

MORE THAN *POP IDOL*: EUROPEAN & DOMESTIC TV CONTENT QUOTAS

BEHIND THE RHETORIC?

Framed by rhetoric about cultural diversity and national identity content quotas for broadcasters are in force in many national jurisdictions and at the level of the European Union. At the European level they were put in place by the Televisions Without Frontiers Directive (TWF), now the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), and oblige broadcasters to ensure that a majority of content qualifies as “European works”. At the national level, quotas for “cultural” content are often linked to the use of the domestic language and range from 5% to as much as 50% of annual broadcast programming. These quotas present an interesting intersection between the politics of cultural policy and the economic interests of industrial policy. This research critically examines the dynamics of the European and domestic quotas asking: **what is actually produced under the quotas and what are the financial implications for broadcasters?**

PERSISTENCE DESPITE CRITIQUE

The breadth of arguments against the use of content quotas is astounding yet they remain widespread at the national level and upheld at the European level. The main criticisms point directly to the tension between the quotas’ cultural and industrial (cross) purposes. Quota critics argue that they:

- Lack consideration for quality, leading to lowest common denominator commercial content;
- Are prone to unequal application and difficult to enforce;
- Limit the freedom to supply services; and,
- May lead to domination of smaller markets by *European giants*.

Though some national regulatory authorities gather information from broadcasters on the implementation of quotas, this data rarely goes beyond simple calculations of compliance (or non) with the obligatory percentages. Little empirical research has been done in Europe on what actually is broadcast under these quotas and how they affect the broadcasters and other subjects in the market. Considering the harsh criticisms above, this kind of research is necessary in order to unravel the purposes and consequences of quota policies.

References

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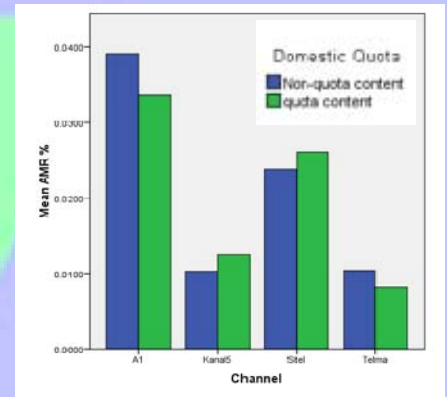
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NOT JUST ENTERTAINMENT

On par with the rest of Europe, stations averaged 9.5 hours of European works per day coming close to compliance, however more than 70% was achieved with domestic production.

Although most domestic quota content was studio-based there were equal amounts of informative and entertainment (29%) with music programmes (23%) a close second.

QUOTA CONTENT GETS RATINGS



Quota content holds its own for ratings compared to other non-news content meaning it can be financially valuable for broadcasters, but regionally produced drama beat all other European or domestic quota content in prime time placement.

CASE STUDY: MACEDONIA

Macedonia is a small country with an ethno-linguistically diverse population and a large number of private broadcasters. The Law on Broadcasting Activities dictates that national broadcasters comply with the European works quota and ensure 30% of their daily programming is “originally produced in the Macedonian language” not including news, teleshopping, advertisements and game shows. Broadcasters operating in one of the minority languages must meet this quota in their language of broadcast. Investigation was as follows:

1. A codebook was developed based on analysis of the relevant articles from the Law on Broadcasting Activity and implementation instructions from the national regulatory authority; then used to identifying which programmes would qualify for the quotas.

2. Data from AGB/Nielson Media Research in Macedonia was selected consisting programme schedules from an average viewing week from 2008 and 2009 for national broadcasters including Average Minute Ratings (AMR) and Reach.

3. Intercoder reliability test on 25% of the data set produced an average of 21.7% disagreement across 4 variables. Some of the disagreement was attributed to recollection differences and resolved by referring to archives, but revisions were also made to the codebook clarifying the treatment of sports events.

Sally Broughton Micova

Mphil/PhD Media and Communications
s.e.broughton@lse.ac.uk



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