for the ineffectiveness of the broadcaster's public service mission provided by law, through a comparison of France, the UK and Italy. It shows that during the day, the public broadcasters tend to provide homogeneous programmes, with regard to genre, format or topic. This is contrary to the obligation of pluralism that is part of their legislative and constitutional mission. When it comes to the informative magazine programme, the article shows that France 2 is characterized by an inability to structure and hierarchize the different topics. Both France 2 and BBC 2's morning magazine programme are characterized by a succession of inserts that reduce the viewer's ability to process the information and, therefore, the quality of the programmes, which is an important part of their legislative mission.

## **Keywords**

Television studies, public service mission, broadcasting, broadcasting programmes, pluralism, quality.

*Pauline Trouillard*  
*Max Weber Fellow, 2019-2020*



## 1) Introduction

We are currently wealthy, fat, comfortable and complacent. We have currently a built-in allergy to unpleasant or disturbing information. Our mass media reflect this. But unless we get up off our fat surpluses and recognize that television in the main is being used to distract, delude, amuse and insulate us, then television and those who finance it, those who look at it and those who work at it, may see a totally different picture too late (...). This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it's nothing but wires and lights in a box.<sup>1</sup>

Sixty years after the American TV journalist Robert Murrow's powerful speech, made in the context of McCarthyism, we have no choice but to note that the debate of what should be broadcast on television has not yet been resolved. Even more serious is the issue of effectiveness of the constitutional and legislative regulation provided by Law in the broadcasting sector. Indeed, the broadcasters, driven by competition for market shares, tend to build TV programming that favours the most entertaining programmes, to the detriment of more unpleasant, diffuse or complex information. Public broadcasters' programme schedule, in particular, is at the heart of a permanent dialectic between compliance with legislative obligations and appeal to the largest number of viewers. This paper argues that in privileging the latter, public broadcasters breach their legal and constitutional obligations.

In explicit opposition to the American model, following Murrow's warning, European countries have adopted a strong regulatory framework to supervise the content of TV programmes. This framework first took the form of a monopoly, aimed at preventing the constitution of private oligopolies, which could negatively influence the free formation of public opinion in the public sphere. At the end of the 1970s, freedom of speech combined with freedom of trade became the major arguments, making the monopolies obsolete and forcing liberalization of the sector; the European countries all decided to safeguard a strong, publicly funded, public broadcasting sector. European Union Law has explicitly recognized this broadcasting sector's particularity: in 1998, a Protocol on the system of public broadcasting in the Member States was annexed to the Amsterdam Treaty with the aim of resolving the issues arising from the state aid allocated to Public Service Broadcasters. This protocol states that "the system of public broadcasting in the Member States is directly related to the democratic, social and cultural needs of each society and to the need to preserve media pluralism". It therefore establishes a freedom and a right for the Member States to fund their public service broadcaster "insofar as such funding is granted to broadcasting organizations for the fulfillment of the public service remit as conferred, defined by the Member States".

In 2001, the European Commission adopted a Communication<sup>2</sup> in which it aimed to conciliate the prohibition of state aid with the dispositions of the Protocol, setting up the criteria for the enforcement of the proportionality test in the broadcasting sector. This Communication was replaced in 2009 by a new one,<sup>3</sup> in which the Commission presented the two criteria that it would examine, based on Article 108 TFEU, to check if the public funding is compatible with the treaties in terms of definition and mandate, and the proportionality of the funding. These criteria and their application have been discussed elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> and it is beyond the scope of this article to return to them.

---

<sup>1</sup> R. Murrow, RTNDA Speech, 1958. See the entire transcript here:

[https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/education/lesson39\\_organizer1.html](https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/education/lesson39_organizer1.html)

<sup>2</sup> EC, Communication on the application of State aid rules to public service broadcasting, OJ C 320, 15.11.2001

<sup>3</sup> EC, Communication on the application of State aid rules to public service broadcasting, OJ C 257, 27.10.2009

<sup>4</sup> See R. Craufurd-Smith, "State support for Public Service Broadcasting : The position under community Law", (2001) 1 *Legal Issues of Economic Integration* 28; F. Bavasso, 'Public service broadcasting and state aid rules: between a rock and a hard place', (2002) 2 *European Law Review* 27 ; A. Bartosch, "The financing of Public service broadcasting and EC State Law : an interim balance", (1999) 4 *European Competition Law Review* 20, P. Trouillard, "EU State Aid Law and the Public Service Broadcasting Sector: a case for ineffective protection of the public interest", forthcoming.

I would like to highlight another condition introduced by the European Commission in its Communication, one that lies, I believe, at the heart of the very notion of public service broadcasting as it is thought of in the Member States. The Commission states that “It is not sufficient, however, that the public service broadcaster be formally entrusted with the provision of a well-defined public service. It is also necessary that the public service be supplied as provided for in the formal agreement between the State and the entrusted undertaking.” With that wording, the Commission refers to the notion of effectiveness of the legal provisions, on which depends the legality of the public funding granted to public service broadcasters by each state.

This condition of effectiveness as formulated by the Commission introduces a reversal on the link between public funding and content of the TV programmes. During the monopoly era, and before the application of European Union Law in the sector, public funding was seen as a requirement for the Public Service Broadcaster if it was to display good quality programmes. It was also seen as necessary to prevent the content of the programmes being influenced by the will of advertisers. The European Union Law overturned that provision by stating that public funding gives rise to a positive obligation, namely the respect by public service broadcasters of the mission provided by law.

The end of the monopoly and the liberalization of the sector, however, have seriously challenged the content and the quality of the programmes displayed on public service broadcasting channels.<sup>5</sup> We have seen homogenization between the content displayed by the private channels and that displayed by the public ones.<sup>6</sup> This casts doubt on the effectiveness of the public service mission provided by law, which is, yet, a condition of the legality of the state aid. The purpose of this article is therefore to examine the primary hypothesis of the ineffectiveness of the public service mission through a comparison between the legislative provision and the content displayed by the public service broadcasters. The second section will return to the necessity of this study as conducted by a lawyer, and explain the methodology of the study.

## 2) Methodology and purpose

It is not for the Commission to check the condition of effectiveness of the public service mission but the Member States, using an independent authority.<sup>7</sup> As I have shown in previous studies,<sup>8</sup> the regulation process that the Member States have put forward through the creation of “independent authorities” is hardly unproblematic, especially because of the inappropriateness of the power granted to these authorities to prevent lack of respect for the rules by public and private broadcasters. However, before showing that some sanctions could and should be taken against the public service broadcasters, it is necessary to make the case that these public broadcasters do not respect the law in the first place. This explains why it is important for legal scholars to appropriate the knowledge of sociologists and communication scientists.

---

<sup>5</sup> P. Lizotte et G. Tremblay, *Les tendances de la radiodiffusion. Quatre études de cas : France, Grande-Bretagne, Etats-Unis, Canada*. Etude du Groupe de recherches sur les industries culturelles et l’informatisation sociale, Université du Québec, Mai 1989, p. 38 ; Schatz, Heribert/ Immer, Nikolaus/ Marcinkowski, Frank (1989): *Der Vielfalt eine Chance? Empirische Befunde zu einem zentralen Argument für die »Dualisierung« des Rundfunks in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. In: *Rundfunk und Fernsehen*, 37. Jg., S. 5–24 ; D. McQuail (1986) “Commercialization”. In D. McQuail, K. Siune, (eds) *New Media Politics: Comparative Perspectives in Western Europe*, SAGE, 1989 pp. 152–178

<sup>6</sup> See P. Trouillard, “Depuis dix ans, le contenu des chaînes publiques n’a cessé de se rapprocher de celui des chaînes privées”, *Le monde*, 14 décembre 2017 ; N. Garhnam, “The public service versus the market”, (1983) 5 *Screen* 6

<sup>7</sup> “It is therefore desirable that an appropriate authority or appointed body monitors its application in a transparent and effective manner. The need for such an appropriate authority or body in charge of supervision is apparent in the case of quality standards imposed on the entrusted operator. In accordance with the Commission communication on the principles and guidelines for the Community’s audiovisual policy in the digital era, it is not for the Commission to judge on the fulfilment of quality standards. The Commission must be able to rely on appropriate supervision by the Member States of compliance by the broadcaster with its public service remit including the qualitative standards set out in that remit”. EC, Communication on the application of State aid rules to public service broadcasting, supra, para 53

<sup>8</sup> See P. Trouillard, *Le service public audiovisuel dans les Etats Membres de l’Union européenne. Etude comparée France, Italie, Royaume-Uni*, PhD Dissertation, 2019, Part 2, Title 2 ; P. Trouillard, “Responsibility, Power and legitimacy of the Regulatory Agencies in the broadcasting sector. A comparative example”, 2017



To understand whether public broadcasters have followed the criteria required by law, I first looked at the *raison d'être* of public service broadcasting, and the public service missions provided by law and by applicable regulations.

In the three Member States I selected for this study – Italy, the UK and France – the main mission granted to public service broadcasters is to propose a pluralistic programming with different genres of programmes. In France, the Case Law of the Conseil Constitutionnel,<sup>9</sup> Article 3 of Loi Léotard, which regulates the sector, and the Cahier des Charges of France Télévisions set forth this obligation. Article 3 of this text states that “France 2 is a generalist channel whose ambition is to bring together all the audiences around a broad and diverse programming, nourished by all the genres of programmes in their more federative dimensions”. In Italy, the Constitutional Court has also repeatedly considered pluralism as a constitutional principle derived from Article 21 of the Constitution.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Article 1 of the Contratto di Servizio of RAI states very clearly that the public service mission is to guarantee to all the audiences a broad range of programmes and a varied and balanced offer. In the UK, the obligation of pluralism lies at the heart of the public service broadcaster’s mission: the famous trio “inform, educate and entertain”, which later infused other European public broadcasters’ missions, was first formulated in this country. The law embedded this trio for the first time in 1981.<sup>11</sup> The current 2003 Communication Act goes further by stating that programmes have to deal “with a wide range of subject matters that are made available for viewing” and that they are likely to “meet the needs and satisfy the interests of as many different audiences as practicable”.<sup>12</sup>

If pluralism seems to be the most important mission for public service broadcasters, another “*raison d'être*” must be found in the quality of the programmes. Indeed, public service broadcasters must play the role of “bench markers” in the market.<sup>13</sup> This means that when they broadcast programmes in the same genre as private broadcasters – such as drama, sport, or entertainment – public service broadcasters should ensure the quality of these programmes and the distinction from private broadcasters’ programme content.<sup>14</sup> This normative concept of quality is to be found in the law of the three countries studied, but there is no definition of this concept in law or in other applicable regulations. It must be concluded that, without a legal definition, the researchers in television studies have a central role to play in that definition.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Conseil Constitutionnel, 27 juillet 1982, n° 82-141 DC, note Favoreu, RDP, 1983, p. 333 ; note Avril et Gicquel, Pouvoirs, 1982, p. 179 ; CC, 18 septembre 1986, n° 86-217 DC, note Waschamann, AJDA, 1987, p. 102 ; note Favoreu, RDP, 1986 p. 399 ; note Genevois, Annuaire International de Justice Constitutionnelle, 1986, p. 430: “The free communication of thoughts and opinions, guaranteed by Article 11 of Declaration of the Rights and Man and of Citizen, would not be effective if the public the means of broadcasting are aimed at was not in a position to dispose of programmes that ensure, in the public as in the private sector, the expression of different tendencies, in the respect of honesty of information”.

<sup>10</sup> C. Cost, no 59/60 du 13 juillet 1960, in Giur. cost, 1960, p. 759s ; C. Cost, n° 225/1974 du 10 juillet 1974, foro.it, 1974, I, p. 1945 ; C. Cost, n° 148/1981 du 21 juillet 1981, foro.it, 1981, I, p. 2094 ; C. Cost, 13 mai 1987, n° 153, foro.it, I, p. 1965. For a comment See R.Zaccaria, “Servizio pubblico radiotelevisivo, Garanzia del diritto all’informazione e istituzioni di effettiva tutela” in *Diritti nuove tecnologie trasformazione sociale*, Cedam, 2003, p. 925 ; P. Caretti, “Comunicazione e informazione”, in *Enciclopedia del diritto*, Giuffrè, 2007, I, p. 218. In English see E. Barendt, “The influence of the German and Italian constitutional courts on their national broadcasting system”, *Public Law*, 1991, p. 94

<sup>11</sup> Broadcasting Act 1981, Article 2(2)

<sup>12</sup> Communication Act 2003, Article 264(4)(a).

<sup>13</sup> See European Commission, BBC News 24, Case NN-88/98, para 54. “Les entreprises publiques de télévision et les missions de service public », Rapport de mission au ministère de la culture et de la communication, Décembre 1997, p. 16

<sup>14</sup> G. Capello, *Il concetto di servizio pubblico radiotelevisivo :l’evoluzione del dibattito su missione, impresa e programmazione*, RAI-ERI, 2001 ; F. Isepi, V. Bossi, *Il ruolo e la missione del servizio pubblico radiotelevisivo e l’etica di impresa*, RAI-ERI, 1988

<sup>15</sup> E. Cintra-Torres, “Comprendre et dépasser les difficultés de l’évaluation académique de la qualité à la Télévision”, in Francois Jost (ed), *Pour une télévision de qualité*, INA, 2014, p. 43, spéc p. 52-53

Defining the quality of popular and entertainment programmes is, however, not an easy task.<sup>16</sup> Popular programmes have long been considered to provide immediate gratification, associated with pure consumerism, and are therefore seen as not encouraging reflection and citizenship.<sup>17</sup> However, since the 1970s, some authors have progressively enhanced popular culture's folklore and orality and shown that this orality also answers to a form of rationality. Popular culture is therefore necessary for personal fulfilment and to make sense of life.<sup>18</sup> If authors and different normative regulations now recognize that quality and popular programmes are not contradictory, and if the genre is no longer the sole criteria to determine the programme's quality, it is thus necessary to determine some quality criterion that could apply, regardless of the genre of the programmes. Researchers in television studies generally agree that the quality must reflect the specificity of the audiovisual language.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to use textual analysis and to exhibit "certain characteristics of content, structure, theme and tone"<sup>20</sup> to decide if these programmes, thanks to their stylistic characteristics, "provide the viewer with the potential for active discovery and ongoing reflection".<sup>21</sup>

It is impossible to analyse the programme schedule of public service broadcasting in its entirety, given the significant number of programmes broadcast each day. At the same time, it is not possible to declare, based on the analysis of one programme, that one public service broadcaster infringes its public service mission. Here lies an apparent contradiction at the heart of the social phenomenon that affects sociological methodology. On the one hand, the social facts that go together in the social reality are apparently discontinuous and unrelated; on the other hand, they can only be explained sociologically if they are replaced in the holistic social phenomenon<sup>22</sup> to which they belong, and that they express, but only imperfectly.<sup>23</sup>

It was thus necessary to develop a methodology that would allow me to get a clear picture of the holistic social phenomenon through a few strategic and representative examples. To be valid, the study had to report on the different levels that constitute the social reality, through different key examples in each sphere.<sup>24</sup> To choose the key examples that illustrate the social reality, the first step of the study thus consisted of a loose observation that allowed me to formulate a scientific hypothesis.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> See European Journal of Cultural Studies, 2004, Vol 7(3), Special issue on Public service Broadcasters and quality ; See notably L. Van Zoonen, "Popular qualities in public broadcasting", p. 275 ; D. Rowe, "Fulfilling the cultural mission. Popular genre and public remit", p. 381 ; D. Biltereyst, "Public service broadcasting, popular entertainment and the construction of trust", p. 341

<sup>17</sup> L. Van Zoonen, supra, p. 277 ; See also the Frankfurt school's work, in particular T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, "The Culture industry: enlightenment as mass deception" in *Dialectics of enlightenment. Philosophical fragments* (1947), Stanford University Press, (2002), in which the authors use the concept of alienation to criticize cultural industries and the mass consumption of cultural products. According to them, the cultural industries, perverted by commercial interests, would lead people to access immediate pleasure and thus forget about their economic conditions.

<sup>18</sup> M. De Certeau, *Culture in the Plural* (1974), Translated by Tom Conley. University of Minnesota Press. 1998 ; J. Bianchi, 'La promesse du feuilleton. Structure d'une réception télévisuelle', *Réseaux*, n° 39, 1990, L'invention du spectateur, p. 7 ; The precursor of what will later be called cultural studies is Richard Hoggart who describes in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) the values associated with popular culture in the British working class.

<sup>19</sup> E. Pujadas, "Télévision de qualité : thèmes et nouvelles perspectives". in F. Jost, *Pour une télévision de qualité*, INA, 2014, p. 34

<sup>20</sup> S. Cardwell, "Is quality television any good ? Generic distinctions, Evaluations and the troubling matter of critical Judgement", In: McCabe, Janet and Akass, Kim, eds. **Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond**. IB Tauris, p. 19, p. 30

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> This concept was put forward by M. Mauss in his book *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*.

<sup>23</sup> G. Granai, "Technique de l'enquête sociologique" in G. Gurvitch, *Traité de sociologie*, Tome I, chapitre VII, PUF, 1967

<sup>24</sup> E. Morin *La Méthode. La nature de la nature*, v. I, Seuil, Paris 1977, 19

<sup>25</sup> See G. Granai, p. 138: "This plan of attack must make way to the intuition of the investigator who seizes the phenomenon with which he is concerned in their connection with on the one hand, the holistic social phenomenon still confusedly perceived, and on the second hand, its own experience. This step allows a progressive organization of the research hypothesis and a first and temporary demarcation of the study".

This loose observation process then gave way to direct observation, which is a process of controlled observation, following the formulation of the first hypothesis.<sup>26</sup>

Following the loose observation process, I formulate the hypothesis that some genres tended to predominate on public channels, and that these genres (talk shows, game shows and drama) were the same that predominated on private channels. This raises the issue of the effectiveness of the pluralism obligation entrusted to public broadcasters. Regarding the textual analysis of the programmes, the loose observation process allowed me to formulate the hypothesis that the “content, structure, theme and tone” of the majority of the programmes did not “provide the viewers with the potential for active discovery and ongoing reflection”.

I formulated a quantitative observation plan based on the programmes’ genre (Section 3) completed by a qualitative one (Section 4), to check if the pluralism was respected in the different public channels studied. Regarding the quality of the programmes, I formulated the hypothesis of the multiplication of the infotainment programmes, with a fast alternation between information and entertainment (Section 5).

### 3) Pluralism and the genre of the programmes

The first step of the study relied on a quantitative methodology that allowed me to get a global picture of the public TV spectrum, through the study of the genre.

Genre is a crucial element for TV analysis.<sup>27</sup> Classifying by genre means including a programme in a predetermined category based on predefined criteria. It is an important element on TV because it establishes a contract, a pact between the transmitter, in the present case the public service broadcaster, and the receptor, in the present case the viewer.<sup>28</sup> It is thus considered the front door to television study, and can be used for our study, based on the assumption that a variety of genres would provide balanced programming.

Based on the observation that the programme schedule during the day is the same every day, from Monday to Friday, I planned to calculate the percentage of each genre of programmes for a normal day on the public service broadcaster’s channels. This first plan would help me to get a clearer picture of the programme schedule on each of the channels.

I had to determine which genre would be used in the study, and this choice was made following the prior observation of the programme schedule, combined with the description by sociologists of the different genre on TV.<sup>29</sup>

The first big distinction has to be made between flow programmes and stock programmes. Stock programmes can be broadcast several times and sold to other media, while flow programmes are aimed at one situation at a particular time, after which they lose a part of their value. In the stock programmes, I included drama (stock programmes which are partly or entirely based on an invented story written for this purpose), documentaries (stock programme, whose object is to present factual elements to the receptor), and animated cartoons for young people. In the flux programmes, I included the news, magazine programmes (periodic programme aiming to give factual information to the viewers), current affairs, reality shows and game shows (including competition between several participants).

The channels studied were the two historical and most general channels in the three countries: for France Télévisions, France 2 and France 3; for the BBC, BBC1 and BBC2 and for the RAI Italian broadcaster, RAI 1 and RAI 2. The time chosen for the representation of the “day schedule” depends on the countries: the evening programming starts at 7 in the UK, while in France and Italy, it starts at 9.

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> This feature can be found especially in the French literature, but the genre is also used very often as an analytical framework in the Anglo-Saxon world. See in French F. Jost, *Introduction à l’analyse de la télévision*, Ellipses, 3ème ed, 2007, p. 20s; F. Jost *Comprendre la télévision et ses programmes*, Armand Collin, 2ème ed, 2009, 39; J. Bourdon, ‘Proposition pour une sémiologie des genres audiovisuels’, *Quaderni*, 1988, n 4. *Les mises en scène télévisuelles*, p. 19 et F. Jost, *La promesse du genre*’, *Réseaux*, 1997, no 81. *Le genre télévisuel*, p. 11. In English see supra, note 15

<sup>28</sup> See F. Jost, “La promesse du genre”, supra ; F. Casetti, *Tra me e te. Strategie di coinvolgimento dello spettatore nei programmi della neotelevision*, Rai Libri, 1988

<sup>29</sup> F. Jost, *Comprendre la télévision et ses programmes*, Armand Collin, 2ème ed, 2009

The results are the following:

	News	Entertainment, magazine	Game show	Reality show	Drama	Current affairs	Documentary	Young people	Sport
Fr 2	14	57	26	-	3	-	-		
Fr 3	9	32	17	-	18	-	-	16	8
BBC 1	36	29	16	6	12	-	-		
BBC 2	3	25	19	5		24	17		7
RAI 1	17	47	11	-	6	19	-		
RAI 2	7	34	3	-	36	10	-	7	3

**Figure 1: Percentage of air time dedicated to each category. Pauline Trouillard, 2018**

Several points have to be highlighted when analysing this table. First, the entertainment magazine programme is the most represented genre on most of the channels, except on RAI 2 where drama dominates, and on BBC1 where the news dominates. On France 2, this genre constitutes more than half the total air time (56,9%) while on RAI 1 it rises to nearly half the total air time (47%). This can be easily understood by the fact that the entertainment magazine is the cheapest genre to produce: it consists only of some people talking on set. It also allows for the creation of a friendly atmosphere between the presenters and the public, conviviality that is part of the public service mission. However, the fact that it takes up to half of total air time seems to breach the obligations of pluralism that is constitutive of public service broadcasting in the three countries.

Second, the BBC seems to present the most balanced programming schedule. BBC1 and BBC2 are the channels where the magazine format occupies the least amount of time (respectively 29 and 25% of total air time). Taken together, BBC1 and BBC2 present all the different genres, which is not the case of France 2 and France 3 which do not present any documentaries during the day, just as RAI 1 and RAI 2.

Finally, the French particularity regarding news and information programming has to be highlighted. The French public channels studied, contrary to the other countries, do not present a daily magazine programme dedicated to current affairs or politics. The news programmes in themselves, only reach 14% of total air time a day on France 2 and 8,8% on France 3, while BBC1 dedicates 36% of the

total air time to the news, and RAI 1 17%. On BBC2, current affairs and news combined reach 27% of the total air time and on RAI 2 17% as well.

While providing us with some important indications regarding the composition of programming in the three countries, this quantitative analysis based on the genre of programmes does not prove sufficient to formulate a conclusion on the level of balance in each country. The inclusion of a programme inside a previously defined category does not tell us enough about each programme. It can sometimes prove simplistic. The same genre can gather some very unrelated programmes on very different topics.<sup>30</sup> This is particularly true for the genre of “magazine”, which is a *portmanteau* genre: many different topics can coexist inside this genre. It is thus necessary to further this quantitative overview with a thematic study of the programmes that I classified into the categories “entertainment magazine” and “game show” (Section 4).

#### 4) Pluralism and the topic of programmes

This observation plan is simple: it means having a quick look at the programmes and at their channel’s description to determine if the overall topics present the diversity required by Law.

##### 4.1 The United Kingdom: BBC

The first entertainment magazine programme of the day on BBC1 is ‘Countryfile Winter Diaries’, it focuses on animals: TV reporters travel the country and the world to uncover historical or contemporary stories about animals.<sup>31</sup> The second, ‘Home Under the Hammer’, consists of reporters discovering beautiful properties in Europe.<sup>32</sup> In the third, ‘Escape to the Country’, the presenters help families to find the house of their dreams in accordance with their maximum budget.<sup>33</sup> In ‘Flog It’, the presenter meets with experts in antiques to present historical districts of the UK. The experts present some interesting pieces released through auctions and the presenter quickly introduces the historical places to the audience.<sup>34</sup> The last of the day, ‘Claimed and Shamed’, presents insurance fraudsters that are found out.<sup>35</sup>

I then turn to the “game shows” broadcast that day. In that category, the first, ‘Best House in Town’, is a contest between homeowners to determine who has the best house in town<sup>36</sup>. In the following, ‘Bargain Hunt’, two teams fight during an auction to make the best purchase at the best price.<sup>37</sup> The game show, ‘Pointless’, is a traditional set game of general knowledge where the contestants have to “plumb the depths of their general knowledge to come up with the answers no-one else can think of”.<sup>38</sup> Finally, in the reality show ‘Wanted Down Under Revisited’, a journalist follows British families who moved abroad, through their house hunting and job hunting.

This quick description of the programmes fitting the genre “entertainment magazine” (30% of air time), “game show” (16% of air time) and “reality show” (6%) allows us to form a stronger view of the programming schedule. It leads us to relativize the premise according to which BBC1 presents a balanced schedule. Independently of the programmes’ genre, we find, in one day, four programmes whose main topic is housing (‘Home Under the Hammer’, ‘Escape to the Country’, ‘Best House in Town’ and ‘Wanted Down Under Revisited’) and two programmes whose main topic is the auction (‘Flog It’ and ‘Bargain Hunt’).

---

<sup>30</sup> F. Jost, *Comprendre la télévision et ses programmes*, supra, 50 and 108

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08fnwry>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0c43d3c>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0b6118y>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0c4crvm>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0c47ncz>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m0002pcc/best-house-in-town-series-1-9-st-albans-wildcard>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006nb9z>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00rhg2r>

The programming schedule on BBC2 seems a bit more balanced, despite the presence of three other programmes dedicated to auction or housing. 'Antiques Roadshow' focuses on a presenter who travels across the UK to find antique pieces and explain their story to the audience.<sup>39</sup> Antiques 'Road Trip'<sup>40</sup> is a magazine programme where experts travel across the UK to search for antiques in order to sell them at the best price at auction. We find a rebroadcast of 'Best House in Town', a contest between homeowners. Other entertainment magazine programmes introduce some new themes. 'Full Steam Ahead' is a historical magazine programme that explores the extension of the railways under Queen Victoria. Another is dedicated to the study of geology and oceanography, 'Richard Hammond's Journey to...'<sup>41</sup>. The only reality TV show broadcast during the day, 'Saving Life at Sea', is also very particular: it presents the work of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, and each episode follows one rescue attempt, explaining the events but also dramatizing them. The game 'Think Tank' is a game of luck and knowledge. Two series of documentaries focus on animals: 'The Wonder of Animals'<sup>42</sup> and 'Natural World'<sup>43</sup>.

Despite this more balanced programme schedule on BBC2, BBC1 and BBC2 taken together present five magazine programmes whose main topic is housing, and four magazine or game shows whose main topic is the auction. This leads me to relativize deeply the claim of an apparent balance of the programme schedule that derived from my quantitative study. Indeed, if the genres are balanced on the British public broadcasting channels, the topic of the programmes are quite repetitive. On the contrary, in France, despite the homogeneity of the genres of programmes, the topics of the programmes seem to be more balanced.

#### **4.2 France: France Télévisions**

On France 2, the first magazine programme of the day, 'Télé-Matin', clusters cultural topics, news and entertainment. The next, 'C'est au programme', is more lifestyle oriented and brings together segments on recipes, sports, fashion, etc. During the afternoon, two entertainment magazine programmes focus on private and intimate life. In 'Ça commence aujourd'hui', a presenter welcomes an unknown guest to talk about a special episode of this guest's private life. In the next, 'Je t'aime etc', the journalists gathered on stage answer questions asked by viewers, the focus is on love and sex. Later in the afternoon, another magazine programme, 'Affaire conclue, tout le monde a quelque chose à vendre', focuses on people who want to sell some of their belongings. Things seem more balanced on France 2 than on the BBC: only two programmes have the same topic, namely private life and love.

The game shows seem diverse as well. In the first, 'Motus', the participants have to find a word based on a group of letters. In the second, 'Les Zamours', couples answer questions that are supposed to assess their knowledge of their respective partners. *Tout le monde veut prendre sa place*, is another game show where questions relate to general knowledge, with a dramatic music, sound and atmosphere. During the afternoon, the channel broadcasts a game based on words: in this participants compete to find the correct spelling or grammar rule ('*Tout le monde a son mot à dire*'). Another game, 'N'oubliez pas les paroles', very popular in France, is karaoke: participants must find the right lyrics for each song displayed.

Over one day, on France 2, two games are about words, one game about general knowledge, one game about intimacy in relationships and one game is based on the principle of karaoke. This apparent diversity has to be relativized, because of the presenters' profile. Indeed, Nagui, who has been a presenter on France Télévisions for 25 years, still presents two of the daily magazine programmes. Sophie Davant, who has been presenting for 30 years, also presents two of them. This raises an issue in terms of equality of access to the public service. If we analyse the game shows and the magazine shows together, we note that the most repetitive topic on France 2 is private life and intimacy.

---

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006mj2y>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00xgqvf>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00x7fdp>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04n1npr>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qnnh>

### 4.3 Italy: RAI

On RAI 1, the first magazine show of the day is 'Storie italiane', where general stories (crimes, accidents) are discussed by experts on set. The second, 'La prova del cuoco', is dedicated to baking: the presenter invites an Italian chef to cook Italian dishes on set. During the afternoon, one magazine slot, 'Vieni da me', consists of an intimate interview of a well-known Italian celebrity by a journalist. The longest magazine show of the day (two and a half hours) is 'La vita in diretta', a talk show where different commentators follow one another to speak about celebrities, beauty, gossip, baking and society.

On RAI 2, the first magazine show of the day is 'Sereni variabili', where the presenter presents a geographic region for viewers, with a historical perspective. 'I fatti vostri' is a magazine programme dedicated to reality, entertainment and culture. After the midday TV newscast, we find a newscast dedicated to celebrities, entertainment and culture 'TG 2 Costume e Società'. The last magazine show of the day is 'Detto Fatto' whose topic is beauty, make-up, weddings, and baking.

*Prima facie*, the magazines' topics seems diverse on RAI: baking, geography, culture, and lifestyle. However, the longest magazine programme of the day focuses on topics seen as "feminine", like beauty, make-up and gossip. We can explain this focus on make-up, beauty and gossip by the fact that women who don't work and may be "housewives" are the most likely to watch TV during the day. Yet, this relies on the assumption that women are only interested in topics that relate to their appearance, an assumption based on gender stereotypes, contrary to Article 3 g) of R.A.I. Contratto di Servizio. This article stipulates that one of RAI's objectives is to "overcome gender stereotypes in order to promote equality between men and women and to respect the woman's figure and dignity in accordance with the non-discrimination principle".<sup>44</sup>

The observation of the programmes' topics leads me to relativize the assumption outlined in Section 3 according to which the BBC and the RAI present a more diverse programming schedule than France Télévisions. Taken together, the category "magazine" and "game show" presents some recurring topics, that vary based on the countries. On the BBC, the recurring topics of the programmes are housing and auctions. On the RAI, the most recurring topic is gossip and beauty. Homogenization of the topic is even more disturbing since the most repetitive topics are not linked to the public service mission, and can even prove contrary to them.

## 5) Programme structure and quality

During the loose observation process, I paid special attention to programming as a whole, but I also focused on the content of each programme and on the rhetoric transmitted by them. For the purposes of this article, I have focused on a programme existing in the three countries studied: the early morning magazine show, where serious information and entertainment news are brought together. I argue that these magazine shows reflect the specificity of the statement process on what is referred to as "neo-television"<sup>45</sup>: It presents a succession of newscasts and slices of entertainment within the same programme: this can also be called "infotainment".<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> This trend of presenting stereotypical visions of women was introduced in particular by R. Berlusconi on his private channels Fininvest (now Mediaset). Women's bodies are everywhere on these channels, qualified as "tette-culi" (boobs-bum television). This body is 'presented as an ideal body, the young, under control, artificial and plastified woman that becomes a norm for women viewers and women who work on TV' (S. Capecchi, *Identità di Genere e Media*, Ed. Carocci, p. 78). See also the movie directed by L. Zanardo et M. Malfi Chimedi, *Il corpo delle donne*, 2010. Available here: <http://tvbruits.org/spip.php?article1443>. Even though this trend has not been reproduced as such on Public Service channels, it has infused the content of the programmes, the topic presented and some debates.

<sup>45</sup> Neo-television is a concept first used by Umberto Eco to describe the shift of Italian television after the liberalization of the sector, from pedagogical television towards a more commercialized one. See U. Eco, 'A guide to the Neo-television of the 1980's', in Z. G. Barański et al. (eds.), *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, and D. Robey, 'Umberto Eco: Theory and Practice in the Analysis of the Media', in Z. G. Barański et al. (eds.), *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1990)

<sup>46</sup> See F. Casetti and R. Odin, 'De la paléo-télévision à la néo-télévision', *Communications*, n°51, 1990 who describe infotainment: 'The traditional breakdown by genre is replaced by a general blending: a variety show about a singer is an

The design of my third plan of the controlled observation process was inspired by the work of communication sociologists and their analysis of content and discourse. There are two main methodologies. “Content analysis” refers to a “research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of clear content of communication”.<sup>47</sup> “Discourse analysis” is a qualitative methodology that seeks to bring to light the link between written or spoken language and its social context. Contrary to content analysis, discourse analysis considers the conditions of production of such a discourse and the conditions of reception by viewers. It seems to be more adequate for television studies: indeed, on TV, “the conditions of production of televisual discourse, the conditions of circulation and of reception are not ordinary circumstances surrounding the discourse: they structure this discourse, they are constituent of it, they enlighten it, and they give it shape”.<sup>48</sup> While content analysis implies a quantitative, comprehensive and extensive study, discourse analysis does not imply exhaustiveness: it rather relies on some key moments of a corpus that express the specificity of the statement process. However, content analysis and discourse analysis are less hermetic than before. It is thus possible to mix some elements of the two methodologies. This allows me to use one of the criteria adopted by content analysis: the sequencing, minute by minute or second by second, to understand the structure of the programmes, and particular details to understand the content, theme and tone of programmes.

### **5.1 The French morning magazine show: *Tele-Matin***

On France 2, *Tele-Matin* is referred to by the channel as “a comprehensive appointment for a great start to the day. Culture, sport, health, animals. The complete panorama will allow you to keep up to date with what you need to know”.<sup>49</sup> I describe here precisely the structure of the programme of 20 July 2018, which starts at 6.30.

12 minutes are first dedicated to the news: 2 minutes to the Benalla affair, 3 minutes for the rest of the news, 2 minutes to the weather forecast and 5 minutes for sport.

6 minutes (from 6.44 to 6.50) are then dedicated to coverage on a singer, Arthur H, who releases a new album. 7 minutes (from 6.51 to 6.58) are dedicated to the release of a book on personal development, the goal of which is to help people “find happiness”.

15 minutes are then dedicated again to the news (from 6.58 to 7.13). Within the news, 2 minutes are devoted to the weather forecast, 2 minutes to the Benalla affair, 1 minute to the bonus -malus in force in France for motor-vehicle insurance contracts, 1 minute to the price framework enforced for Parisian apartment rents, 30 seconds to the meeting between President Trump and President Putin, 1 minute to the release from jail of a French person in Indonesia, 1 minute to football, and 1 minute to the Tour de France bicycle race. 1 minute is then devoted to gender distribution of tasks during the summer holidays and 1 minute to a French beach with archaeological remains. 3 minutes are then dedicated to Brexit and to the debate in the British Parliament. The news cast then seems to end, without a clear breakdown between what falls within it and what does not.

6 minutes are then dedicated to an exhibition of Monet and Boudin, the two well-known French painters. 3 minutes to the press review. 7 minutes consist of an interview of the parliamentary group MODEM, an ally with the majority, about the Benalla affair. Over the entire morning (from 6.30 to 8.30), no report lasted more than 7 minutes.

Some important things are worth noting in this first step of analysis, namely the absence of a hierarchy between the different information that is communicated and the « bombing of information ».

First, there is no apparent structure in the way the news is presented within the newscasts. Admittedly, French political news is presented first, but the international news regarding Brexit is presented after the sport. This reflects an absence of hierarchy in the importance of news, reinforced by

---

opportunity to talk about wine with some experts ; a story on a motorcycle race is interrupted by songs and games that are entertainment, more or less blatantly. Neo-television is the syncretism made as a defining and organizational principle’.

<sup>47</sup> See B. Berelson, *Content analysis in Communication Research*, (Free Press, 1952)

<sup>48</sup> M. Coulomb-Gouilly ‘Propositions pour une méthode d’analyse du discours télévisuel’, *Mots. Les langages du politique*, 2002(70), en ligne.

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.france.tv/france-2/telematin/>



the fact that the tone of the voice of the presenter does not change whether he presents the “hard news” that is essential to the political and democratic life of the nation or “soft news” less essential to democratic life, such as sport, culture, slice of life or consumer information.<sup>50</sup> In the first newscast of the day, the time dedicated to sport and the weather forecast is greater than the time dedicated to political news, which raises once again the issue of the hierarchy between “hard news” and “soft news”. In the middle of the Benalla affair, which affected President Macron’s mandate in July 2018, the over-representation of soft news in the first news casts of the day is striking.

Outside of the news strictly speaking, cultural and lifestyle topics are given much more time than political topics: 6 minutes are dedicated to a Monet exhibition, 7 minutes to a personal development book and 7 minutes to a singer, while only 7 minutes are dedicated to a political interview and 3 minutes to the press review. The time dedicated to each piece of information is minimal, which reinforces the impression of jumping from one piece of information to another. N. Postman, in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, has already highlighted this “bombarding of information”, and the presenter’s inability or unwillingness to establish a hierarchy between important and less important news. According to Postman, the speed with which journalists go from one TV news item to another that “has no relevance to one what has just seen”<sup>51</sup> is very detrimental to the democratic debate. By presenting on the same level pieces of information that have no relevance to each other, without any transition, and in a succinct time, these programmes reduce the viewer’s ability to analyse information in order to make sense of it.

In the French case, the inability, difficulty or the unwillingness to prioritize some pieces of information over others becomes apparent not only in the structure of the programme but also in the way the presenters talk about important information, the information that affects the democratic and political life of the nation, or that falls within human life.

I illustrate this assertion with a description of a Tele-Matin abstract called press review. This abstract is recurrent, each day, but I have chosen one about the Benalla Affair, much discussed during the summer of 2018 in France.<sup>52</sup>

The journalist starts his chronicle with suspense music that suddenly increases the pressure of the programme. He then starts talking, using a vocabulary that recalls fairy tales: “This is a story which takes place in the year 2018 of the present era. A story in which the land of France was living an enchanted time, made of commonality and pride, and that held high patriotic values. We could have called this era ‘les bleus time’<sup>53</sup>. Back then, see, life was a work of art. Power had laid down the gauntlet, those of the Jupiter presidency, to mingle with the people, in fusion.” As the journalist speaks, we can see on the screen behind him some newspaper front pages related to the success of the French football team at the World Cup, which had taken place a couple of days before the present chronicle. One of these pictures represents Didier Deschamps holding the cup with a big smile, and one represents the crowd in the Champs Elysées on the night of the victory. Suddenly, the presenter switches to another language register and vocabulary, using the lexical fields of the catastrophe: “And then, the disaster, he blew it. As powerful and thrilling as it was, the period closed up, and was swept away in a media tornado, a political and judicial tornado. He must be pretty resentful, Emmanuel Macron, because immediately after revisiting the good times of the World Cup, he finds himself with an affair, a big one, an affair of state as they say behind the scenes of power. This morning, it is the kill, and the press oscillates between irony, concern and anger. And think about the fact that the next world cup is only in four years!”

---

<sup>50</sup> For this distinction, See E. Neveu, *Sociologie du journalisme*, La découverte, 2013, p. 7-8

<sup>51</sup> “Now this has no relevance to what one is about to see” is the newscaster’s way of saying ‘that you have thought long enough on the previous matter (approximately forty-five seconds), that you must not be morbidly preoccupied with it (...) and that you must now give your attention to another fragment of news or commercial’”. N. Postman, *Amusing ourselves to death*, supra, 99-100

<sup>52</sup> Alexandre Benalla was a close collaborator of President Macron at the time: he had been his private bodyguard during the 2017 campaign and during the first year of his mandate. The affair started on the 14 July, when a *Le Monde* journalist revealed that Benalla had participated, on the 1 May in a police operation where he hit a protester violently, and that he was wearing a police band and a gun, even though he was not part of the group of police officers.

<sup>53</sup> Les bleus is the nickname of the French football team.

What is striking in this chronicle is the contrast between the gravity of the institutional crisis that was the Benalla affair (it gave rise to a parliamentary inquiry and several resignations in the President's circle) and the presenter's tone of speech. The presenter's goals seem to make storytelling of this affair to make fun of it, or to spread his own message about it. One can define storytelling as a communication technique using particular narrative processes,<sup>54</sup> especially directed towards the feelings of the listener in order to achieve better adherence to the message transmitted.<sup>55</sup> The use of storytelling in politics and journalism has been heavily criticized: as it is directed towards the feelings, sometimes unconscious, of the receptors, it has been accused, when used in politics, of leading citizens to make choices not on a rational basis but on an emotional one.<sup>56</sup> In the present case, the presenter uses some hyperbole, this figure of speech that allows the enunciator to exaggerate the expression of an idea ("work of art", "mingle with the people, in fusion" which was an exaggeration since Emmanuel Macron had not joined any people's gathering nor received any reward from the people). He also uses metaphors such as "swept away by a media tornado" or "it is the kill". These metaphors have the function to place President Macron as a victim of something bigger than himself, something comparable to an unexpected climatic phenomenon. Taken together, these different techniques have the effect of blurring the message of what is a serious topic and what is entertainment.

### **5.2 The Italian morning magazine: *UnoMattina estate***

The structure of the Italian magazine show is different from the French. At the very beginning, the presenters announce the title of the topic the programme will concentrate on. These are the death of the anti-mafia judge Paolo Borsellino in a car-bomb attack, 26 years before, the large fine imposed by the European Union on Google and the anaphylactic shock that caused the death of a little girl.

10 minutes are dedicated to the first topic, with two people invited to talk about it: a judge who is part of the Supreme Council of Magistracy and the executive chief of the anti-mafia direction of the investigation. 7 minutes are then dedicated to the second topic: the EU's fine of Google. During these seven minutes there intervened a private legal scholar from Luis University-Roma, and a journalist following this affair in Brussels. The journalists then give way to the 8 o'clock news forecast, with another presenter, and this lasts 30 minutes.

During these 30 minutes, 3 are first dedicated to the Di Maio decree that strengthens fixed-term contract employees' protection. 2 minutes 30 are then dedicated to parliament's activity, and two and a half minutes to the legalization of bearing arms in the country. 2 minutes 30 are dedicated to the sea rescue of migrants by an Italian boat, with NGO and government reactions, and 2 minutes are dedicated to the new European policy on the topic. 2 minutes concern the visit of the foreign minister to Azerbaijan, 4 minutes 30 to the death of Judge Borsellino and the fight against corruption. 2 minutes are then dedicated to the death of a hospital patient because of a flawed machine, 2 minutes 30 to the meeting between Trump and Putin and 2 minutes 30 to the Google fine. 4 minutes are then dedicated to sport and 1 minute to the weather forecast.

After the news forecast, the two presenters return to present 9 minutes on the death of a young girl following anaphylactic shock. They treat not only the death but also the technique to prevent it. 1 minute is dedicated to the international press review, with the presentation of the front pages of *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, and the *New York Times*.

The ambience on set changes suddenly: festive music introduces the segment dedicated to baking. The setting changes as well, from a dark blue background to much brighter colours, such as orange and red. 11 minutes are dedicated to pasta, its production, and to the condiments that can be used to make a good sauce. The tone of the programme becomes serious again when presenters talk about the consequences of a Cassation Court decision on marriage, taking 8 minutes.

---

<sup>54</sup> First developed by S. Denning, *The Secret language of Leadership*, Jossey Bass, 2007

<sup>55</sup> Scientists show that understanding of storytelling operates in a different brain zone from the semantic area. See V. M. Deghani, R. Boghrati, K. Man et J. Hoover, "Decoding the neural representation of story meanings across languages", *Human Brain Mapping*, vol. 38, no 12, 1er décembre 2017, p. 6096–6106

<sup>56</sup> See C. Salmon, *Storytelling la machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits*, La Découverte, 2007

From that quick and non-exhaustive presentation of the daily magazine programme, some important differences have to be highlighted which allow me to state that the bombarding of information criticized by Postman is less present on the Italian show than the French.

First, while the cultural information dominates on Tele-Matin, the political and societal ones dominate UnoMattina. Each topic is dedicated more time on UnaMattina than on Tele-Matin: this reduces the impression of “jumping” from one piece of information to another. The most important information is at the beginning of the programme, which gives an impression of hierarchy for viewers, contrary to the French programmes where the presenters jump from a cultural topic to a political one, without any hierarchy. In the Italian programme, the tone of the voice of the presenters and the changing sets allow viewers to distinguish between the nature of the information (entertainment or political and societal information). This alleviates the hybridity of the programme.

The structure of the news forecast is very different in the two countries as well. While in Italy it lasts 30 minutes and addresses essentially hard news such as internal, European and international political topics, in France it lasts 15 minutes, of which 1/3 is dedicated to the weather forecast and sport. In the remaining ten minutes only 6 address hard news that relates to the political and democratic life of the country and the world. Most topics are given 2 minutes on UnaMattina’s new forecast, while on ‘Tele-Matin’’s new forecast most topics are given 1 minute.

### ***5.3 The British morning magazine: BBC Breakfast***

I analysed an extract of the programme of 7 January 2019 between 6 o’clock and 6.30. The choice of such a short extract is based on the structure of the programme: the same information is diffused repeatedly between 6 o’clock and 9 o’clock. The 30 minute sequence constitutes the basis of what will be broadcast all morning.

At 6, the two presenters, seated on a couch, first present the subject that will be treated during the news forecast, which they present themselves. 3 minutes are dedicated to the management of the NHS, 1 minute to a murder in a train, 1 minute to a drunk footballer. 3 minutes are then dedicated to the Golden Globes (the American ceremony) and, specifically, to the British representatives who received a prize during that ceremony. 3 minutes are then dedicated to the latest news of Brexit.

For the sport, a new presenter arrives on set. The tone changes, the three presenters joke about the clothes of the newcomer and episodes of her private life, for 1 minute. 1 minute is then dedicated to sports coverage. Another presenter, on another set, presents the weather forecast that follows. It lasts 3 minutes.

After the weather forecast, the presenters cover the press review of different newspapers, namely The Mirror, the Daily Mail, the Telegraph and The Times. They put forward the front pages of these papers; in all cases, this is the success of the British actors at the Golden Globes ceremony.

The tone of the programme changes again when they welcome a new presenter to discuss a selection of press articles drawn from different national and local newspapers. Each presents an article, and this presentation gives rise to a little chat between those present on set. All the articles chosen are related to very ordinary stories of day-to-day life. This section lasts 4 minutes. 2 minutes are then dedicated to one presenter reading letters received from viewers.

Then follows a 4 minutes sketch on Brexit, done as a parody of Groundhog Day: it suggests that the days are going by, one day looks like the next, without an agreement to be found on the topic.

3 minutes of coverage are then dedicated to a war memorial in Sheffield, before the newscast starts again, at 6.30.

What can be concluded from this 30 minutes observation ?

The structure of the British programme is closer to the French one than to the Italian one. Each topic of the newscast is treated quite quickly, the maximum time dedicated to a topic being 3 minutes. As in the French magazine programme, there is no apparent structure in the news coverage: the Golden Globes slice (a soft news topic) comes before the Brexit coverage (a hard news topic) for example.

Contrary to the Italian programme, the set does not change following the topic presented. Like the French show, outside of the news forecast, the topic related to the democratic life of the country, Brexit, is subject to jokes by the presenters, and there is no substantive analysis of the information given to the viewers. However, these jokes are more structured and limited than in the French case.

Furthermore, the tone of voice of the presenters does change following the topic: the atmosphere always seems more relaxed when they present the weather forecast, the sport than when they treat the hard news.

The different programmes that we have analysed meet Casetti and Odin's description of Neo-Television. Neo-television is, according to them, "the domain of insertion"<sup>57</sup>: temporal insertions cutting the flux into micro-sections and spatial insertions, which give a tabular structure to the screen. A comprehensive programme drains all the segments, and this has an important impact on the viewers: they do not have to choose the programme they want to see, since a unique programme proposes all sorts of segments. Temporal and spatial insertions can be more or less pronounced, though. They take different forms in the three programmes I have analysed. In France, the presenter's tone and the setting do not change according to the information presented, and the insertions are much faster than in Italy. This is also the case in the UK. Therefore, the Italian programme seems to allow viewers to identify what falls within hard news, soft news, or entertainment. It also allows the viewer to process the information presented more than in the UK or in France, where the "bombing process" described by Neil Postman might alter good comprehension of each topic by the viewer.

### General Conclusion

I have made the case here of the homogenization of programme content during the day and in the three countries studied. The genre magazine programme is over-represented, and we can see an overlapping of the magazine's themes in each country. This is contrary to the obligations of presenting a balanced programming incumbent on the public service broadcasters. The authorities, to our knowledge, have never sanctioned this breach in the obligation of balanced programming, which raises the issue of the effectiveness of the regulation that weighs on public channels.

The other aspect that I have studied concerns the way the news and the news analysis are introduced in each country. The comparative analysis allowed me to highlight some differences between the countries. In France, the viewer is not given much time to understand and process the information during the news forecast. In the same vein, the presenters' tone of voice and the absence of temporal hierarchy between topics does not always allow viewers to understand the importance of the news discussed. This has an impact, I believe, on the quality of the programmes and the obligation to ensure that the correct information is transmitted to viewers, and in an honest way. The rapid sequencing of the subjects and the absence of hierarchy may indeed alter the viewers' good comprehension of each subject that should be the aim of each journalist.

On the contrary, in Italy, the time dedicated to each piece of information is more important. The tone of voice of the presenter, the hierarchy between each topic presented and the atmosphere on set allow viewers to distinguish between what is important and what is less important. The BBC represents an intermediate model in the way the news is presented: if the rapid sequencing of the different topics and the absence of a temporal hierarchy between the news items brings it closer to the French model, the presenters respect a change of tone of voice whether they deal with hard news or soft news.

Casetti and Odin say that neo-television's rationales are equivalence and undecidability.<sup>58</sup> These rationales have transformed public service broadcasters' programming and content, but they can be more or less pronounced depending on the country. They have a negative cognitive effect on viewers and, as a result, on public broadcasters' respect of their obligations. These, in turn, cast doubt on the effectiveness of the Law and applicable regulations, which is yet a condition to measure the compatibility of public broadcasting sector state aid with the treaties. Effectiveness is intrinsically linked to the realization of the rule of law: it refers to the fact that the power of the state finds its limit in the juridical rule that it has to respect.<sup>59</sup> Effectiveness as a paramount character of democracy is reinforced in the broadcasting sector, because of the sector's impact on pluralism and democracy. If, as stated by the Protocol annexed to the Amsterdam Treaty, public broadcasting is essential to the social, cultural

---

<sup>57</sup> F. Casetti, R. Odin, 'De la paleo-television à la neo-television', *supra*, 18

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> J. Rivero, "Etat de droit, Etat du droit" in *L'Etat de droit – Mélanges en l'honneur de Guy Braibant*, (Daloz, 1996), 609

and democratic needs of each society, the public broadcasters' compliance with the missions set by law should be considered itself a matter of democratic interest.





With the support of the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

The European Commission supports the EUI through the European Union budget. This publication reflects the views only of the author(s), and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.