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# Public Interest and Television Performance in Croatia

Zrinjka Peruško\*

## SAŽETAK

*The paper empirically demonstrates public interest performance of Croatian commercial and public service televisions with national coverage, based on their program broadcast in the chosen weekly samples for the 2005- 2009 period. The criteria for evaluating television program output are defined a) against a theoretical media public interest model and b) against the specific Croatian media public interest model. Specific Croatian definitions of public interest are contained in media policy. Public interest is analyzed according to authors' theoretical model of media public interest along three dimensions (content, audiences, and social goals) to construct a media public interest matrix. The sources of public interest definitions in Croatian media policy are limited to laws and regulations relevant to television broadcasting.*

*The author proposes a theoretical definition of democratic media performance in the public interest which should include three interrelated dimensions: content – socially useful and diverse, audiences – citizens and special needs or minority audiences, and social goals – inform the citizens for political participation and contribution to democracy. Diversity as a content quality in the public interest is conceptualized additionally in contrasting conceptualizations of pluralist and neo-liberal media policy in terms of openness versus reflective diversity.*

*Content analysis of the program guides included 5769 programs – units of analysis, which were categorized into genres in three larger classes: information programs (socially useful), entertainment, and fiction. The analysis shows the prevalence of 'socially useful' genres on public service channels (news, news interviews, current affairs magazines, documentaries, art and education*

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\* Zrinjka Peruško, Associate professor, Chair, Centre for Media and Communication Research (CIM), Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, Lepušićeva 6, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia. <http://www.cim.fpzg.hr> E-mail [zrinjka.perusko@fpzg.hr](mailto:zrinjka.perusko@fpzg.hr)

*programs), as well as greater genre diversity. The audience preferences (in terms of attention) show a lack of information programs, and an excess of fiction on Croatian national televisions.<sup>1</sup>*

**Key words:** media performance, public interest, media policy, television programs, genre, socially useful content, diversity, Croatia

### **Public interest in media policy**

Pluralism and diversity of the media has in the past decade been in the focus of European media policy and critical analysis. The concern was partly related to the possibility of continued competition within the media industries in view of the enduring concentration trends, but even more to the possibility of continued contribution of the pluralistic and diverse media to democracy. Beyond this focal issue, at the heart of any media policy is the forgotten question: what is the contemporary social role of the media? Do we still see communication media as social institutions expected to contribute to society and culture? At the juncture of these issues arises the idea of public interest.

Changes in media and communication technologies, media industries and economies as well as in global media realities are making us revisit this question every once in a while in the swiftly changing media history. As Aufderheide (1999) points out (after analyzing the changes in the USA from the 1934 to the 1996 Communications act), public interest is at the centre of communication policy, even if the technological development in the media sector would be the first suspect for the agent of policy change.

The need for substantive research into the public interest implications of media policy were highlighted strongly by William Melody (1990) two decades ago. He was concerned with ensuring that new communication technologies (at that time CATV, VCR, satellite television, ISDN, and the nascent Internet) contribute to all segments of society. His was an appeal for continued media policy in the public interest in spite of the growing diversification and proliferation in channels, program types and ownership modes already evident at that time. Melody defined public interest in relation to the “essential functions of information and communication in modern participatory democracy, that is, to provide opportunities for citizens to be informed and to be heard” (1990:29). He highlighted two public interest aspects of media programs: diversity (especially in terms of the press), and public service programming (for the PSB’s) or “programming in the public interest” for commercial broadcasters. In terms of the “beneficiaries” of the public interest,

Melody highlights special needs groups like disabled, or children, and the society as a whole.

Public interest is not a concept with commonly shared content. In attempts to define it, authors explain it in terms of common interest, public significance, or general good. "Public interest is a field in which parties struggle to establish policy. Public interest implies the invocation of social purpose in all matters in which there remains a territory of discussable collective policy within a society." (Smith (1989:23) in McQuail 1992:20).

Expectations of media performance in the public interest are, somehow naturally, linked to the contribution of the media to the development of a democratic public sphere. In this regard, the role of the media is seen most clearly in the original sense of their contribution to democratic procedure and democratic culture. Public interest in relation to this political role of the media includes the specification of the intended collective beneficiary – the public.

McQuail (1992:3) defines media related public interest as a "complex of supposed informational, cultural and social benefits to the wider society, which go beyond the immediate, particular and individual interests of those who participate in public communication, whether as senders or receivers". Definitions of public interest in concrete cultural contexts can be found in media policy, understood as "conventions, laws and evaluative claims which surface in public debate according to local circumstances" (McQuail 1992:11).

Freedman (2008:63-71) discusses public interest in its two major contemporary meanings: as that which is good for the greater society vs. that which is of interest to the individual member of society (or audience).<sup>2</sup> These two framings of the public interest correspond accordingly to two prevailing contemporary ideological positions: liberal pluralism and neo-liberalism, where the latter trusts in the hidden hand of the market to provide the diversity of programs that the audience wants, and gives the proof of the success of the public interest in the use of the programs by the audiences. Thus the "interest of the public" today wishes to replace the "public interest" as defined by pluralist media policy, which believes that pluralism and diversity of the media should continue to be supported by regulation and incentives, including programming content requirements. This fits with the new communication policy paradigm elaborated by van Cuilenburg & McQuail (2003) where the satisfaction of communication needs of the citizens/consumers will replace as the criterion of satisfaction and expectation with/from media the former public service media policy paradigm, which was based on normative principles and socio-political considerations of aims and values for the media. Thus the satisfaction of citizens-consumers (as shown in the reflective diversity of the media) is replacing any socially determined media value (shown in the openness diversity).

Unlike those who define public interest one dimensionally, I believe that public interest in media policy should be comprehensively defined along three interrelated dimensions: type of programs/content which is acknowledged to be in the public interest, target audiences – what audiences, general or specialized, are the main beneficiaries of the public interest tasks for the media, and social goals that are normatively defined and expected to be fulfilled by the performance of the media. Media systems will differ according to choices they make in each of these dimensions.<sup>3</sup>

### **Public interest and socially useful content**

As a consequence of a growing commercialization of media, general belief is that media are increasingly showing non-socially useful content. This is linked to changing media market structures, which exhibit growing concentration of ownership and predominance of transnational ownership in the local/national media markets (especially in the relatively new markets of Central and Eastern Europe), and rise of media conglomerates which spread over different, originally separate media industries.

In framing the public interest primarily in terms of the democratic contribution of the media, the performance of the media customarily focuses on the public-citizen as the main beneficiary, and on information/news and current affairs as the main content. In his 1996 speech on the new US Communication Regulatory architecture, then FCC chairman Ronald E. Hundt defined public interest programming as “free time for candidates, children’s educational television, shows for minorities or other underserved segments of community, and other *valuable* programming that the market demonstrably does not generate in sufficient amounts” (in Aufderheide 1999:290).

This valuable programming is often seen as “socially useful” content/programs, defined as news and information programs, current affairs, and documentaries. Wood (2004) divides television programs into fact, fiction, entertainment and advertising. The four groups fall into two main program classes, according to the strong or weak emotional potential and high and low objective aspects of the texts (Berger 1992). The aspect of objectivity deals with the nature of the relationship of the television program with reality. For Wood (2004), how a genre “deals with” reality is the central point of their differentiation, as well as the central area of blurring of the lines between the genres. The hybridization of genres happens exactly by the shifting of the ways the reality is constructed, especially in terms of the softening of the differences between fact and fiction, or in their changing

places altogether. This is also how infotainment happens, and a growing concern about the continued role of media in democracy.

### **Public interest and media diversity**

Another measure of public interest is diversity (Aufderheide 1992). Media pluralism and diversity is in relations to public interest seen as the prerequisite for the fulfillment of the media's role in democracy, public deliberation, and citizen participation. Public interest content has also been defined as "quality"<sup>4</sup> content (Raboy, 1996, Ishikawa 1996). For Leggatt (1996) quality is also best expressed as diversity.

Jan van Cuilenburg defines media diversity as "the extent to which media content differs according to one or more criteria" (2007:27) He describes 4 levels at which media diversity can be studied: a) units of content (like newspaper articles or individual programs), where the diversity of opinions are studied, b) content bundles like television channels where the study is program content supply within one media (i.e. genres or program types), c) at the level of one media type (i.e. program content in television, etc.), and d) at the level of the total social communication system. (van Cuilenburg 2007:28). He uses the concept (after Hellmann) of open media diversity and reflective media diversity, as two normative benchmarks to empirically measure a society's media diversity. Reflexive and openness diversity are in a mutually excluding relationship: the more reflective diversity in a media system, the system will include more media in a fiercer competition (thus lower concentration), and there will be less openness diversity, i.e. equitable presentation of different social and political ideas in the media.

Reflective diversity is a measure of the "extent to which media content matches the preferences of media users" (Dutch television study: Annex). In other words, it is the degree of similarity of audience share/viewing time for different program types (i.e. news and information, fiction films, drama, etc.) and the share of that program type in the overall programming of a certain channel or broadcasting company. The study proposes that the better the "fit" between the proportion of the program type in the broadcast (television) program and audience viewing times of such programs, that the media serve the public need better. This would seem to support the thesis of a new communication policy paradigm proposed by van Cuilenburg and McQuail (2003) that the satisfaction of communication needs of the citizens/consumers will replace as the criterion of satisfaction and expectation with/from media the former public service media policy paradigm, which was based on normative principles and socio-political considerations of aims and values for the media. Thus the satisfaction of citizens-consumers (as shown in the re-

flective diversity of the media) is replacing any socially determined media value (shown in the openness diversity). The satisfaction is in this instance equaled with user-behavior; the behavior of the mass-media audience has become the positive norm of evaluating media behavior.

Recently, there has been discussion about the rising importance of Internet and multichannel, digital television, and the shifting expectations regarding pluralism and diversity to these new media platforms where channel scarcity is not any longer a concern. In parallel, the expectations regarding the fulfilment of the public interest and the social role of the media might accordingly be expected to be shifted to the new media.

Croatia is, however, still a broadcast television country (and in spite of the new media developments, so are the majority of developed democracies, Ward 2008). In spite of growth of internet use, IP-TV and cable delivery, generalist broadcast television in Croatia is still the market leader in every respect<sup>5</sup> Television is still the medium Croatians spend the most time with – in 2008 some 200 minutes daily<sup>6</sup>. Television (with small contribution from radio) in 2008 holds 66% of the total advertising market.<sup>7</sup> Television market in Croatia<sup>8</sup> is highly concentrated: in 2008 three strongest channels (public service HTV 1, commercial RTL and Nova TV, in that order) together had 74.9% of the audience share and over 90% of the television advertising market. The total television offer of terrestrial television in Croatia includes two public service channels – HTV 1 and HTV 2, and two commercial channels – RTL TV (owned by RTL Group) and Nova TV (owned by the CME). Some 23 local and regional televisions, as well as different foreign channels offered on cable and ADSL, together command less the 10 per cent of the national television audience share.

The newspaper and new media markets are also highly concentrated – the C 3 share of daily newspaper titles in circulation is 63.7% for 2008, and this includes 3 daily titles but only 2 companies; in internet access HT (owned by Deutsche Telecom) holds the dominant position with some 80% market share. Radio is a regional and local medium, with medium to high concentration in different Croatian regions (Peruško & Jurlin, 2006). This is the backdrop against any evaluation of media performance in the public interest needs to be considered.

### **The research aim and method**

The aim is to empirically demonstrate public interest performance of Croatian televisions, based on their program outputs in the chosen weekly samples for the 2005- 2009 period.

The criteria for evaluating television program output are defined a) against a theoretical media public interest model and b) against the specific Croatian media public interest model.

The analysis of public interest in the Croatian media policy and media was limited to television in its original sense, as broadcasting. This facilitated operationalization and empirical application of the public interest as the performance criterion, as well as focus on the still most popular medium in the relevant cultural context. Specific Croatian definitions of public interest are contained in media policy. Public interest will be analyzed according to the three dimensions of the theoretical media public interest model (content, audiences, and social goals) to construct a media public interest matrix. The sources of public interest definitions in Croatian media policy will be limited to laws and regulations relevant to television broadcasting.<sup>9</sup>

The theoretical definition of democratic media performance in the public interest includes, as demonstrated above, three interrelated dimensions: content – socially useful and diverse, audiences – citizens and special needs or minority audiences, and social goals – inform the citizens for political participation and contribution to democracy.

In analyzing television program output traditional division of program genres will be used: factual and objective (as opposed to fictional and emotive) are in the public interest and socially useful, entertainment or fiction are those which are not in the public interest and have no social use (other than private enjoyment; exploration of its social uses is beyond the scope of this paper). The socially useful class of programs then includes the news, documentaries, political debates, high cultural programs, and educational programs.

Television performance in the public interest will be evaluated in relation to diversity of programs offered and the share of the “socially useful” content in television programs. Both program qualities will be analyzed at the level of program genres, i.e. program types and categories. Even though diversity and pluralism of political ideas present in television programs would also be a valid (and sometimes preferred) way of looking at television performance in the public interest, the analysis in this text will remain on the structural level of program categories.

In examination of performance of public interest in terms of diversity, Croatian television output will be examined both in relation to reflective and to openness diversity: how well does the program offer correspond with the program choices made by the audiences (reflective diversity), or how well is the program offer balanced in terms of program genres. The results will be interpreted in relation to the understanding of media policy based on publicly/normatively defined public interest vs. media policy based on the “public’s interest” as consumed public desire.

## **Methodology**

**The research method:** The data on genre distribution was obtained by content analyzing the published weekly television program guides, according to the coding scheme including the genre distribution in Table 1. Other information coded was the channel, length of the broadcast, start and end time, origin (geographical) of the broadcast, whether it was a first run or a repeat program. Two variables were added in recoding: high and low social significance (as in Table 1) and prime time/non-prime time. The coding was performed on the basis of the definitions of categories by trained coders, upper classwomen and upper classmen in journalism (2007, 2008 and 2009) and sociology (2005<sup>10</sup>), and all members of the Croatian cultural community. In 2007, 2008 and 2009 the actual titles of the programs were also coded into the data base. This facilitated supervision and some later recoding by the author of the paper.

**Audience data:** television audience data are from the AGBNielsen people-meter regular research in Croatia. The audience data are yearly averages, except for 2009 where they relate to the week of March 1 to 7, 2009 and to the specific program categories in our output.

**The sample and unit of analysis:** The television program and genre data for 2005, 2007 and 2008 pertain to 2 weeks in October of each year (24 October to 8 November 2005; 6-19 October 2007, 5 to 18 October 2008), and for 2009 for 1-7 March. The sample is not representative on a yearly level, even though for 3 years the data are for the similar period in the yearly scheduling which should provide an increased comparative basis.

The unit of analysis and the coding unit was a television program. 5769 program units were identified altogether and form our research sample.

The units of program were coded according to genre distribution in Table 1, and then grouped into three program groups: fiction, entertainment, and information.<sup>11</sup> In this analysis we don't deal with persuasions/advertising genre group.

**Television program categories employed in coding**

<b>Fiction</b>	<b>Information (high social value)</b>
Comedy	<i>Art and culture (classical music &amp; jazz, theatre, books, dance)</i>
Drama	<i>Consumer affairs</i>
Movie	<i>Current affairs</i>
<i>Cinema (high social value)</i>	<i>Documentary</i>
Soap opera	<i>History</i>
Series	<i>Magazine type of programs on any topic (usually political)</i>
Miniseries	<i>Nature and wildlife</i>
<b>Entertainment</b>	<i>News</i>
Breakfast TV	<i>Political interview</i>
Sports	<i>Schools and learning</i>
Chat & talk show	<i>Religion</i>
Children's	
Fashion	
Hobbies & leisure	<b>Other (none of the above)</b>
Human interest	Announcements, advertising, etc.
Light entertainment – reality programs of all kinds	<i>High social value: cinema fiction &amp; information</i>
Music (not classical or jazz)	
Quiz & game shows	

Classification is based on program categories used in: Ward, D. Final Report: Study on the assessment of Content Diversity in Newspapers and Television in the context of increasing trends towards concentration of media markets. Media Division. Council of Europe. MC-S-MD (2006)001, 2006.

## Results and discussion

### Public interest in Croatian broadcasting policy

Public interest in Croatian television policy can then be comprehensively evaluated in answer to three questions:

- 1) What kind of program content is seen to fulfill the public interest?
- 2) Which audiences are especially envisaged as targets for media acting in the public interest?
- 3) What social goals are expected to be fulfilled when media act in the public interest?

The main television specific formulations of the expected public interest in Croatian media policy are to be found in the Law on the electronic media (NN 122/03 2003, NN 79/07 2007). It defines the public interest content in electronic media in terms of the expected contribution of radio and televisions. This law equally extends to commercial and public radio and television. Public service broadcaster Croatian Radio and Television which has additionally its own mandate defined in its special law.

Public interest is in the Law on the electronic media formulated in two ways – as “the interest of the Republic of Croatia” (article 9), and implicitly in the program expectations and obligations of radio and television broadcasters.

Article 9<sup>12</sup> of the Law on electronic media defines the first, stronger phrased, public interest.

Here we find all three dimensions from the public interest matrix:

- 1) **content requirements** – public information
- 2) **audiences** – all the citizens, Croatian minorities abroad, minorities in Croatia (special audience benefits: fulfillment of the right to public information, fulfillment of the human and political rights of the citizens)
- 3) **social goals** – development of the rule of law, the social state and the civil society, protection of the Croatian national and cultural identity, encouragement of Croatian cultural creativity, culture of public dialogue, development of education, science and art, protection of nature, environment and health.

In article 12, specific program requirements for radio and television continue to define public expectations:

- 1) **content requirements** – to publish truth
- 2) **audiences** – all citizens, cultural audiences
- 3) **social goals** – respect for other opinion, free and objective information, education and entertainment of the citizens, promote Croatia cultural

heritage, promote international understanding and justice, democratic freedoms, environment protection, equality of the sexes, promote understanding of the members of national minorities

Own production is required (of national level commercial and public televisions) at 20% in the day and at 60% in prime time (defined as 18:00-22:00) (NN 122/03 article 24). Other quotas include 55% of programs in the Croatian language (at the yearly level) (article 27) and 51% of European audiovisual works (article 29).

Children as special audiences are included in the Law only in a negative way, in terms of their protection from potentially harmful content. The protection of minors has gained a lot of attention from the regulator (Agency and Council for Electronic Media), children's ombudsman, and the public at large. In this law the special needs audiences are not mentioned at all (the Law on the Croatian Radio Television, the public service broadcaster, is much more specific in this respect, but only obliges the PSB).

Diversity and pluralism is specially highlighted as a public interest aim, but only in relation to local and regional televisions. The Fund for the stimulation of diversity and pluralism is part of the Agency for electronic media (Law on the changes of the Law on Electronic Media NN 79/07), which on a yearly basis distributes 3% of the amount of the fee paid by television owners in Croatia to the public service radio and television HRT, to the regional and local radio and television stations, based on a public competition. The funds are awarded for pretty much the same kind of content and social goals as above, for programs which are innovative, high quality, and contribute to cultural creativity. As the Fund is not relevant to commercial or public service televisions at national level, the evaluation of its (dubious) impact will not be pursued here.

In Croatian broadcast television policy, public interest is defined in terms of the basic expectations from the media regarding the public sphere, i.e. to inform the citizens, and in terms of the more specialized program requirements and/or special audiences contained in the Croatian media policy regulations.

In terms of program content, public interest in Croatia includes primarily information programs, those related to national minorities, programs that promote human and political rights, the culture of dialogue, the rule of law and the social state and civil society: The promotion of national cultural identity and creativity is next, followed by education and science.

In terms of the target audiences, media policy promotes the traditional public-service expectations regarding the contribution of television programming to a common social good (to ensure that the citizens are informed, and their political and social rights promoted) as well as the good of special groups (in this case, national minorities) even for commercial televisions. The traditional public service

aims of educating the citizens by giving them art and science is also included here. If the norm is rather encompassing, the implementation is lacking or was never intended.

With the program content and audience dimensions we can form a four cell media policy public interest matrix, and add the third dimension of social goals which relates to the audience and content dimension at the same time. The content of each cell maps the public interest in Croatian media policy.

Table 1. Television policy public interest matrix: Croatia

AUDIENCES	PROGRAM CONTENT		SOCIAL GOALS
	Socially useful programs	Program diversity	
<b>Special interest/needs audiences</b>	<b>A</b> Croatian minorities abroad National /ethnic minorities in Croatia Audiences of local and regional televisions <i>(socially harmful programs: protection for children from harmful content)</i>	<b>C</b> Programs for national/ethnic minorities in Croatia  Information Cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>SOCIAL INCLUSION</b></li> <li>• <i>Protection of minors</i></li> </ul>
<b>All citizens</b>	<b>B</b> Information Art and culture Education Entertainment	<b>D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>PUBLIC SPHERE &amp; DIALOGUE</b></li> <li>• <b>INFORM THE CITIZENS</b></li> <li>• <b>PROTECT CULTURE</b></li> </ul>

This paper only begins to unpack the construction of public interest in media policy, and will in the empirical analysis of broadcasting performance in the public interest only focus on the first dimension of public interest – broadcast content.

#### Television performance: socially useful and diverse content

The findings regarding the program output of Croatian televisions can be evaluated internally, i.e. in terms of the changes in the past 4 years, or externally, in relation to the program content on other European televisions. The external comparison is at this point available only for 2005.

The analysis in 2005 was conducted for the Group of Specialists for Media Diversity of the Council of Europe, as part of the comparative study on the diversity and

concentration. In addition to Croatia, the study included Great Britain, Italy and Norway (Ward 2006). Quantitative content analysis was performed on the same two week sample (24.10.2005 – 06.11.2005) of prime time television news (5 PM-midnight) and the 24 hour distribution of genres. The Croatian national television sample included HTV 1 i HTV2, RTL TV and NOVA TV) (as well as 7 national newspapers which were also part of the study).

The analysis for 2005 showed the prevalence of entertainment genres. Two channels of Croatian public service television broadcast 30% of socially important programs (news, political debates, documentaries, current affairs, education or culture), while this type of programming made up only 5% of two commercial channels (Ward 2006). The rest was entertainment and fiction. In other countries analyzed in 2005, the share of the socially useful programming on public service televisions was much higher: – 41% in Great Britain, 44% in Norway and 47% in Italy (Ward 2006:10).

The amount of news programs was strikingly different – in Norway news amounted to 23% of total programming, in Italy 17%, in Great Britain 14%. In Croatia the news made up some 5% of programs broadcast on two channels of public service HTV 1 and HTV 2, while the commercial channels had a slim news diet of 2,7% on Nova TV and 2,5% on RTL TV.

Ward (2006) found that the research confirmed three groups of television channels: public channels with the largest amount of news and socially useful programming; established commercial channels which invest in program production of both information and fiction programming, and the third group composed of commercial channels relying mainly on the imports of entertainment programs. In 2005 only the HTV 1 enters the first group, HTV 2 and Nova TV fit in the second, and RTL TV in the third group. Let us know see is there has been any change in this in the past three years.

For the purpose of this research we defined prime time as 18:00-24:00, i.e. 6 PM to midnight. As a Mediterranean country Croatia exhibits the “Mediterranean amplitude” with two viewing peaks – one in the afternoon at 1 PM (includes the news), and the evening peak is at 10 PM (with almost 50% AMR). The viewing starts to rise at 6PM and starts to fall after 11:30 PM. 40% AMR is attained from 8 PM to 11 PM.<sup>13</sup> We widened a little the “prime time” because we wanted to include the main evening news on commercial televisions RTL TV and Nova TV (at 6:30 and 7:15 PM respectively; the PBS HTV 1 airs their main news at 7:30 PM, and the PBS HTV2 around 9 PM).

Prime time is in the composite sample (combined 2005, 2007, 2008, and 2009 for all four channels) rather evenly balanced between the number of different genre categories – entertainment 29.00%, information 38.20%, and fiction 32.80%. The

only program group which are represented in prime time in an unequal proportion to the share of the prime time in total programming time (6 out of 24 hours, i.e. 25%) is information (35.40% of all information programs are broadcast in prime time), as opposed to entertainment (25.60%) and fiction (23.70%). The reason for the overrepresentation of the composite category “information” in prime time is due to the fact that most of the news genre on commercial televisions is broadcast only in prime time. This is probably in direct relation to the legal provision regarding the obligation of 60 per cent of own production in prime time (which is an obligation that the commercial televisions, as well as radios, have lobbied (so far unsuccessfully) to have removed in the new proposal for the Law electronic media, which will include also audiovisual services (in parliamentary procedure in mid 2009).

The first public service channel HTV 1 has in the analyzed period increased the number of programs in the information category from 54.4% in 2005 to 60.1% and 60.8% in 2008 and 2009, while the 2007 was exceptionally high at 63.7% of all broadcast programs, most likely due to the pre-election time (parliamentary elections were held at the end our sample period). The share of information programs in their prime time varies between 20-26%, with only large exception in 2007 when it was at 35% (this would tend to show the increased attention to serious topics because of the special election coverage – the public service broadcaster is legally bound to have extra programming during official campaign time).

The commercial RTL TV and Nova TV also increased, but slightly, the share of the number of the group of information genres in the total program output – RTL TV from 7% to 10.8%, and Nova TV from 11% to 13.5%. The shares of information in the prime time oscillated in the sample to reach in 2009 61.9% on RTL TV and 50% of all information programs aired in prime time on Nova TV.

HTV 1 retained the share of socially useful programming (60% in 2007, 2008 and 2009), while on HTV 2 we see an increase (from 70% to 75%) of programming with low public service value (traditionally defined). Nova TV increased its share of this type of programming as well (from 82.60% in 2007 to 86.50% in 2009). RTL TV still broadcasts the least number of the socially useful content, although it has been increasing its share in the past 3 years from 8 to 10% – its total share of the programming with low public service value is at 89.2% in 2009.

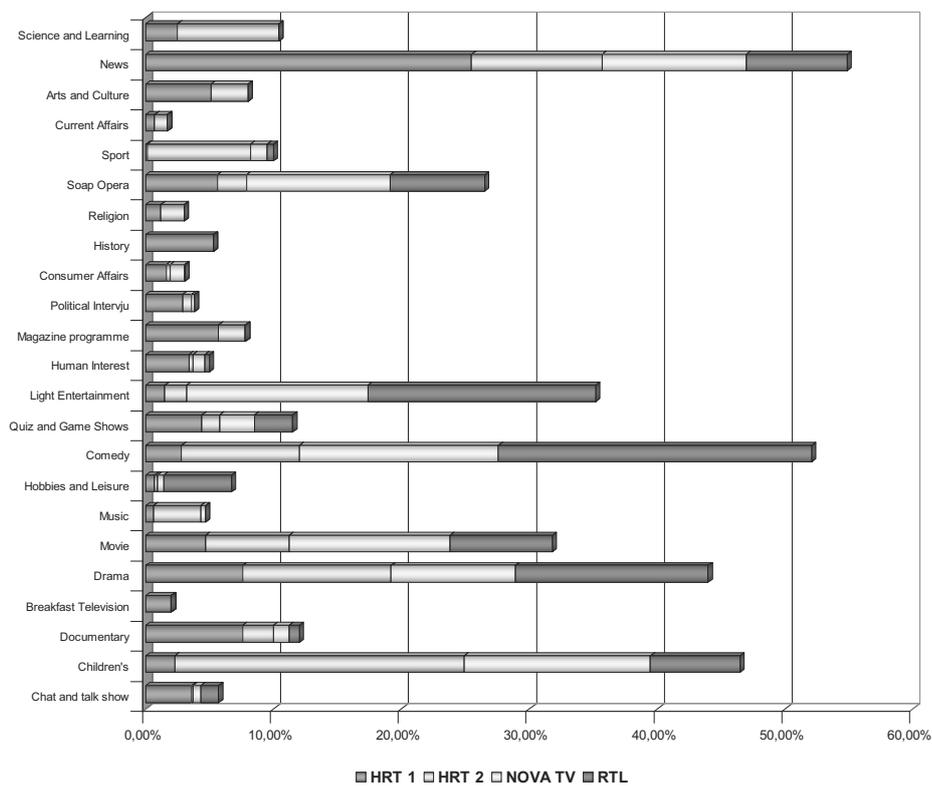
News is the single most prominent genre category (in number of programs) in the composite sample for all years at 14.8% due to the high share in the HTV 1 programming of 26,1%. The next most numerous category is comedy (12.9%), followed by drama (11.1%), children’s programs (11%), light entertainment (8.7%) and soap operas (6.7%). In prime time the children’s programs and soaps are reduced (to 1.9% and 4.6%), while sports becomes a more prominent category with

a share of 4.8%. The news increases to 25.1% in prime time, and comedies and light entertainment switch the places of prominence from the whole day sample.

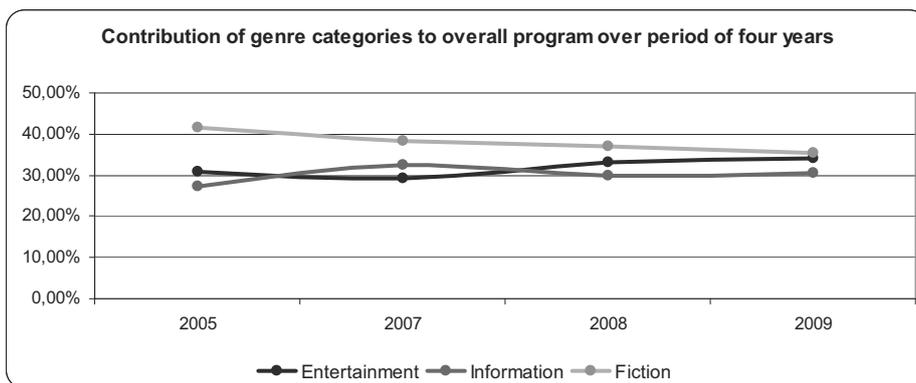
Table 2. Share of television channels in genres broadcast in Croatia (combined samples for 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, N= 5769)

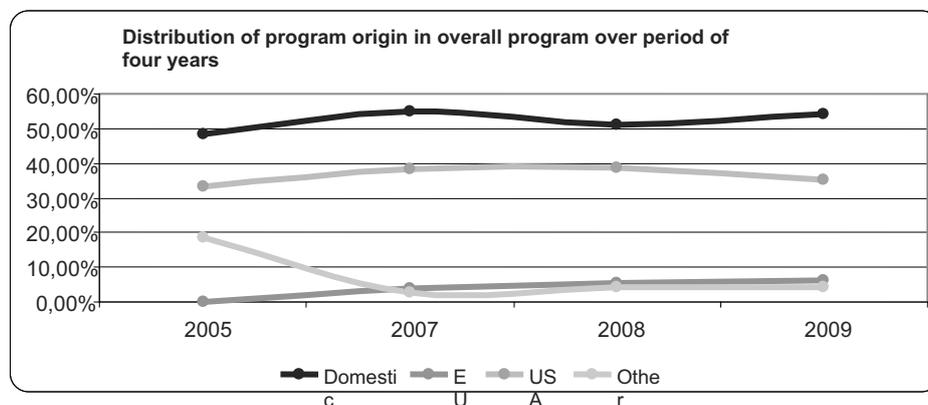
Genre	Channel				Grand Total
	HTV 1	HTV 2	NOVA TV	RTL	
chat and talk show	68.09%	1.06%	7.45%	23.40%	100.00%
children's	6.49%	47.31%	29.11%	17.09%	100.00%
documentary	69.74%	16.41%	7.69%	6.15%	100.00%
breakfast TV	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
drama	21.18%	23.83%	19.00%	35.98%	100.00%
cinema	18.40%	19.07%	35.25%	27.27%	100.00%
music	16.92%	75.38%	7.69%	0.00%	100.00%
hobbies & leisure	11.88%	1.98%	5.94%	80.20%	100.00%
comedy	6.59%	16.42%	26.51%	50.47%	100.00%
light entertainment	5.40%	4.40%	35.80%	54.40%	100.00%
human interest	74.07%	4.94%	13.58%	7.41%	100.00%
magazines	78.29%	21.71%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
other	36.22%	31.50%	22.05%	10.24%	100.00%
political talk shows and debates	82.26%	14.52%	3.23%	0.00%	100.00%
consumer affairs	60.42%	8.33%	29.17%	2.08%	100.00%
history	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
religion	47.83%	52.17%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
soaps	25.97%	8.05%	36.62%	29.35%	100.00%
current affairs and investigative journalism	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
culture & art	70.54%	29.46%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
news	53.17%	15.85%	16.78%	14.20%	100.00%
science and education	29.73%	70.27%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
sports	0.75%	80.45%	12.78%	6.02%	100.00%
quiz & panel games	44.32%	10.23%	19.32%	26.14%	100.00%
Grand Total of all broadcast programs	30.17%	22.41%	21.44%	25.98%	100.00%

Distribution of genres across TV programs, composite sample 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009



Contribution of genre categories to overall program over period of four years





### Television performance for the public desire

The second part of the analysis of diversity in programs offered is aimed to show the relationship of the program genres offered and consumed by the public, and the relationship of the “public interest” and “public desire” in our Croatian sample. If “the public’s interest, then, defines the public interest” (Fowler & Brenner, 1982, in Freedman 2008:69), let’s see what the Croatian media publics find interesting. We have seen the type of programs offered on Croatian televisions. What are the television audiences in Croatia actually watching?

The share<sup>14</sup> of channels in the total number of programs broadcast (Table 4) was relatively stable in the past five years, and the average of the three years is almost identical to the 2008 sample of broadcasts. This would go towards supporting the validity of the sample (at least on this variable) and the solid basis for the conclusions drawn from it, in spite of the sample not being statistically representative.

The audiences have not been behaving stably in the same period, and especially if we include the earlier years for which the people-meter data are available. What we see is a steady loss of audience for HTV 1, the first channel of the public service, as well as for the second public channel HTV 2. At the same time the audiences for commercial channels Nova TV and RTL TV were rising, so that today some 45 per cent of the audiences are with the public service channels, and some 45 per cent with commercial national channels, while the remaining 10 per cent watch local and regional television channels and the growing offer of international channels on cable and IPTV.

Table 3. Share of national televisions in the total television audience in Croatia

Channel	Year	SHR%				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
HTV 1	42.79%	39.09%	38.18%	34.61%	33.16%	32.62%
HTV 2	18.96%	17.79%	15.79%	17.74%	16.07%	14.00%
HTV 3*	9.52%	1.86%	-	-	-	-
Nova TV	15.58%	14.26%	13.48%	15.08%	17.56%	19.48%
RTL**	-	16.69%	24.77%	24.61%	23.79%	22.88%
Total	86.85%	89.69%	92.22%	92.04%	90.58%	88.98%

Source: AGB Nielsen, 2009.

\* HTV 3 – went off the air on 1.3.2004.

\*\* RTL – started broadcasting on the former HTV3 frequency in April 2004.

If we go back to our proposition of linking the concept of audience desire or choice with the public interest (in the neo-liberal fashion), we find, quite surprisingly, that the Croatian audiences systematically lack the type of programs and genres offered on the first public television channel, HTV 1. Table 4 shows that HTV 1's audience share is larger than its share in the total number of programs, and the opposite is true for other national television channels. The discrepancy is perhaps the greatest for the second public service channel HTV 2, whose character is much less public service. These findings would tend to support the conclusion that the audiences would prefer more of the type of programming offered on HTV 1 (hence, the neo-liberal expectation that the audience choice will shape the offer to their benefit and desire does not hold in Croatia).

Table 4. Television program offer vs. audience program use, television channels and national audiences

Channel	Composite share of channels in all broadcast programs for the 4 year sample (2005, 2007, 2008, 2009)	Composite share of channels in all broadcast programs for 2005, 2007, 2008	Average composite share of national television audiences in 2005, 2007, 2008	Share of channels in all broadcast programs in 2008	National television audiences in 2008
HTV 1	30%	30%	35%	29%	33%
HTV 2	22,5%	23%	15%	23%	14%
Nova TV	21,5%	21%	17%	22%	19%
RTL	26%	26%	24%	26%	23%
Total	100%	100%	91%	100%	89%

HTV 1 is the channel which in Croatia broadcasts the most of the public interest content, defined in genres traditionally seen to be socially useful or in the public interest. Let us now see if the demise of the neo-liberal concept of public interest can be supported at the level of genres and their audiences. The data on broadcast genres and their audiences that follow relate to the same week in March 2009.

Table 5. Television program offer vs. audience program use, program groups and national audiences across all televisions (PBS & commercial)

Type of program*	Length of program broadcast in minutes, as% of all programs 1-7 March 2009	Average daily audience share** 1-7 March 2009
Entertainment	28%	17%
Information	18%	22%
Fiction	54%	21%
Total	100%	60%

\*\* Genres are categorized as in Table 1

\* AGB Nielsen data, adapted to categorization in Table 1

What does Table 5 show us? First, that only 60% of the potential television audience chose to watch the four national television channels in our sample week; the other 40 per cent of the audience was either watching other television channels, using other media, or doing something else altogether with their leisure time.

We can conclude that the offer of entertainment and fiction programs exceeds the demand of our audiences. The information programs category has the highest average audience share and is the only audience share that exceeds the shares of these program genres in the program offer. Again, it seems that the socially useful programs in the composite “information” category are what the audiences don’t have enough off (compare Resengren et al 1996).

Statistically significant relationship was uncovered between the origin of program and its social significance (domestic programs had high, and US imports low significance), origin of the program and the television channel, genre distribution in prime time and out of the prime time, its social significance, the difference between the genre distribution between the public service channels and commercial channels (for all the relationships Chi-square was significant at the 0.01 level).

Table 6. Share of program category in total channel broadcast in minutes and average prime time audience share, 1-7 March 2009

Type of program		Entertainment	Information	Fiction	Total programs and combined audiences
Program	HTV 1	27.13%	<b>43.32%</b>	29.55%	100.00%
Audiences	HTV 1	30.27%	<b>24.15%</b>	25.60%	80.02%
Program	HTV 2	29.87%	<b>28.54%</b>	41.59%	100.00%
Audiences	HTV 2	11.44%	<b>6.70%</b>	12.22%	30.32%
Program	RTL TV	21.59%	<b>9.80%</b>	68.60%	100.00%
Audiences	RTL TV	15.50%	<b>24.00%</b>	22.00%	61.50%
Program	Nova TV	45.69%	<b>17.64%</b>	36.67%	100.00%
Audiences	Nova TV	26.00%	<b>29.00%</b>	27.00%	82.00%

Table 7. Average and total length of genre categories on public service and commercial television in 2009

		Program type	Entertainment	Information	Fiction	Total
<b>Public Service Television Channels</b>	Length in minutes	Mean	47	33	53	42
		Sum	5577	6428	5380	17385
		Column N%	32,08%	36,97%	30,95%	100,00%
		Row N%	44,20%	81,20%	36,30%	52,70%
<b>Commercial Television Channels</b>	Length in minutes	Mean	43	27	58	48
		Sum	6500	1230	10214	17944
		Column N%	36,22%	6,85%	56,92%	100,00%
		Row N%	55,80%	18,80%	63,70%	47,30%

## Conclusion

Our findings show that the diversity of genres on Croatian public television is greater than on Croatian commercial televisions, public channels show more “socially useful” content than commercial channels, commercial televisions broadcast prevalently entertainment and fiction genres. This confirms earlier research in different European and other countries which showed a higher level of (internal) diversity for public television channels, and lower for commercial television networks (Ishikawa 1996, Hillve et al, 1997, Leon 2004, Ward 2006). If the history of communication can be seen as the history of the enlargement of the public space (McQuail 1992), should we not (re)examine the content of this public space as

presented to us by the media – where the information content of political relevance in the customary sense forms the smallest share in what are, essentially, entertainment industries.

The data seem to deny the validity of the neo-liberal concept of pluralism and public interest provided by the market alone – the audience preferences (as attention) seems to show a lack in the class of information programs. The public service broadcaster HTV is the one with the most diverse genre mix, and the largest share of socially useful content. The small size of the and the high concentration of the television market, as well as the media policy still of the pluralist<sup>15</sup> fashion, seems to confirm the positive impact of media policy for media performance in the public interest. If this needs spelling out – without the existence of public service HTV, Croatian media audiences would be even more deprived of the television programs in the factual, real and socially useful genres able to contribute (at least in policy expectations) to democracy, the public sphere, and political participation. In Croatia, television is still the no.1 medium. The multichannel television environment is growing on the supply side (Perišin 2009, forthcoming), but the audiences are still predominantly with the four broadcast television channels. Our data does not support the claim of fragmented audiences, as seems also to be the case in many other countries in Europe and beyond, in spite of a widespread belief to the contrary (Ward 2008).

Future research on public interest and television programs should certainly take into account the hybridization of genres, and not only because the classic distinctions between information and entertainment (fact and fiction, emotion and objectiveness) are hard to maintain in contemporary programs with blurred boundaries. We should look for ways in which television programs are exhibiting the softening (emotionality), the fictionalization, and the dramatization of the factual, in the issue-oriented programs; or the actualization, insertion of public and policy issues, in the fictional and entertainment programs. The evaluation of the public interest in television programming should also monitor possible changes in the cultural meanings of genres (Mittel 2001) that figure prominently within the public interest matrix. In order to start re-conceptualizing the social role of the media, we need to review our understanding of what is it really that they are producing, and what is it that we are watching, and why.

The abundance of different media channels and platforms in today's mediascapes, which are not any more constrained by the economies of scarcity, is sometimes seen as the reason for ending our concern with the product they produce. It is thought that the growth in the number of channels of media delivery would automatically produce a perfect competition ("the paradox of competition is that although firms compete to win, the ultimate victory is monopoly" Judge Bark, in

Aufderheide 1999:285) which would ensure that the products of the media are exactly what is needed by their consumers. Lazarsfeld and Merton new more than 60 years ago, that “Social objectives are consistently abandoned by commercial media when they clash with economic gain” (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948). Should we then abandon our expectations that the media should indeed contribute to democracy with such content as can contribute to the development of the political process of democracy? If we did that, what vehicle would we have to perpetuate community, and what medium could we use to share our ideas? If we are not to return to the pre-media oral culture, we should better implement media policies which will secure the continued contribution of the media to the public interest. Public policy should continue to play a pivotal role in ensuring that the media continue to play a socially useful role, in the future multichannel and internet dominated media.

It must also be clear that it is a long stretch to conclude about the effects of the media – in their contribution to public interest – just by relying on the analysis of their content. In this text the attention of the audiences (in terms of ratings) were brought into the program offer equation, but this is certainly not enough information on which to conclude how the content to which they had attended really served any of the public interest social goals – to inform the public at large (and the minority audiences), to motivate them to cultural participation, to motivate them to understanding and tolerance of the other, et cetera. This area of media influences is the largest lacuna in Croatian media research.

#### ENDNOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Research for this text was undertaken within the long term research project “Croatian media culture: pluralism in media policy and media system”, led by Z. Peruško, and funded by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport at the Centre for Media and Communication Research, Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb. The author wishes to thank the student assistants – coders Ana Lulić and Nina Kolman, and Visnja Bevandić Bara for statistical analyses.
- <sup>2</sup> Held discusses three ways of arriving at what is public interest: preponderance theory (as the sum of individual interests, from a majoritarian perspective), common interest theory (all members presumably share the same interest), and unitary theory (absolute standard of values, an absolute normative principle) (McQuail 1992:22-23).
- <sup>3</sup> The examination of the fit of the public interest definitions with different types of media systems, along the Hallin and Mancini (2004) lines, would be interesting.
- <sup>4</sup> Quality is necessarily a relational variable, i.e. it includes a set of values against which we evaluate quality. Compare Rosengren 1996. In relation to television programs, “quality” is not limited to “socially useful” programs, but is also applied to distinctive characteristics of entertainment genres.
- <sup>5</sup> Digital Terrestrial television is in test phase and plans exist for digital switchover in 2010, but the process appears lame and no new content/channel has so far been proposed for new digital multiplexes. The public service HRT announced ambitious plans last year for specialized news and sports channels, but

this was soon nipped in the bud (with now uncertain conclusion) by the commercial competition, with support of the regulator and government.

- <sup>6</sup> This data was presented as part of the results of a public opinion pool on media and journalism, Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb, on November 5, 2009.
- <sup>7</sup> MediaMarket, Lider, 6 March 2009.
- <sup>8</sup> For the Croatian mediascape in terms of media policy and system developments in the 1990's see Z. Peruško Čulek, (2003) "Croatia: The First Ten Years", in Paletz & Jakubowitz (eds.), *Business as Usual*, pp. 111-145. for market and policy development with special attention to television see Peruško, Z. "Croatia" in *Television Across Europe: Regulation, Policy and Independence*, Budapest: EUMAP, 2005; on democratization and civic values in the media see Peruško, Z. "Media and civic values", in Ramet & Matić, "Democratic transition in Croatia: value transformation, education and media", Texas A&M University Press, 2007; for the evaluation of the freedom and development of the media after 2000 see Peruško, Z. "The Media", in *Openness of Society*, 2005, 2006; in the context of the concentration and market development trends in CEE see Peruško, Popović (2008a), and in relation to digital television policy see Peruško, Popović (2008b).
- <sup>9</sup> In my earlier analyses on the Croatian media policy in the 1990s and its formation by conflicting understandings of democracy in the Croatian political corpus, in addition to the laws, parliamentary debates and public statements of politicians were used as sources of normative media definitions shaping media policy and media system development. See Peruško Čulek 1999, 2003.
- <sup>10</sup> The coding scheme is adapted from the Ward 2006 Study on the assessment of Content Diversity in Newspapers and Television in the context of increasing trends towards concentration of media markets. The 2005 Croatian research cited in this text was undertaken within the mentioned study, by the research team supervised by Z. Peruško, then Chair of the Department for Culture and Communication, Institute for International Relations.
- <sup>11</sup> There is a high culture vs. low culture/popular culture division implicit in this way of grouping genres into program categories, and in the implication that only the "serious" genres from the "information" group hold social value. Why should we think that art or politics could not be entertaining? See Van Zoonen 2005 on the exploration of the later topic.
- <sup>12</sup> "The fulfillment of the right to public information and for all the citizens of the Republic of Croatia, of the members of the Croatian minorities abroad, and the rights of the national minorities in the Republic of Croatia,
  - The fulfillment of human and political rights of the citizens and the development of the rule of law, the social state and the civil society,
  - Protection of the Croatian national and cultural identity,
  - Encouragement of Croatian cultural creativity,
  - Culture of public dialogue,
  - Development of education, science and art,
  - Protection of nature, environment and health", General principles. Article 9, Law on the electronic media (NN 122/03)
- <sup>13</sup> This information is according to the AGB Nielsen Croatia. AMR is average minute rating, per cent of all the audience members who are watching television at that particular time.
- <sup>14</sup> Share is a measure of audience (i.e. television viewing) which shows the percentage of a program in relation to the size of the audience at that particular time (if program A has 5 viewers and 8 out of 10 possible audience members are watching television at that time, the share is calculated by dividing the number of the viewers of the program with the total number of viewers at that time, i.e. 5/8 is 62.5%).
- <sup>15</sup> A comprehensive discussion of the Croatian media policy exceeds the boundaries of this paper; suffice it to say that even though it exhibits, at the normative level, the liberal pluralist character (in the broadcasting and press policy – the telecommunications policy has gone down the neo-liberal path without a

return ticket), in its implementation we find it lacking in issues of transparency, insurance of freedom and independence of the journalists, and in curtailing the spin practices of the government which balance on the verge of coercion.

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## Javni interes i djelovanje televizije u Hrvatskoj

Zrinjka Peruško

### SAŽETAK

Članak na temelju tjednih uzoraka programa komercijalnih i javnih televizija s nacionalnim pokrivanjem u Hrvatskoj u periodu od 2005. do 2009. godine empirijski pokazuje stupanj njihovog djelovanja u javnom interesu. Kriteriji za evaluaciju javnog interesa u televizijskom programu su definirani a) prema teorijskom modelu medija i javnog interesa i b) prema specifičnom hrvatskom modelu javnog

interesa u medijima. Specifične hrvatske definicije javnog interesa nalaze se u medijskoj politici. Javni interes se analizira prema autoričinom trodimenzionalnom modelu medijskog javnog interesa (sadržaj, publike, i društveni ciljevi) kojim se konstruira matrica medijskog javnog interesa. Izvori definicija javnog interesa u hrvatskoj medijskoj politici ovdje su ograničeni na zakone i propise relevantne za televizijsko emitiranje.

Autorica predlaže teorijsku definiciju demokratskog medijskog djelovanja u javnom interesu koja treba uključiti tri međusobno povezane dimenzije: sadržaj – društveno koristan i raznolik, publike – građani i publike s posebnim potrebama ili manjinske publike, i društvene ciljeve – informirati građane za političku participaciju i doprinos demokraciji. Raznolikost kao kvaliteta programa u javnom interesu je dodatno konceptualizirana u suprotstavljenim razumijevanjima pluralističke i neoliberalne medijske politike, u smislu otvorene nasuprot reflektivnoj raznolikosti.

Analiza sadržaja programskih vodiča obuhvatila je uzorak od 5769 emitiranih emisija – jedinica analize koje su kategorizirane u žanrove u tri veće grupe programa: informativni (društveno korisni), zabavni, i dramska fikcija. Analiza je pokazala da je najveći broj društveno korisnih žanrova (vijesti, politički intervjui, informativni magazini, dokumentarci, umjetnost i obrazovni program) na javnim kanalima HTV 1 i HTV 2, koji pokazuju i veću raznolikost žanrova koje emitiraju. Izbor publika (u smislu pažnje) pokazuje manjak emitiranih programa u informativnoj kategoriji, i preveliku količinu emitirane fikcije na hrvatskim televizijama s nacionalnim pokrivanjem.\*

**Ključne riječi:** medijsko djelovanje, javni interes, medijska politika, televizijski program, žanr, društveno koristan sadržaj, raznolikost, Hrvatska

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