## Media Communication

# Creating a Television Culture in Post-Conflict Kosovo: from a Balanced Public Forum to Politicization and Commercialization

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**Abstract:** This article aims to discuss and analyze television in Kosovo together with its socio-cultural and political dimensions, including its constituent elements, structure, functioning and influence. The establishment of independent media was as much the result of external intervention (UN) as it was of determination within society, media makers and private capital in a dual system of public and private broadcasters. However, the optimism which created here a television culture along European model, in order to fulfill its proper function in a new democracy and serve the public, is long gone; there is now a continuous fading of societal trust that television is a balanced public forum. Television in this country faces serious problems: the politicization and underfinancing of public broadcasters, concentration of ownership and non- transparent way of financing private broadcasters - problems that challenge editorial independence, constrain freedom of expression or restrict the possibility of choice. The article also examines the transformation of television from a cultural forum under socialism, through a potentially balanced public forum under democracy, to its new dimension in recent years, entertainment. In order to explain this argument, the article takes a theoretical and methodological multi-disciplinary approach, aiming to fill the gap in the research of television studies.

**Keywords:** cultural studies; public television; private television; politicization; commercialization

## 1. Introduction

This article aims to discus and explain television culture in the case of Kosovo, where it remains the main source of information and influence. Despite the rapid spread of online media and the significant use of social networks resulting from new technology and the relative youth of Kosovar society, television has a growing influence even compared to all other media. The focus here is television as an object of study in its socio-political and cultural aspects, including its constituent elements, structure, functioning and particularities during the last two decades. This has been

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the period of transition from socialism as a political and economic system, and from ethnic conflict and war, through international administration to today's reality of the troubled creation of a new multi-ethnic democracy. As with anywhere else in the Balkans, the establishment of a free media, together with political institutions, a market economy and civil society is seen as part of the process of the country's "europeanisation" and its possible accession to the EU, a process in which this country remains in last place in the region.

The fostering of a dynamic diversity of media here has been a difficult process, a phenomenon historically delayed and political complex. Even today freedom of expression, information and objective reporting, editorial and financial independence, programme structure and technological standards remain far from those among media in the mature democracies of EU member states. Despite this situation, the country has lately made progress in international indexes of freedom of expression, but remains behind her regional neighbours. Thus, according to Reporters Without Borders, it has moved up four places to 78th, a reflection of small steps forwards and the great tasks that remain (Reporters Without Borders, 2017). Describing media in Kosovo at the start of this year, the BBC declared that "TV is the most popular medium", while adding an interesting nuance: "Kosovo has a large number of media outlets in proportion to its population" (BBC, 2018).

Considering televisual culture from a theoretical perspective (Hall, Williams, Fiske, Postman & Meyrowitz) and analysing current trends (Schumacher, 2000, pp. 130 - 206; Faulstich, 2003, pp. 44-52; Speck & Roy, 2008, pp. 1197-1219; Turner & Tay, 2009; D. Lotz 2009, Gray 2010, pp. 54-57; Hutnyk, 2012, pp. 583-590; Corner & Roscoe, 2016, pp. 157-167; Jones, 2016, pp. 116-137), this study assesses how much television was part of socio-political and cultural change, and how much the institution and programme structure heralded change, benefited from it or was restricted. The experience of this televisual culture, the result of a reciprocal relationship between particular socio-political circumstances and television, remains unique. The experience is distinctive not only in the context of Central and Eastern Europe (Zielonka & Mancini, 2011), but also in the Balkans, and this merits scholarly analysis. However, serious study of television in Kosovo has hitherto been lacking, with some recent exceptions, and limited consideration of theoretical aspects (Shahini-Hoxhaj, 2014, pp. 31-57; pp. 86-93; pp. 130-141). The findings presented in this article are part of a multi-year quantitative and qualitative research, including a survey with 703 respondents, representative for the population of Kosovo. Another method used is desk research and the comparative method as well.

This article argues that televisual culture here has been shaped according to three principal parameters:

i) the transition from state-controlled socialist television to a dual public and private system occurred in a particular historical context, but without a continuity of broadcasting, leading to an entirely fresh start;

ii) the political context in which public and private broadcasters were founded was international (UN) administration and this made it a process driven substantially from outside, as the import of "civilizing" liberal values; and

iii) the television sector has lately become more dynamic, diverse and competitive because of private capital.

Moreover, an appropriate analysis of programming and media content, of journalism as a profession (Andresen, Hoxha & Godole, 2017, pp. 614-628; Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2017, pp. 525-535) and of viewing shows that politicisation and editorial interference from politics, under-funding and commercialisation represent serious concerns in this country and in her neighbors (Hanretty, 2011, pp. 5-6; Volcic, 2009, pp. 115-124, Popovic, 2015, pp. 25-28). Compared to other media in the region (Popovic, 2015, pp. 29-31), in Kosovo there has to date been no foreign investment in any commercial broadcaster.


## 2 The Context of Study

Looking at the theoretical level, Adelmann et al argue that television is the product of diverse significant processes and changes, through which technical, political, institutional and social factors define its current image and form. They further consider that, emphasising perpetual change, "television is not a monument, but a process, a performance, a practice" (Adelmann, 2001, p. 205). In the Kosovo case, historical and political circumstances have determined the delayed emergence of television and its socio-cultural nature has hitherto been shaped by the character of political institutions, by the dynamic of economic conditions, and by the culture of politics and of journalism. All of these factors continue to affect television, but it remains the principal source of information (see figure 1).
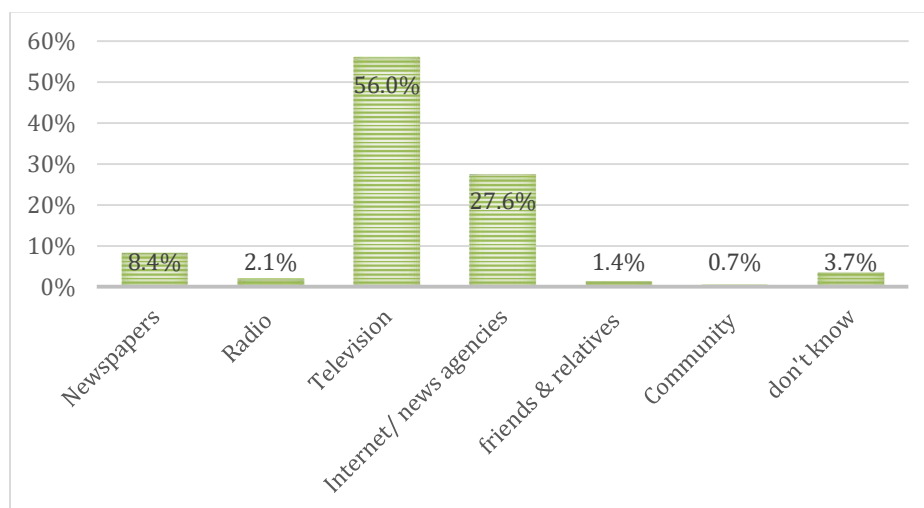
**Figure 1. What is your main information source?**

Since television in Kosovo was expected to develop according to the traditions of European democracy and the market economy, "a generic European model" was taken as its starting point. This model was based on two components: "a private media sector complying with domestic legislation and rules imposed by national regulators; and a public service broadcasting sector, which should be independent from the State" (Dragomir, 2010, p. 2). In Central and South-Eastern Europe this took place at the beginning of the 1990s in the context of media sector reforms in post-communist countries, while in Kosovo it was only possible after 2000 and even later. As will be explained below, here televisual culture has developed between two poles: on the one hand a public broadcaster established and developed with a clear legal framework and public financing, and on the other private broadcasters as products of competition in the free market, with support from foreign donors and local private capital. This situation shaped programme scheduling, organization, competition, financing, advertising and everything else.

Nevertheless, in its first decade televisual culture was defined by specific circumstances in the local context. The founding of Radio Television Kosovo (RTK) as a public broadcaster, to date the only one, was clearly foreseen as an objective by the international administration, whereby right at the start of its executive mandate the UN mission together with European mechanisms (OSCE, European Broadcasting Union) was given a decisive role in its operations. The involvement of significant international organizations present in Kosovo and large European and

non-European states shaped public expectations for RTK, the legal framework, the way of financing, its character and its mission. This was closer to the model of a European public broadcaster (Jakubowicz, 2011, pp. 210-229).

Up until now, the public broadcaster has enjoyed political support and, noticeably, professional and financial support from inter-state organizations, foundations and non-governmental organizations. Support for RTK became a kind of ideological and doctrinaire issue among European institutions and donors. Because the public broadcaster was a British invention (Hearst, 1992, pp. 61-79), which had been successfully transferred as experience and as model into different European states (Blumler, 1992; ARD & ZDF, 1997). However, while such a model might have been successful in Northern Europe, it was an entirely different matter when it came to public broadcasting, balanced information, trustworthiness and viewership in diverse countries of Eastern and Southern Europe (Dragomir 2017, pp. 1-18) and the Balkans (Milosavljevic & Poler, 2017, pp. 1-12). Meanwhile the European Parliament (EP, 2014, pp. 32-35) and the European Commission (EC, 2018, p. 74) in particular, monitoring RTK's development on an annual basis, were putting pressure on the governing bodies with regard to political non-interference and financial independence. The public broadcaster often found itself in the focus of criticism about one-sided reporting and for its closeness to governments or parties running the country (Western Balkan's Regional Platform, 2017, p. 15). Even today there is serious concern as to how much the public broadcaster truly offers a balanced service of information reflecting all points of view, with pluralism and diversity of programming.

In the Balkans, "the idea promoted by international community of a 'free and independent media', really meant the opening up of opportunities for commercial marked players" (Popovic, 2015, pp. 28-29). If in the Balkans the expectations of western states were that, after the change of political system in the 1990s, only media operating in a free market could be free from influence by political elites, in Kosovo during the UN administration the Europeans and the Americans had a direct role in governance and decision-making. Consistent with American expectations of the role of private media with regard to editorial and institutional independence, responsibility and public accountability, 2000 saw the founding of the first two private broadcasters, KTV and TV21. Together with the public broadcaster, these two private broadcasters in particular were to become "gatekeepers" and "watchdogs" among national media. Their development was the product of collaboration between several professional journalists and political and financial

backers, in particular American donors but also others. Right from their foundation, they reflected the status of commercial media in a democracy and a new market, determined to serve the public and to cover issues, which were not the concern of the public broadcaster. They offered the possibility of opinions that could not be portrayed elsewhere.

Although for more than a decade the public broadcaster dominated as an information service and because of the range, quality and viewership of its programming, the media market nonetheless began to fragment, with other, private broadcasters becoming active. Once again they involved a number of journalists, those who wanted at all costs to establish a commercial broadcaster with the aim of finding a new audience and influence, by which they hoped to maintain the role of "gatekeepers" and to balance public debate. They dealt with themes of politico-social controversy, bringing to bear all perspectives and points of view. However, analysis of television's development shows that the paradigm shift in televisual culture only occurred in recent years. There is a difference between where television was a decade ago and where it is today, institutionally and in programming and technology. Only in recent years has a significant diversity of private broadcasters become apparent, and then their consolidation and a concentration of ownership. With the evolution of other private broadcasters such as TV Klan, TV Dukagjini, TV 7, TV Tribuna Channel and more, there is a competition for legitimacy, viewership and credibility in a dual public and commercial system.

What must be analyzed is whether the public broadcaster with its programme structure is losing ground and influence relative to other, commercial broadcasters. Likewise, an important issue for this new culture is whether television has become more an "entertainment device" (Postman, 2005) than a source of appropriate information and of civic cultural education. It is apparent that some private broadcasters are today offering information faster and fuller, more interesting investigative journalism with more scandal-raking, news casting in something closer to popular language, diverse reportage and above all much entertainment programming (see table no. 3). All of these are contemporary trends and may become future trends in televisual cultural development. But several television experts have identified another particularity of commercial broadcasters: "The concentration of television ownership in a few hands is potentially dangerous, in that it means a concentration of influence that can be used for political, personal, ideological or commercial gains" (Dragomir, Reljic dhe Thompson, 2005, p. 67). In the case of Kosovo too there is serious concern about whether commercial broadcasters are

being used to support particular political agendas, to propagandize for ideological viewpoints or to pursue economic ends.

Applying the most influential theories and analyzing the Kosovar televisual context, this work will seek fuller answers to certain essential questions:

1. What is the socio-cultural context for the development of television and what is its influence on Kosovo's politics, economy and society?

2. What differentiates the media sector in terms of the relationship between public and private broadcasters in a dual televisual system?

3. How much is television affected - as institution, organizational structure, content and programming independence - by financial stability, legal control and political interference?

4. What are the factors and parameters of the changes to television culture in Kosovo and is it changing because of viewership, programme offer, technology, commercialization or new social trends towards television as an entertainment medium?

5. Why does a small country, with an emerging economy and a young society, have a large number of broadcasters and other media providers relative to its population and geographical size?

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The questions under consideration help to define the research subject and to offer a full analysis of what television represents, socio-culturally speaking, in the case of Kosovo. When the discussion is grounded in a theoretical basis its elements may be identified and its methodic approaches specified, with the aim of verifying its hypotheses and justifying its explanatory models (Adelmann, 2002, p. 3; p. 337). That is to say, only thus may we understand with adequate depth the role, influence and culture of television today as well as the future trends in this country.

Because the USA and Great Britain enjoyed an expansion of television after the Second World War (Schumacher, 2000, pp. 130-131), especially during the 1960s, the first studies in this field emerged among Anglo-American scholars, who became the "classic" theorists of television. The first milestone in television theory occurred in 1964 with Marshall McLuhan's work *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (McLuhan, 1964). At a time when television as a medium and a device for

family use was spreading in North America, McLuhan defined it as a broadening of man's understanding and as an extension of his central nervous system. He argued that while radio, telescope and photography each had their own ways of influencing, television opened the senses of sight and hearing to perceive voices and images which could not be perceived in any other way. McLuhan asserted a connection between medium and perception, by which he broadly showed that television has a multi-faceted influence on the audience. He became famous for his formula "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964, pp. 23-35; pp. 63-67), while content is unimportant (Kunczik & Weber, 1990, p. 13).

McLuhan further classified media as "hot media" (books, photography, radio, film) and "cool media" (television), for which he was criticized. One valid criticism was of his stance on the relationship between man and machine, which was technical. Raymond Williams would argue that this approach was limited and unhistorical in its understanding of television, and he would become the most prominent figure in another influential movement, the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. Its representatives - including Stuart Hall, John Fiske, John Hartley, John Ellis and others - would have a significant impact on the study of television in Europe, while offering a very different conception of it (Schumacher 2000, pp. 139-191; Marchart 2006, pp. 49-89, pp. 131-160).

The second true milestone came with Williams's work *Television, Technology and Cultural Form* (Williams, 1975) and Fiske and Hartley's *Reading Television* (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). According to Williams, television is a meeting point between technology, social institutions and cultural developments, and a form of cultural manifestation or indeed a "whole way of life". As such, television comprised experiences as much as cultural practices. One of his most influential opinions relates to programme structure, where he judges that structure is a "flow" and organized in that form, with different segments passing one to another. Accordingly, analysis of programmes should not concentrate on a single and specific element, but should comprehend the entire effect of a programme and indeed a genre (Williams, 1975, pp. 78-118). At a time when programme diversity and pluralism were becoming reality among western broadcasters, Williams observed the change that television was undergoing from an institution overseen by the state to a free market of multiple broadcasters.

Because the representatives of Cultural Studies had an enduring effect on television studies, even to the present day, they will serve as the theoretical framework for this article. Cultural studies enable a full institutional understanding of television, along

with mechanisms such as textual and viewer analysis (Adelmann 2002, p. 12). However, only some of their viewpoints will be referenced here, according to the needs of the argument. Naturally, this is one of the most influential schools of thought but not the only one, and a multi-disciplinary approach is necessary in this situation.

## 4. Television as Cultural Forum

The beginnings of television in Kosovo date back as far as the time of Yugoslav socialism, when it was part of a mono-medial system controlled by the state. One of the first Albanian-language broadcasts in this context was in 1966, and comprised a half-hour interview with a communist leader of the day and a musical programme by the "Shota" ensemble from Prishtina which took up the other half of the hour. Because there was no television broadcaster in Prishtina and the medium had only just begun to spread across Yugoslavia, it was managed under the auspices of TV Belgrade. This had been founded in 1957 and for a time was the broadcaster with the greatest influence across Yugoslavia, until during a period of political and socio-economic change dedicated television programmes were established in each of the entities of the federal republic. The founding of Radio Television Prishtina (RTP) as an institution with a programme structure was likewise a reflection of the political and constitutional changes, which took place in 1974. Though founded in that year, because of technical conditions and the lack of professional staff it started broadcasting in 1975, which is taken as the date of its full functionality (Gordey & Thomaß, 2001, p. 125).

At that time, RTP began to broaden its schedule with informational, educational and cultural programmes, to increase its number of staff and to build popular influence, because it was the only Albanian-language broadcast. As everywhere else in the communist bloc, RTP was naturally nothing more than an extension of the socialist identity and system, and embodied communist values and ideology. RTP was part of Yugoslavia's state television broadcaster (Miftari, 2017, p. 25). Until the death in 1980 of Tito, historic founder of the multi-nation state, RTP's editorial policy and scheduling was coordinated by a federal body within Radio Television Yugoslavia, which oversaw scheduling throughout all entities of state. When domestic tensions grew, the internal collapse began and relations between the entities of Yugoslavia deteriorated gravely, co-operation between television centers likewise became worse and was eventually broken off.

After the demonstrations of 1981 in Prishtina, which marked the beginning of the Yugoslav crisis, RTP was brought under tighter central control, but did not lose its influence. Until the imposition of violent restrictions (on July 5th 1990) and indeed its closure after Milošević came to power, RTP was among the most important institutions for information and culture. Equivalent to everywhere else in Yugoslavia, RTP was part of a wider Albanian-language cultural system in Kosovo, together with the University of Prishtina, the Academy of Sciences and Arts and various other organizations. The opening up of RTP institutionally and in programming occurred in step with the political emancipation and recognition of the rights of Albanians, and its end was likewise the consequence of the disintegration of the multi-nation state and the rise of nationalism.

It is important to be clear that, for a time, all of Yugoslavia's television hubs promoted co-existence between the country's constituent nationalities and self-governing socialism - while also becoming instruments for manipulating the masses, as was the case elsewhere in the world (Schumacher, 2000, p. 168). But the distinction is precisely that those who had been editors and reporters in the service of Yugoslav ideas and who had preached to the masses of the immortality of socialism, often with the guidance and oversight of the socialist state, after its fall spoke on behalf of the nationalism of their own ethnicity, in a manifestation of a dangerous political resurgence.

In the context of the Yugoslavia of that time, television in Kosovo would be characterized by its unique development relative to what happened elsewhere. Unlike the other Yugoslav entities, there was no continuity of programming from RTP. In the fact, in the 1990s Kosovars suffered an "information blackout", a dramatic media situation which was only informally and partly overcome thanks to the spread of the new satellite technology, by which they could watch programmes from TVSh (Shahini-Hoxhaj, 2015, p. 557). This programme, prepared by former RTP journalists and only last a few hours, was predominantly made up of news and other reportage. The 1990s saw new technological advances in the field of TV, economic growth and the growth of a new world order after the collapse of communism, but while academic circles discussed the end of history (Fukuyama, 1992 p. xi). Yugoslavia experienced a renewal of it, in the form of war and ethnic cleansing. Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo would endure these events for a decade, and make headlines around the world.

Whatever else might be said for televisual culture at that time, and however much Yugoslavia's self-government was a more open system than other communist
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states', it was in a communist system and there was no suggestion of any kind of editorial independence. Its programme structure was poor and of limited diversity, but the fact that it was the only comprehensive Albanian-language offering available, together with the domestic political context with its dramatic events, led to rather different socio-cultural expectations of the broadcaster. It was a situation in which media content would have a different impact on its audience, its consumers, who wanted protection and the promotion of their identity. However it was, in the non-violent phase of the internal disintegration of Yugoslavia, from 1980-81 RTP saw a new kind of plurality of opinion, at a time when the state monopoly of the television system was growing weaker by the day.

In fact, what developed was the kind of role for television that several scholars had observed in other circumstances and countries. This refers in particular to Horace Newcomb, Paul Hirsch and Joshua Meyrowitz. Analyzing television in the 1980s, Newcomb and Hirsch (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1983) defined it as a cultural forum, which enabled a kind of diversity of points of view. For them, television is part of a symbolic order, which creates public opinion and helps the collective process of constructing reality (Schumaher, 2000, p. 196). In continuation of the same theory, Meyrowitz states that television acts on a cultural level, shaping and influencing our collective points of view, values and norms (Meyrowitz, 1985). For him, television is a simulator of experiences and has an integrating effect in the social dimension, something he illustrates through particular historical examples (the movements of 1968 in the USA, minority movements around the world, the women's movement etc).

Because it was a solitary Albanian-language broadcaster, RTP became the articulator of socio-cultural expectations and the propagandist of society's political identity, contributing to the fostering of society's collective conception of itself and of others in the Yugoslav context and beyond. Eluding state oversight as much as it could, RTP helped the creation of a social cohesion within Kosovo and a new window onto the world for those living under communism. It was a remarkable cultural form at a very particular time, which, while constructing a Kosovar reality, helped more than had been anticipated with the social integration of Kosovar society, its views and the values and norms of the time.

## 5. Television as Balanced Public Forum

It would take time and the right circumstances for television in Kosovo to become a public forum, to fulfill the expectation that it be as balanced as possible in informing and neutral in the presentation of different viewpoints; a forum in which opinions, differences and contrasting positions can be presented, countered and debated in the context of a democratic society. In former communist countries, democratic institutions and a market economy were pre-conditions for this; in this case, a liberal media system was created as a consequence of the spread of liberal peace through external intervention. Internal democratization, market economy, free media and civil society were a kind of external export, the product of a humanitarian intervention intended to establish a multi-ethnic society as a sustainable socio-political phenomenon. Whether television today is a balanced forum or has failed is a significant question beyond media studies. Whether or not there is broadcasting diversity and a plurality of programming is important for society and democratic development overall.

The founding of independent media came with the end of the war in 1999, and the country's being placed under UN administration, which de facto and de jure created a new situation. NATO's humanitarian intervention was intended to defend human rights in the face of ethnic cleansing, and after the war to establish liberal institutions and a multi-ethnic society. Such were the expectations of Kosovo society and of the new media, which were being formed, but the role of the international community with its executive mandate and capacity was decisive. The establishment of a protectorate through UN Security Council Resolution 1244, the creation of a substantial mission in the form of UNMIK to implement this Resolution, the involvement of large international organizations and of western and non-western states, all created a special environment for the import of democratic concepts, laws, media and a multi-ethnic society. Local people saw these phenomena as more imposed from outside than fostered from within. It was a "post-colonial" situation (Varela & Dhawan 2005, pp. 11-27), with the expectation of a kind of social engineering.

As the implementer of Resolution 1244, UNMIK had three objectives: administration; the establishment of institutions of governance and the fulfillment of their competences; and the preparation of a process to address the country's final status. But the mission was also involved in the development of the media sector. One of its early initiatives was the creation in June 2000 of a Temporary Media

Commissioner (TMC), in collaboration with the OSCE. Their mandate was as follows: to define the rules and procedures for media in this transitional phase of a post-conflict society, in which security was fragile, there was no judicial system and nor could one speak of the rule of law. The TMC was established to offer some protection of freedom of expression, but also to oversee the media, some of whom could through their informational work or public messaging actually put people at risk. It was a difficult situation politically, and complex in terms of security, with any newspaper headline or bulletin capable of impacting on human lives.

There was subsequently a "Kosovarisation" of the institutions, with many responsibilities transferred from internationals to local, in which context the Independent Media Commission (IMC) was founded in 2005. This was more a continuation than a replacement of the TMC. As an independent body, the IMC was to administer the awarding of licenses for broadcasting frequencies, to award licenses for audio-visual providers, to oversee compliance with the regulations for licensees and to levy sanctions for breaches of procedure. The IMC was responsible for the support and maintenance of a fair and open system for electronic media, on the basis of the best international standards, including technical and ethical aspects. Consistent with its mandate, the IMC drew up strategic documents for audio-visual services (KPM, 2016) as well as a strategy for the process of digital broadcasting.

To date there are only three broadcasters (one public and two private) with terrestrial coverage of the country, while the others use analogue broadcasting to provide service to all citizens (KPM, 2008). With regard to legal and procedural oversight for the development of broadcasters, the international community enabled an appropriate clarity from the beginning. Nevertheless, it has been apparent in Kosovo as elsewhere in Europe that the regulation of this sector has been and remains a political matter. Thus the IMC too often faced criticism from private broadcasters during its work, for example about who and how much was appropriate in advertising and revenue sources. Taken all in all, the international administration played a decisive role in establishing the pre-conditions for a new televisual culture and for fabricating in Kosovo the European model of dual system of public and private broadcasting. This would shape regulation, legal framework, organization, financing and programme structure.

At the theoretical level, this new situation for television in Kosovo conforms precisely to that stage of development defined by Hall in his analysis of television in general (Hall, 1993, pp. 90-103). Influenced by Michel Foucault, Hall perceives television as part of the discourse of power, in which television as a mode of

discourse reflects power relations. However, applying a criticism of the linear approach (sender-message-recipient) as an analytical model, Hall widens his theoretical perspective into a structural circulation model of communication (Schumacher, 2000, pp. 156-158) which incorporates the aspects production - distribution - consumption - reproduction of televisual messages and their meaning. This model also displays the influence of Karl Marx. In any case, in the literature of media, Hall's model is known as encoding/decoding and takes as its starting point the idea that media discourse is produced simultaneously by media institutions and by the public.

On a practical level, television as part of the discourse of power was reflected in the way in which public and private broadcasters were founded and functioned under the international protectorate: they were conceived as essential contributors to the establishment of a multi-ethnic society, being a projection not only from within it but also of the foreign intervention. Objective information, pluralism of viewpoints, co-existence among different groups, ethnic reconciliation, human rights, the breaking of various taboos, and economic, developmental and scientific themes - all would be part of the focus of RTK (Selimi, 2013, pp. 288-297). RTK was founded in September 1999 by means of a memorandum of co-operation between UNMIK/OSCE and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). However, today this broadcaster comprises four different channels (RTK1, RTK2, RTK3, RTK4), with terrestrial and satellite transmission as well as two radio stations (Radio Kosovo and Radio Blue Sky) and its own website (rtklive.com). One year after its foundation it was broadcasting for up to seven hours, by 2002 to fifteen hours, and finally at the end of 2003 for 24 hours, following the establishment of a license fee (Stegherr & Liesem, 2010, p. 60). Its beginnings were difficult, and programmes could only be broadcast in Albanian. Subsequently and to date there has been production and transmission in five languages: Albanian, Serbian, Turkish, Bosniak and Roma. RTK2 is a channel solely in the Serbian language, with a professional staff from the Serb community and a programme structure comprising political, social, documentary and entertainment themes.

RTK's mission today can be understood through the way it was founded. OSCE, which was one of the four principal pillars of the UN for democratization, was responsible for drawing up a framework for public broadcasting, with professional management and a staff of journalists working in the service of all communities. It is interesting to note that although RTK was installed in the building formerly occupied by RTP, with some exceptions former professional staff of RTP could not

be employed. OSCE deliberately recruited a new generation of managers and reporters, while UNMIK would not even allow former staff access to their old office (Miftari, 2017, pp. 25-26). It is likewise noteworthy that RTK's first three directors would be Europeans: successively Richard Dill (former ARD journalist), Erik Lehmann (former President of the Board of the Association of Broadcasters of Switzerland) and Richard Lucas (former manager at BBC). Together with the EBU these three shaped the criteria for the establishment of a broadcaster meeting the standards of the BBC and German-speaking public television, an expectation which was never realized. Ironically, while the "internationals" had distanced themselves from former RTP staff, with the "Kosovarisation" of institutions a former RTP director, Agim Zatriqi, was named as director in 2001 (Miftari, 2017, p. 27).

As the broadcaster with the largest audience (see figure 2) and the largest television enterprise, RTK has two governing elements - a board and a director-general, as chief manager. The board is composed of a wide spectrum of representatives from all ethnic groups, civil society, the journalism and academic communities and other independent figures. As in other cases, it was designed as a broadcaster with a social responsibility independent of government institutions, being a source of information, education, culture and entertainment; these responsibilities are set out in law (RTK, 2006; Plake, 2004, p. 331). Covering 80% of the country, it is required to offer a programme structure in the service of nurturing the values of all citizens, with a politically- and socially-integrational function, facilitating co-existence and sustainable security. In the concrete context of a society deeply affected by ethnic conflict and war, this is essential. Only RTK with its multi-lingual arrangement can offer common media content and support the political participation of everyone. RTK continues to support inter-cultural exchange, to foster ethnic diversity and to promote a concept of multi-ethnicity in principles, values and languages, which is not the focus of commercial broadcasters.
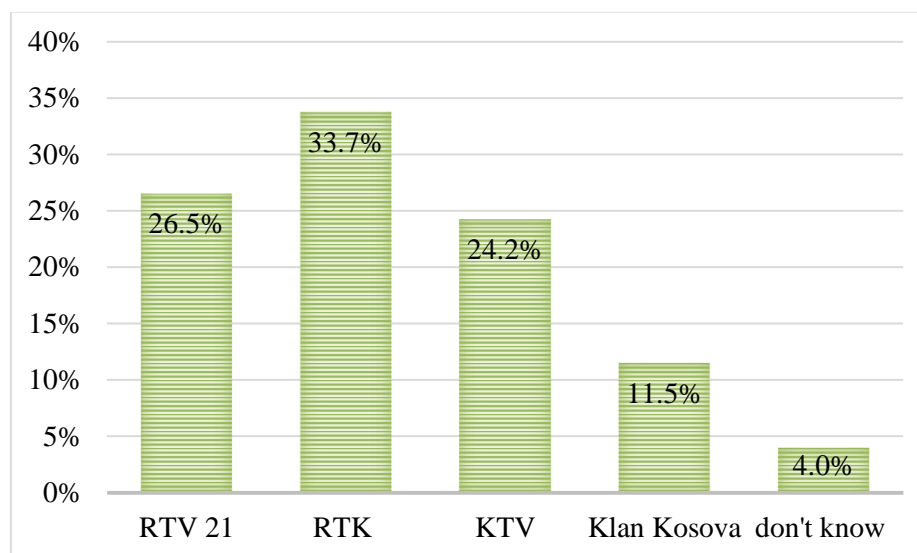
**Figure 2. Which national broadcasters you watch more?**

RTK's editorial independence, institutional autonomy and financial sustainability are regulated by law, which has to date changed more than once, though always pegged to a level of European comparability (RTK, 2006; 2012). Its implementation in practice is far removed from the expectations on paper (IREX, 2017, p. 3). To the question of whether RTK has fulfilled socio-cultural expectations as a public broadcaster, as it is today and reflecting other European trends (Jakubowicz, 2011, pp. 210-229), the answer must be no. There are different evaluations and it is impossible to offer a full analysis here, but several key findings may be mentioned. Politicization of RTK occurs both through the nomination of board members - conducted through parliament as in other places (Hanretty, 2011, pp. 5-6) - and management and, according to persistent criticism, through "allowing politics to intervene directly in its editorial independence" (Western Balkans Regional Platform, 2017, p. 15). From 2003 RTK's financial sustainability was managed through public fees, but this was rejected by the Constitutional Court, so that it is now financed directly from the state budget. This is naturally a serious concern: "the shift in RTK funding since 2009 has also influenced the programming, making the RTK employees prone to becoming politicized" (Miftari, 2017, p. 45). RTK staff complain of underfunding and the lack of new technology, an enduring issue. Yet the fact remains that there is no adequate debate about addressing these challenges according to the best European traditions (Jakubowicz & Sudkosd, 2008), nor any "re-invention" of the kind that some countries have managed (Bardoel & d'Haenens,

2008, pp. 337-355). It is essential to devise a new approach towards RTK, if we wish to prevent the same marginalization of the public broadcaster that has occurred in some other Balkan states (Milosavljevic & Poler, 2017, pp. 5-12).

In Kosovo as in the European context of television's development, a dual system of public and commercial broadcasters was created with the aim of offering programme diversity and pluralism. The process of building a private broadcasting sector and enabling it to enter the media market on equal terms with the public broadcaster caused a fragmentation of the audience and a competition for viewers and influence. While RTK is obliged to fulfil a distinct and rigorous requirement for social responsibility, private broadcasters pursue particular audience groups. Shortly after RTK, in 2000 two private broadcasters were founded, Koha Vision (KTV) and Radio Televizioni 21 (RTV 21), on the initiative of several journalists and with substantial donor support (Southeast European Media Observatory, 2015, pp. 3-4). The financial backing of American donors and the initiatives of broadcaster owners were meant to develop private television according to the American model, in which the media market guarantees objectivity of reporting and pluralism of view points. This was different to the European approach to RTK's development, by which a public broadcaster would not only occupy a special place in the new Kosovo democracy but also assist the improvement of standards among private broadcasters. There is no doubt today that these public and private broadcasters have not fulfilled their original objectives and expectations of offering television to western standards, and yet their role in society has from their very beginning and to now been irreplaceable.

While several media outlets and broadcasters were created with donor support in this period, it was only KTV and TV21 that - thanks to professionalism, strategic clarity and satisfactory financial support from donors, in particular USAID and the Soros Foundation - were established solidly and quickly (Southeast European Media Observatory, 2015, p. 3). Foreign financial support lasted for some years and also involved the professional development of journalists and managers, and the purchase of equipment (Stegherr & Liesem, 2010, p. 155). Starting from a two-hour transmission, these broadcasters were soon providing 24 hours of programming. Originally an off-shoot of the daily newspaper Koha Ditore (Stegherr & Liesem, 2010, p. 56), today Kohavision (KTV) is part of the Koha Group which includes the informational Arta TV channel, Koha Printing, the Koha publishing house and the web portal Koha.net. Meanwhile TV21 grew out of a radio station, and today has several TV channels (21 New Business, 21 Plus, 21 Populore, 21 MIX, Sheshi 21), another broadcaster in Skopje (RTV21 Macedonia) and a web portal. Together with

RTK, these two have had licenses for national frequencies ever since 2000, and cover the whole of Kosovo with terrestrial networks, putting them ahead of other commercial cable broadcasters.

The consolidation of these commercial broadcasters brought a new inter-dependence between media and society as regards further democratization. Because informational programmes such as news bulletins, political debates and reportage remained the most watched genre on television (with the possible exception of certain soap operas or sporting events), these private broadcasters and others founded later were able to play their "gatekeeper" role. They would conduct investigative reporting and improve the quality and speed of news broadcasting, while conducting a permanent struggle with the public broadcaster for new viewers. They would do more than RTK to promote the interests of civil society, private business and global themes in the service of a younger and more liberal audience. They aired the voices of independent experts on diverse local and international issues, creating a space not only for a variety of opinions, but also for a variety of taboo subjects. Private broadcasters also found room for larger pieces about the opposition, whoever they might be, supporting a plurality of points of view and facing up to issues.

## 6. Television as Entertainment

The analysis of television in Kosovo presented so far shows the development in its first ten years, but does not include a more recent dimension: entertainment. While the first phase (from 1999 to 2009, and further developed to the present day) saw the establishment of a dual public and private system, in the second phase comprising the last ten and in particular the last five years it became possible to speak of the consolidation of the television sector in the country. The start of this new phase was marked by the founding of TV Klan (2009), which would in subsequent years have significant influence in the media market. Meanwhile, RTK was also increasing the number of its programmes and channels, maintaining its position as the country's largest and most influential broadcaster. But KTV and TV21 also expanded their programme structure, offering more diversity and establishing themselves as more influential media outfits. By 2015, "Klan Kosovo TV already has the highest broadcast rating in Kosovo among TV channels that broadcast through cable network. RTK has a broadcast rating that is a few percentage points higher, only because it has much wider coverage of Kosovo territory through its terrestrial network" (Southeast European Media Observatory, 2015, p. 4).

In their competition for viewers through the spread of cable, commercial broadcasters would reach a kind of modus vivendi for televisual culture in the country, but a new dynamic was created with the establishment of additional private concerns such as TV Dukagjini (2009), TV7 (2017) and Tribuna Channel (2009). As an institution, and in programme structure and content, television culture became more competitive and offered more, catching up with trends in the region and beyond. But what was distinctive about this phase of television's development, in comparison with what had happened before, was that it was not the state budget, western state donors, foundations, nor inter-governmental or non-governmental organizations behind the creation of the new broadcasters. It was local capital from various businesses, large and small, as well as the initiative by some experienced journalists, who wanted a market with more broadcasters, pluralism of opinions and of course to pursue their own economic interests. Thus TV Klan, TV Dukagjini, TV7, TV Tribuna Channel and others joined the serious broadcasters. The founding of new broadcasters also helped media convergence, as cable networks and digital platforms helped to overcome geographical and political barriers, and gave all sectors of society access to a programme structure similar to other European examples (Gundlach, 2009, pp. 53-77).

All of these are in a kind of competition for viewers with the public broadcaster, particularly KTV and TV21, and not to mention other smaller players covering other cities in Kosovo. Because of the political situation and national circumstances, in this new phase television has a substantial focus on important political themes, education, culture and society, but its programming target is changing every day, and a transformation is occurring which must be further elaborated.

The theoretical approach to the role of television used up to this point is insufficient. The changes which televisual culture has undergone throughout the world in recent decades, and the nature of the new dimension in today's televisual culture in Kosovo, including how it comes to influence us each day and our relationship with it, may be better explained by bringing in the view of Neil Postman. Analysing American commercial television and aiming to warn other societies of the risks that come with such a trend, he argues: "Entertainment is the supra-ideology of all discourse on television" (Postman, 1986, p. 63). For Postman - who has in the meantime become a kind of moral representative for a public worried about where television is going with its influence - the medium is diverting society towards a poorer culture between show biz and entertainment. To him, television's programme structure aims at nothing more than "amusing ourselves to death". Not only content related to

entertainment, but serious themes such as education, religion or news of human dramas or natural catastrophes are all presented in the same way, in the service of entertainment.

At the time when these concerns were first raised, little attention was devoted to televisual entertainment as a topic of study, something that is no longer the case. Since then, clearer definitions have been offered for the meaning of entertainment on television and how recipients can move from informative to entertainment programmes when there is no kind of boundary (Dehm, 1985). Much as Postman's stance has attracted attention, it has also been widely criticized (Sturm, 1990, pp. 240-263). Nonetheless, his observations are relevant to understanding television today, including in the case of Kosovo. Our quantitative assessments have shown that entertainment is taking a considerable role on Kosovar television and has become a trend, especially in recent years (see figure 3).
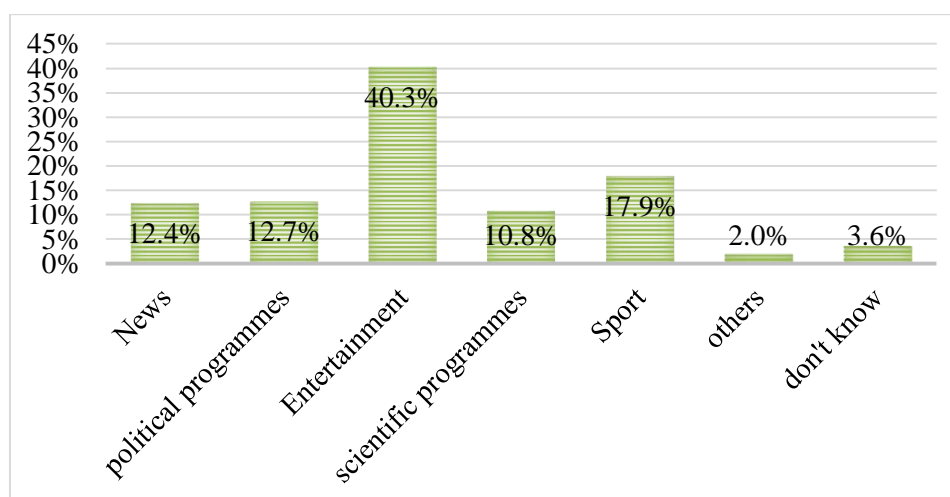


**Figure 3. Which programme you watch most?**

A broadcaster can guarantee its sustainability by offering the public a good programme, and according to public surveys entertainment is the preferred genre, in which private broadcasters compete. They broadcast particular programmes (soap operas, sport, films, spectacles, game shows) to increase viewership, because whoever has the biggest viewership gets more profit from advertising, shown continuously during the most watched programmes and also during the rest of the day and evening. In this regard, viewership, entertainment and advertising enabled the transformation of television - as everywhere in Europe (Schumacher, 2000, p.

191) - from "the true - the good - the beautiful" to "the beautiful - the good - the true". In consequence, the public broadcaster eventually lost its monopoly, and private television won primacy in entertainment - including digital platforms in Albania and others internationally. In particular, with the new technological possibilities and with TV Top Channel as an all-encompassing entertainment superpower in Albanian, digital platforms such as Digitalb contributed to the redefinition of the entertainment character of television culture in Kosovo.

In Europe, public broadcasters stand out as the source of "hard news" information such as politics, security, economics, education, health and environment, while the commercial ones focus more on "soft news" such as culture, arts, lifestyle, sport, religion, gender themes and showbiz. Such a relationship is not apparent in Kosovo's televisual culture. Commercial broadcasters are today increasingly determined to lead on political information, including political campaigns, election debates, electoral advertising and even having a direct impact on voters through election-day polls, as was seen with TV Klan in 2017. Today private broadcasters set the agenda not only during elections, but the whole time, for every possible theme whether domestic or international. In the Kosovar context, agenda-setting also happens thanks to one distinct factor: certain broadcasters are part of larger media entities, with pooled ownership and editorial policy between online media and daily newspapers. Thus, whatever starts to become the lead headline on the web-portals of Gazeta Express or Telegraf is also the main story or reportage or documentary on TV7 or TV Dukagjini. The same holds true for the link between KTV and the newspaper Koha Ditore, and for others.

In the end, in place of the dual system of public and private broadcasters, in which television was a source of information and education for a post-conflict society, and a kind of constitutional multi-ethnic patriotism was being promoted, commercial television - with the logic of the free market, with programme variety, and hunting for viewers - is focused on one goal only: how to keep the public tied as much as possible to their programmes. The citizen has become merely a piece of a programme flow for one or more broadcasters. Even though it is still influential thanks to its terrestrial coverage, RTK is at risk of losing its predominant influence to commercial broadcasters, because it is slow at day-to-day reporting and clumsy compared to the tone, look and focused messaging of professionals. The conservative seriousness and objectivity in RTK's presentation of events, and its trustworthiness, is being supplanted by mass appeal and sensationalist reportage and documentaries. Audience share is being captured more by spectacles, game shows, sporting events

and showings of soap operas or films. When there is a sporting event such as the World Cup in Russia, attracting attention from all age groups, commercial broadcasters invite not only sporting experts and former players but also singers, actors, artists, politicians and so on.

The principal issue in such a trend is how a commercial broadcaster in a new democracy serves the public interest while at the same time operating in a free market, securing financial sustainability without damaging their primary goal. In fact, private broadcasters in this country have undoubtedly offered quality informational content. But there are several disquieting findings in this analysis, which should be taken in account if one is to comprehend commercial television in its entirety. Kosovo is no different to anywhere else (Popovic, 2015, pp. 25-38), in so far as editorial independence and pluralism of points of view consistent with the democratic role are threatened by the concentration of ownership of commercial broadcasters and their means of financing. "Media ownership and finances are two crucial aspects of media development in Kosovo that influence or even determine media freedom and independence" (Southeast European Media Observatory, 2015, p. 1). Back in 2006 the IMC attempted to resolve the question of concentration of ownership, but because of obstruction from private broadcasters it was impossible. There appear to be three forms of ownership of commercial broadcasters here: "hidden ownership", "family ownership" and "big companies or corporations as media owners" (Southeast European Media Observatory, 2015, p. 3), which mean that because of proximity to politicians private television does not always offer balanced, independent and neutral information.

## 7. Conclusions

In comparison with everywhere else in the Balkans, television in Kosova was a late developer and a satisfactory television culture only emerged after 2000. Within a short time, thanks to domestic and foreign financial support, to new technology and the great determination of journalists, television culture underwent an enormous development - but both public and private broadcasters have been and remain the subject of criticism. The lack of proper funding for RTK, its direct financing from the state budget after 2009 and the politicization of the institution have had a direct impact on the public broadcaster's loss of credibility and declining viewership. Finding new financing alternatives and securing institutional and editorial independence, in order to fulfill the basic objective for which it was founded, are

challenges for the future. Today the challenges for television remain objectivity of news reporting and the presentation of political debate, and whether television will be in the public interest or in the service of political and financial nodes, as is the case elsewhere in the region.

Diversity of broadcasters and fragmentation of audiences has made political influence more difficult, but the weak involvement of private capital in the sector, the limited income from advertising, the lack of foreign investment and the absence of a long-term approach to the media sector are serious concerns. Influential broadcasters often face financial difficulty, forced to cut staff and restrict programme scheduling. As the poorest country in the Balkans, despite rapid economic growth (according to the World Bank the rise in GDP for 2018/19 is 4.5%) and macro-fiscal stability, it will be difficult for private broadcasters to secure self-financing and long-term stability. This is something that can have a direct effect on the process of society's further democratization. Because television has undergone a transformation, including in the broadening of its mission, thanks to viewership, entertainment and advertising, the trend that remains to be analysed in the future is whether television will stay ahead of traditional media in terms of its mission, thanks to rapid developments in new technology (IPTV, video on demand), or whether there will be an expansion of new media, which even today are having an effect on media content and media audiences.

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