

The importance of regional public service media

**A strategic view of the role of
regional public media in Europe**

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CIRCOM Regional

CIRCOM Regional is an international association of professionals working in the field of public service regional audiovisual media in Europe. Two hundred thirty nine regional public service broadcasters are members, drawn from more than thirty countries. CIRCOM Regional's aims and objectives are to:

- promote the development of public service regional audiovisual media;
- encourage productive contacts between professionals working in this field;
- examine and debate issues affecting public service regional audiovisual media;
- facilitate co-operation between organisations in this field;
- improve the quality of public service regional audiovisual media and the service it offers audiences and users.

CIRCOM Regional includes:

- **31 countries.**
- **239 broadcast stations.**
- **10.000 regional journalists.**
- **1.600 hours of news programmes each week.**
- **Over 90 different TV broadcasts in minority languages.**
- **A daily reach of millions of TV viewers, radio listeners and online consumers.**

CIRCOM Regional joint activities:

- **Over 150 training sessions for more than 2.000 trainees led by an international team of trainers from TV stations and members of CIRCOM.**
- **Over 5.000 delegates have attended CIRCOM conferences all around Europe.**
- **Over 3.000 programmes have been scrutinised, judged and awarded as the best of European Television in the Prix CIRCOM Awards.**

CIRCOM Regional organises and delivers a range of activities to achieve those aims and objectives, and to enhance public service regional media on behalf of audiences. CIRCOM Regional organises conferences, assemblies and meetings for those with an interest in public service regional media. It helps regional stations deliver cross-border projects and projects of mutual co-operation. CIRCOM Regional also hosts awards for excellence in regional programme-making, celebrating the best talent and raising the profile of our member stations. Another key role for CIRCOM Regional is to deliver expert training for regional television practitioners, training that is recognised as amongst the best in the world.

CIRCOM Regional also has an important role enabling members to work together to preserve and strengthen regional public service television in Europe. CIRCOM Regional and its members are adapting to a rapidly changing environment, and CIRCOM Regional is becoming an important platform for regional broadcasters across Europe to share common themes and challenges, and exchange ideas. CIRCOM Regional members can learn from each other's approaches to common challenges, and in doing so enhance regional broadcasting across Europe for the benefit of all audiences.

CIRCOM Regional seeks dialogue and cooperation with all organisations that can help CIRCOM Regional achieve its goals without affecting the independence of CIRCOM Regional or its

members. On a European level CIRCOM Regional works with the European Parliament to highlight the importance of political journalism on a regional and local level. The same goes for the European Commission, the Assembly of the European Regions (AER/ARE), the Council of Europe, the Committee of the European Regions and the EBU.

Introduction

This paper from CIRCOM Regional seeks to underline the importance of independent professional public service regional media organisations, and explores how they contribute to securing a democratic and culturally diverse society.

CIRCOM Regional speaks on behalf of all professional, independent public service regional organisations. Regional media is of enormous importance to the many regional societies that form the countries of Europe. It provides a number of essential safeguards to enable these societies to function properly, and is part of the democratic process itself. But regional public service media faces challenges, as well as offering opportunities, as will be explored more fully in this paper. The importance of regional public service media, as well as its challenges and opportunities are not always recognised and therefore public regional media deserves a place on national and European agendas.

Global digital innovations are changing the world rapidly and the change affects everyone, both at home and at work. In the world of media, the changes are also hugely significant both for consumers and media companies, and public service media must respond to changes in the way our audience consumes traditional and new media. In essence, technological revolution in the media is about new platforms, new and easier ways to communicate. Closer communication breaks down boundaries, and draws communities together, across the globe and across Europe. It presents opportunities but it also presents threats to community identities and cultural differences. So whilst regional public service media celebrates new and easier ways to communicate, it recognises the changes signal a growing need for the independent reporting and celebration of the different regions of Europe. The need to keep people well informed at a regional and local level within Europe is increasingly important, and audiences deserve strong regional focused news and information services.

Digital innovation leads to new forms of media consumption and new service providers. On a national scale, broadcasters need to respond to the new (global) media service providers such as Hulu, Netflix, HBO, Apple and YouTube. On a regional scale, newspapers are seeing their print editions dwindling fast whilst consumers enter the digital domain. Together with declining commercial news services it places regional news and information under pressure. In that changing landscape, it is regional public service media who is a stable provider of increasing importance.

CIRCOM Regional recognises these trends, and recognises that all public service media organisations in Europe, no matter what their challenges and opportunities, have to adapt to change to keep regional and local programming at a sufficient quality and quantity. That is not easy, and in many countries the regional and local public service media risk being subsumed by the national broadcasters, whilst the audience expectations are increasing on a regional and local level.

Our priorities:

- 1. Strong Regional Journalism** - we examine, explain and question local and regional decision makers. Our news encourages debate and democratic participation. We are trusted for our commitment to editorial independence, impartiality and public purpose.
- 2. Cultural Life** - regional public service media supports all types of cultural activities, and has a commitment to portrayal and diversity. We support second and minority languages, we foster local and regional identity, and contribute to political stability and understanding.
- 3. Regional Growth** - public service broadcasters support the creative industries, and are a source of talent and skills. We create jobs and opportunities in the regions, and foster community activity.

Our requirements:

- 1. Recognition** - we want recognition for local and regional public service media at the highest levels of European institutions, and in legislation. We want to be the voice of regional public service media, a key player and a valuable source of information and expertise.
- 2. Access** - we must be available to audiences on all platforms. There are two urgent priorities: sufficient frequency spectrum and open and neutral web access.
- 3. Funding** - we need sustainable and sufficient funding.

Public service broadcasting in Europe

National and regional public services

Public service media in Europe are an important pillar of democracy and opinion. At a European level frameworks are formulated for public service media.

The Protocol of Amsterdam in 1997 tried to impose certain requirements on public bodies, which include pluralism, democratic control and paying special attention to their social and cultural landscape to exercise their function. The European Directive on Audiovisual Services, in 2007, supplemented with the Communication of the EC on the application of rules on State aid to public service broadcasting in 2009, sets principles according to which the specific concepts and applications of public service should be drawn. It also requires public operators not to interfere with market competition, and to exercise their functions under the control of an external and independent authority.

Each Member State itself must give substance to the role, organisation and size of the public service media. There is a wide variety of public service media in the Member States of Europe. This also applies to the different (organisational) forms of public service at national, regional (and local) scale. In several member states, national and regional public service media are organised independently (i.e. Germany, Spain, the Netherlands). In other Member States, national and regional public service media are set within the same organisation (i.e. Sweden, United Kingdom, Italy).

Public service media on a national scale is the most visible and receives the bigger share of funding. The national public service media generally have a wider remit than the regional ones and can do more with more resources. National public service media offer a wide and diverse range of programmes for all residents of a member state, such as national and international news, entertainment, children's and sports programming, as well as big nationwide events and as said, they need to respond to new (global) media developments and new service providers. In each Member State, besides national public and commercial TV and radio broadcasters many national newspapers are also thriving. The overall picture is one of a rich offer of national media provision, in a landscape of diversity and plurality.

On a regional level the media landscape is very different. Firstly, the range of output from the regional public service media can be limited by the national's range of output. In addition, there are far fewer providers of regional media services - less competition, but also less diversity and plurality. In many cases, the regional public service media and regional newspapers are the only two providers of high-quality independent media in a region. That is something to keep an eye on, and even to worry about as regional media are of significant importance for the functioning of regional society and thus for the whole (European) society.

Case Study

'TVG: The public television as a driving force in the development of a regional audio-visual sector'

Galicia is an autonomous region of Spain with great personality, a distinctive culture and its own language, Galician. In the 1980s, however, television didn't really reflect the region or its culture. People from Galicia barely featured on Spanish national television, and when they did it was often related to tragic news or picturesque stories.

The creation of the Television de Galicia (TVG) in 1985, funded by the Autonomous Community, represented a paradigm shift. The channel was designed to develop Galicia's culture and language, offering all kinds of television genres.

TVG soon became the engine of an audio-visual industry that has been increasing its quality and efficiency year after year, and that has been supported -sometimes massively- by the audience, with fiction series such as 'Mareas vivas' and 'Libro de familia' achieving audience shares of 30% on a regular basis. Some of the professionals who started their careers in TVG a couple of decades ago are now in some of Spain's leading production companies.

By the end of the 20th century there were already some 50 independent audio-visual production companies based in Galicia, with an annual turnover of 75 million euros. Recent successes include the blockbuster 'Celda 211', the New Producers Award 2010 in the Cannes Film Festival for 'Todos vós sodes capitáns', and the Prix CIRCUM 2012 in the Fiction/Drama category for 'Matalobos'. However, times are changing and Galician audio-visual companies are struggling to adapt to changes in consumption habits and reduced purchasing capacity from public television, whilst still trying to retain the quality and prestige gained throughout these years. Despite the financial adjustments, TVG still dedicates 25% of its total programming to independent local production companies (complemented with a 55% of in-house productions), particularly in prime time.

Developments and challenges for regional media in Europe

The market is challenging for all local and regional media, including newspapers. The issues we face could affect the plurality of media overall, and without plurality in regional media, the audience will see an effect on the quality of local news, accountability, and information about where they live. In these challenging circumstances it's more important than ever to have a strong and vibrant regional public service media, to contribute to securing a democratic and culturally diverse society.

All regional public service media and local media, however they're funded, face pressure on budgets. It's important that regional public service media continue to provide value for money, as well as providing the services that audiences have come to expect.

Regional public service media have a special position and function in the public service media system. Along with newspapers, regional public service media are often the only professional media organisations in many parts of Europe that provide audiences with high quality independent news about where they live. Regional public service media by their nature belong to the regions, providing news, sport, cultural coverage and documentaries, delivering information to enable people to participate in their community. Regional public service media do this by being relevant, accessible and close to regional communities, and have a remit to cover both mainstream issues and specific interest groups.

Throughout Europe, delivering news and cultural programming on a local and regional level is the primary focus of regional public service media organisations. Regional public service media contribute to media pluralism in the regions, and also play a role in engaging the public in the workings of their local and regional governments, and cultural and social organisations.

As already indicated, there are major differences between the regional public service media in Europe, due to the way each public service media organisation has developed over time in the various countries. In many ways, each regional public service media organisation is a product of the country and region it serves - it reflects population size and density, political structures, and cultural influences. In some countries regional public service media are independent, some are part of a national public service media system, some have their own channels and other share them with the national organisation. There are also huge variations in funding models and overall budget available. In spite of this, in the last few decades one common factor has emerged - a widespread recognition of the importance and relevance of regional public service media, capable of delivering independent local and regional news and information that connects with the cultural differences in European regions. However, in several countries regional service media are under siege, struggling financially, and that is of concern to all regional and local public service media organisations. It is also noticeable that in the European debate the specific differences between national and regional public service media are not always recognised.

Case Study

'TG4 Ireland: Independent research shows in Ireland that for every €1 invested by the state in the Irish language station TG4, the Irish economy receives a return of almost €2'.

Since 2007 TG4 has commissioned €140m worth of independent television productions in Ireland. Many of these independent companies are small companies located in some of the most Westerly parts of the country. 300 highly skilled and creative full time jobs have been created and sustained through this process in the independent sector. Many of these jobs are located in the Irish speaking area of the country, TG4 itself is based in the heartland of the Galway Gaeltacht (Irish language speaking area) on the edge of the Atlantic in Baile na hAbhann over thirty kilometres from Galway the nearest city.

What do we stand for?

Support for democracy and culture

Indeed there is a need for strong independent public service media on both a national and regional level. Regional public media is important, distinctive, and increasingly relevant, because it provides for the many different regional socio-cultural and economic geographical areas in the member states of Europe. It connects people, informs them on issues in the regions, encourages discussion and participation, and is essential for the democratic functioning of local and regional communities.

Regional public service media also celebrates, protects and even reinforces regional identity and languages. In the ever-changing climate of media, the regional public service media are helping the audience find a way through the mass of information available to them. The programmes should be everywhere accessible to everyone on every device.

Journalism (editorial)

The audience tells us that they want news and information about where they live. Research tells us they look to regional public service media as the best place for this.

- Regional journalism is a key part of the regional and local democratic process, we examine and question local decisions and decision makers. Other media and broadcasters may also serve this function, but public service media have one crucial difference - we strive for editorial independence in everything we do. It is the single most important part of what we do, and what the audience demands from us.
- Regional news and programmes connect people, inform them about issues in the regions, encourage discussion and participation, and are essential for the democratic functioning of local and regional communities. We are professional media, delivering high standards, committed to accuracy without the need to sensationalise coverage.
- Public service media acts ethically, taking on social responsibility for local and regional communities, with a distinctive remit to deliver journalism in the public interest. We are trusted for our commitment to editorial independence, impartiality, and public purpose.

Culture

- Regional public service media support traditional cultural activities, and gives coverage and value to the aspects of local life that our audiences cherish.
- Regional public service media employ staff who know the region in detail, and their knowledge informs coverage.
- Regional and local public service media ensure that each part of a region feels represented because we have a commitment to portrayal and diversity. The audience knows that the programmes are about them and for them.

- Regional public service media helps develop a sense of identity, and often supports broadcasts in second and minority languages. We also support a wide range of cultural activity, including dance, music and sport.
- Other broadcasters don't usually have the same level of commitment to portrayal and diversity, because it's often not part of their core remit.
- We give recognition and a degree of protection to marginalised communities as a result, which fosters local and regional identity, and community cohesion.
- We can draw attention to the issues faced by many regional and sometimes marginalised communities, explain and draw parallels with the issues faced by people all over Europe.
- We believe that our commitment to these areas of life can contribute to political stability and understanding.

Recognition

- We want recognition for local and regional service media at the highest levels of European institutions, and in legislation. We would expect to be the representative voice of regional public service media, part of the discussion both as a player and a valuable source of information.
- We want to be recognised as an important, relevant part of all media across all platforms because in some cases we are under threat.
- We want public service regional media to be recognised in all legislation and agreements between public service media and governments where possible.
- We want to establish a true and accurate picture of the scale and relevance of our operation, which is often poorly reflected in all kinds of information and data bases.
- We want to demonstrate the importance of the service provided by local and regional media to our audiences.

Growth

Regional public service media are important supporters of the creative industries, and a source of journalistic talent and skills.

- We create jobs and opportunities in the regions, develop talent and foster community activity.
- We work with colleges and universities to develop skills and media literacy, and foster intellectual debate by creating the environment for everyone to participate, learn and develop.

Accessibility and legislation

Accessibility

We work in a rapidly changing media market. In recent times, there has been a radical change in the way audiences can receive news and information. We are still in a linear world, it is evolving into a non-linear world, with digital, on-line and mobile. In both those worlds we now have to serve our audiences. Social media and on-line continue to grow and whilst traditional media retains significant audiences, there are pressing challenges now and in the future.

If regional public service media are to continue to be relevant and carry out their primary function, they will need to be available to audiences on all platforms - radio, television and online. Depending on specific national situations, it is also important that regional media can be guaranteed to be broadcast via all possible distribution platforms including cable, terrestrial, satellite and internet. In addition, it is essential that developments such as DTT, TDAB(+), FTTH, HbbTV, VoD are also available to regional public service media.

By moving into non-linear platforms we ensure we continue to serve the needs of our younger audiences too. We are trusted news and information providers - the skills and experience of our journalists and programme makers are more important than ever given the accessibility of information and the advent of citizen journalism. Many would agree that broadcasting is still the best, most universal, and cheapest type of mass communication, information and culture in Europe. But internet services are already an important complementary service to broadcasting, not just an alternative.

When it comes to the distribution of the regional programmes in a changing world it is important for Regional PSM to be able to reach their audience in an easy and affordable way via all platforms. There are two issues of large importance: unlimited and free access to the digital domain (net neutrality) and sufficient frequencies (digital dividend).

On net neutrality

Free and unconditional access to the internet is also important for regional public service media. It should be ensured that internet service providers (ISP's) cannot block the signals or charge regional public service media for the access to their networks, and that ISP's provide regional public service media with the same standard quality of services as other organisations or companies.

On digital dividend

Regional public service media often seem to be forgotten in international and national negotiations on frequencies. European and national policy makers must be aware of the risk of losing one of the important tools of a healthy European democracy. For CIRCUM Regional it is a priority that the European Union ensures the necessary spectrum for regional public service media and that the 500-600 MHz (470-694) UHF band is secured until at least 2030 and the 700 MHz band until at least 2022. It is important that Europe highlights the importance of compensation and managed transition that take regional public service media into account.

Sustainable and sufficient funding and legislation

Many people recognise that the system of public service media in Europe is directly related to the democratic, social and cultural needs of each society and to the importance of preserving media pluralism. CIRCUM Regional underlines this important role of public service media, and takes into account that commercial media also contributes to pluralism, enriches cultural and political debate, and widens the choice of programmes. On regional scale that pluralism is under threat as print newspaper sales decline due to changing consumer habits. CIRCUM Regional underlines in particular the need for sustainable and sufficient funding of public service media on regional and local scale. It is also important

Case Study

'TVP Poland: regional media are very close to their audiences'

Established over 60 years ago Polish Public Television (TVP) prides itself in a rich history of regional programming with the first regional branch established in 1956. Now there are 16 regional channels broadcasting daily for 4,5 hours on a national channel TVP Regionalna. The rest of the programming of this channel is also composed of production from the regions. The main objective of TVP Regionalna - and the 16 regional branches of Polish Public Television - is quick and reliable information about life in Poland and most importantly - its regions. It aims at promoting the notion of civil society. Viewers will find current national and local information, current affairs programmes and documentary films.

The public media in Poland, especially the regional ones, operate in tremendously difficult conditions. TVP has not only one of the lowest licence fees in Europe but also one of the lowest collection rates. The financial challenges became more severe in 2007 and there was even a threat that some of the regional televisions would cease to exist. The regional branches fought through the crisis and now, in spite of the financial situation still being difficult, they are modern and technologically advanced. TVP offers the regional viewers an extensive portfolio of services available also online and on mobile devices. In this way it truly becomes the medium which is the closest to the viewers.

The regional branches of TVP fulfill the mission of public media and want to play an important role in regional and local communities. Therefore, the rich offer of regional stations of TVP includes award winning and distinguished application TVP Stream, thanks to which one can watch every regional program almost all over the world, special HBBTV applications and (the first in Europe) a regional warning system for natural disasters RSO, created together with the local governments. In the spirit of promoting high culture in the country, since 2012 regional branches of TVP have been carrying out a novel and missionary project Online TVP Theatre for Schools, whose purpose is to reach a mass young audience with arts and culture using broadband Internet. Every month even 40,000 students in hundreds of schools in villages and small towns watch live performances. Usually it is their first contact with the theatre.

that the responsibility for funding public service media stays with the individual member states or regions, as it is now.

As media in the regions are under pressure because of the financial situation in both private and public media, cooperation between public and private media could be seen as a way forward to maintain diversity and quality of media at both regional and local level. Any legal barriers that hinder cooperation between public and private media should be eliminated in favour of an independent high quality news and information provision to all citizens.

Overview of countries and member stations

ALBANIA - **RTSH** | AUSTRIA - **ORF** | BELGIUM - **RTBF, Tele Bruxelles**
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA - **BHRT** | BULGARIA - **BNT** | CROATIA - **HRT**
CZECH REPUBLIC - **CT** | DENMARK - **TV2** | FINLAND - **YLE** | FRANCE - **France 3**
GEORGIA - **GPB** | GERMANY - **HR, RBB** | HUNGARY - **MTVA** | IRELAND - **RTÉ, TG4**
ITALY - **RAI** | KOSOVO - **RTK** | MACEDONIA - **MKRTV** | MALTA - **PBS**
MONTENEGRO - **RTCG** | NETHERLANDS - **ROOS** | NORWAY - **NRK** | POLAND - **TVP**
PORTUGAL - **RTP** | ROMANIA - **TVR** | SERBIA - **RTS, RTV** | SLOVAKIA - **STV**
SLOVENIA - **RTVSLO** | SPAIN - **CRTVG, EITB, RTPA, ERTVIB, RTVCyL** | SWEDEN - **SVT, UR**
SWITZERLAND - **RTSI Lugano** | UNITED KINGDOM - **BBC Nations and English Regions**

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