

WestminsterResearch

<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/westminsterresearch>

**Making a difference? Public service broadcasting, distinctiveness
and children's provision in Italy and Spain**

D'Arma, A. and Labio, A.

This is an author's accepted manuscript of an article published in the International Journal of Digital Television 8 (2), pp. 183-199, 2017. The final definitive version is available online at:

https://dx.doi.org/10.1386/jdtv.8.2.183_1

The WestminsterResearch online digital archive at the University of Westminster aims to make the research output of the University available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the authors and/or copyright owners.

Whilst further distribution of specific materials from within this archive is forbidden, you may freely distribute the URL of WestminsterResearch: (<http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/>).

In case of abuse or copyright appearing without permission e-mail repository@westminster.ac.uk

Making a difference? Public service broadcasting, distinctiveness and children's provision in Italy and Spain

Dr Alessandro D'Arma, University of Westminster, United Kingdom

Dr Aurora Labio, University of Seville, Spain

Author bios

Alessandro D'Arma is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Westminster. His research focuses on communications policy and has appeared in several academic journals and edited collections. He is the author of *Media and Politics in Italy* (Lexington, 2015).

Aurora Labio is a Tenured Lecturer at University of Seville. Director of the Media, Communication Policies and Democracy in the European Union research group and author of articles published in international journals. She is the author of the report *Media and Child Protection in humanitarian crisis* (Save the Children, 2009).

Abstract

This article evaluates the performance of public service broadcasters in the area of children's television in Italy and Spain. It asks: how distinctive is the output of public service children's channels? As core area of public service provision, children's television represents an important testing ground for wider debates about the distinctiveness of public service broadcasting in a digital age. Public broadcasters in Southern Europe have historically been more vulnerable to market pressure than their counterparts in continental and Northern Europe, and this is believed to have impacted negatively on their ability to maintain a distinctive public service profile. After engaging with debates on distinctiveness in order to develop a framework for the analysis, the article presents the results of a two-week analysis of the TV schedules of the main children's channels operating in the two countries. It finds evidence that in both countries the output of public service children's channels is distinctive to a degree, but also that there are important gaps in public service provision as well as some significant differences between the public service children's channels analysed.

Keywords

- public service media (PSM);
- children's television
- broadcasting regulation
- media policy
- Southern Europe

Introduction

These are hard times for public service broadcasters (PSBs) around the world. While still generally occupying a prominent place in national media landscapes, many of these organizations have experienced a decline in recent years both in income, as

public funding has either stagnated or shrunk in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008, and in audience terms, as patterns of media consumption have become more widely distributed among the plethora of commercial services now available on digital television and increasingly online (see Tambini 2015). For many years now, PSBs have operated in a challenging environment. In the words of James Curran (2002: 191), they have been subject to a ‘combined commercial, political and ideological assault’. Criticisms levelled against PSBs range from partisan bias to capture by state power, from waste and inefficiency to harbouring ‘imperial ambitions’. Another recurring criticism in both political and popular discourse is that public service broadcasting (PSB) output is not sufficiently *distinctive*. In an effort to chase audience ratings and/or reduce costs, PSB organizations are seen as neglecting their public service obligations concerning the provision of distinctive high-quality programmes.

This latter charge has been an especially sore point for PSBs in Southern Europe, contributing to account for the lower levels of support that these organisations have historically enjoyed compared with their counterparts in continental and Northern Europe. A cross-national study of European PSBs in the early 1990s (Achilles and Mieke 1994) described the programming strategy adopted by Italian public service broadcaster RAI and its Spanish counterpart TVE in response to the introduction of private television as one of ‘identification’ with the commercial sector. By contrast, other European PSBs, the authors argued, had maintained a more distinctive public service profile in the face of growing competition. Similarly, a 1999 report by consultancy firm McKinsey comparing PSB output in seven countries described RAI and TVE’s strategy as one based on ‘a focus on market share over distinctiveness’. The report argued that ‘while these PSBs have the potential to significantly influence their market, in practice there is little to differentiate them from commercially funded operators’ (McKinsey 1999: 3). McKinsey put this down to the heavy reliance on advertising revenue by Southern European PSBs. This situation exacerbated the competitive pressures felt by these organizations vis-à-vis the new private channels, which, unlike their Northern counterparts, were allowed to operate largely free of public service programming obligations. A subsequent report by McKinsey (2004) corroborated these findings.

Children’s television represents a good testing ground for arguments about PSB distinctiveness. While never been well resourced nor at the forefront of PSB strategies, children’s television has always been part of PSB core provision. It represents arguably ‘a microcosm of many PSB challenges relating to competition, funding, commercialization and changing modes of consumption’ (Steemers and D’Arma 2012: 68). In the limited-channel broadcasting environment of the past, airing children’s programmes on mixed-genre television channels entailed high opportunity costs for commercial broadcasters, given their small audience and the limited size of the advertising market. Traditionally seen as a ‘market failure genre’, children’s content is nowadays supplied in large quantity by both domestic and transnational commercial broadcasters through their dedicated digital channels. Yet, as it will be argued below, there are still likely to be important gaps in market provision, and thus there continues to be a continuing justification for a strong PSB presence in this area.

Much of the academic literature purporting to evaluate PSB performance has focussed on journalistic output, the quintessential public service genre (for a review of this literature see Cushion 2012). Few studies have looked into PSB’s performance in the area of children’s provision, mostly providing a qualified positive assessment (see

Blumler 1993; Biltereyst 1997; Mjos 2010; Steemers and D'Arma 2012; Enli 2013; Rutherford and Brown 2013; Shivonen 2015). This study aims to contribute to this endeavour by examining how distinctive public service children's provision is in a part of Western Europe where historically PSBs have struggled to assert their distinctiveness from commercial operators. It begins by providing an overview of the changing children's media landscape. Next, it engages with the notion of distinctiveness in relation to debates on PSB in order to develop a framework for the analysis of PSB's children provision in Italy and Spain that follows. The article reports on the results of a two-week analysis of the schedules of dedicated children's channels run by PSBs and their main commercial competitors. Two 'normal' weeks, free of special events affecting the programming, were selected in May and September 2015. Programmes were classified by genre and country of origin. The contextual analysis of the market and the regulatory framework draws on a range of sources including policy and legislative documents, audience research and recent reports on children's media in Europe.

The contemporary children's media landscape

The last two decades have seen a surge in the number of dedicated children's channels in Europe. According to the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO 2013), there were some 320 channels across Europe in 2013, compared to less than 100 a decade earlier and only ten in 1995. Three US-based media corporations (The Walt Disney Company, Viacom and Time Warner) dominated the scene. At the time of the EAO study, Disney ran 63 channels in Europe, followed by Viacom's Nickelodeon (44 channels) and Time Warner's Cartoon Network and Boomerang (29 and 21 channels respectively). Only 21 of those 320 channels were run by PSB organizations. These channels, however, often ranked nationally among the most popular ones.

In the larger European countries, children's television has become a crowded space. In Italy there were over 20, mostly US-originated dedicated children's channels in 2015, the majority available only on subscription and segmented along gender lines and by age group (Milesi 2015). The Spanish market was considerably less crowded than the Italian one. In recent years a few channels, including the Cartoon Network, had exited the market citing worsening economic conditions. However, in terms of typology of players, the broad picture was similar. As of 2015 there were eleven public and commercial dedicated channels, operating across both free and pay-TV platforms.

Historically, the arrival of the US-based transnational children's television networks from the mid-1990s onward marked the beginning of a third age of children's television in Europe, following the age of PSB monopolies and a subsequent period up to the mid-1990s, still in the age of analogue broadcasting, of limited competition between mixed-genre PSB and the new private terrestrial channels. According to the Eurodata TV Worldwide (2015), over a third of all time spent watching TV by children in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom in the first half of 2015 went to viewing dedicated children's channels. This proportion rose as high as 50 per cent for younger children.

In very recent years, the launch of online video services, providing children's content on-demand and accessible via multiple devices – from the traditional TV screen to mobile devices – has arguably marked the beginning of a new phase, characterized by further expansion in the volume of children's programmes, now

available ‘anytime/anywhere’, and by their closer integration with various kinds of interactive and inter-textual features. Children’s viewing is contextually shifting from the TV screen to computers, smartphones and tablets, and from ‘linear’ to ‘non-linear’ services. However, we are still arguably at the dawn of this new era. As of 2015 on-demand children’s services had only made limited inroads in Spain and Italy. According to Eurodata TV Worldwide (2015), in the first half of 2015 children in Italy and Spain were spending on average two hours a day watching TV, far exceeding the amount of time spent watching online video content.

Of course, Internet use involves several other activities, ranging from communicating through social media to chatting with friends, from playing games to listening to music. This is especially the case for school-age children. In response to growing public anxiety about risks associated with children’s use of online social networks such as online bullying and breach of personal associated, the issue of online child protection has grown in salience in recent years (see, e.g., Cabrera *et al* 2015). In the digital age, however, not only are children’s rights to *protection* at stake but also their rights to *provision*. Aside from concerns relating to harm potentially caused to children as a consequence of their digital engagements, another issue (surely featuring less prominently in the public debate, but nonetheless an enduring one) has to do with concerns about inadequate provision of media content for children that is reflective of their culture and place. The surge in the supply of children’s television programming could easily be mistaken for having brought in a new era of diversity. Critics and children’s media campaigners, however, decry that much of what is available on the television screens originates from the United States. This issue is particularly felt in European countries with a strong tradition of domestic production such as the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries (see Enli 2013; Sihvonen 2015). In the United Kingdom, following the removal of children’s programme quotas in 2003 and budget cuts, spend by commercial terrestrial broadcasters on original children’s content has collapsed (Ofcom 2014: 9). Anne Wood, a prominent campaigner, recently warned against the risk of ‘north American mono-culture creeping over everywhere’ (cited in Plunkett 2015). Against this backdrop, and in spite of its own financial woes, the BBC has recently been left as the chief purveyor of domestic children’s content (Steemers 2010). Relevantly for present purposes, children’s has been singled out as an area of provision where the BBC is clearly fulfilling its remit of providing a *distinctive* offering.

PSB and distinctiveness

The notion of distinctiveness figures prominently in policy debates on PSB. It is often invoked, for opposite ends, by both advocates of PSB and its detractors. As such, it is a highly politically charged concept. As part of their lobbying efforts to see PSBs not encroaching into their core business areas, commercial rivals routinely criticize PSB provision for being insufficiently distinctive from commercial alternatives and thus their presence in either existing or new areas ‘crowding out’ private investments. In PSB mission statements, distinctiveness is typically described as a key *raison d’être* for PSB provision. For instance, the remit of CBBC, BBC’s channel for 6-12 year olds, is ‘to provide a wide range of high quality, distinctive content’ (BBC Trust 2014: 1). In the latest BBC Trust’s 50-page review of BBC’s children’s services, eighteen occurrences were found of either the noun ‘distinctiveness’ or the adjective ‘distinctive’ (BBC Trust 2013). PSB organizations take pain to demonstrate their

distinctiveness from commercial provision to earn public support and legitimize public funding.

Scholars such as Karol Jakubowicz (2003) have been critical of dominant policy discourse on PSB distinctiveness. They argue that commercial actors and sympathetic politicians appeal to the notion of distinctiveness to advocate a filling-the-gap role for PSBs, based on narrow market-failure arguments, that is, that PSB represents a major distortion of social welfare-optimising free-market mechanisms and thus can only be justified to the extent that it is designed to redress limited and well-defined instances of market failure. Stretched to its logical limit, this interpretation of the PSB role in a digital media environment characterized by commercial over-supply, PSB advocates remark, would be to consign PSB to a ghetto at the margin of the market and thus unable to make any significant impact on society. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines distinctiveness as ‘the quality or state of being different’.¹ Even those commentators who reject notions of distinctiveness based on narrow market-failure arguments would nonetheless concur that PSBs must strive to be different and provide programmes that would not normally be provided if there were no PSB – while surely interpreting this normative expectation in a less restrictive sense than those favouring a filling-the-gap role for PSB.

In order to develop a framework for evaluating the distinctiveness of PSB children’s television provision in Spain and Italy, it is first necessary to deal briefly with two issues. A first point to note is that expectations of PSB distinctiveness are set primarily in relation to PSB’s ‘capacity to secure *positive* communication benefits’ (McQuail 1997: 527, emphasis added). The children’s media regulatory framework well illustrates the dual nature of media regulation – negative regulation (regulating against negative effects) and positive regulation (regulating for positive outcomes). Both positive and negative rules rest on assumptions of media’s social influence, either for good or for bad. Negative rules are designed to protect children from various kinds of harm and are justified on the ground that children are a vulnerable audience in need of special protection. However, the media are also seen as potentially a positive force, contributing to children’s cultural identity and to their cognitive and emotional development. As put by Denis McQuail (2003: 15), ‘obligations to do good are different from requirements to avoid harm’, and the latter ‘are not always the reverse of the benefits’. McQuail (2003: 19) goes on to argue that while requirements to avoid harm ‘will apply with more force and to all media’, expectations of benefit are more likely to be a special requirement of PSBs. According to this argument then, it is primarily in the area of securing positive communication benefits (as opposed to protecting from harm) where PSB’s ability to make a difference should be evaluated.

The second point to note is that in an era of multichannel television and niche programming the traditional approach to assessing the distinctiveness of PSB output, namely measuring genre diversity in the schedule of mixed-genre channels, appears no longer tenable (if indeed it ever was). Several European PSB organizations have in recent years either drastically reduced or altogether removed children’s programming from their main channels, migrating it to dedicated channels. Faced with criticisms, PSBs have countered that in a fully digitalized television environment dedicated channels are available to the entire child population and thus removing children’s programmes from the main channels does not undermine the core PSB principle of universality of access. The two McKinsey studies cited in the introduction assessed the distinctiveness of PSB output based on the traditional approach of calculating the proportion of ‘key public service genres’ in the schedules of mixed-genre PSB vis-à-

vis commercial channels. Children's programming was included among the 'key public service genres' alongside news, arts and few other 'market-failure' genres. The very definition of children's television as a genre, however, is problematic. Children's television has been defined as 'programs targeted primarily to children and designed to attract a majority of viewers who are children' (Alexander and Owers 2006: 57). What defines it is thus its target audience. A variety of 'genres' (drama, comedy, news, factual) and 'forms' (animation, live action) fall within its definitional scope. Equally problematic, at least if taken at face value, is the notion that children's television is a *market-failure* genre. As already mentioned, children's television has become a crowded market, well served in quantitative terms by commercial providers. However, both historical and contemporary evidence indicates that especially where certain regulatory conditions are absent (i.e., financial incentives or scheduling quotas) particular types of children's programmes such as domestically-produced content and non-animated forms tend to be under-provided by for-profit broadcasters (see D'Arma and Steemers 2013). In evaluating the distinctiveness of children's provision it is therefore necessary to delve deeper into the *type* of children's content supplied, as opposed to its mere *availability*.

The approach adopted in this article in light of the above considerations is to consider the proportion of 'national' (or domestic) programmes in the schedule of PSB dedicated children's channels as the main indicator of PSB distinctiveness in this area of provision.² Availability of domestic children's television programmes is normatively desirable insofar as this type of programmes can presumptively be regarded as contributing to develop children's cultural sense of themselves. At supranational level, the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Children provides a normative underpinning for the promotion of domestic programming. Article 17 calls upon States 'to ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of *national* and international sources' (emphasis added). Catering to national identity and community, and (instrumentally to this) ensuring high levels of investment in domestic programmes, are expectations typically found in documents setting out the public service remit.

A focus on domestic content can be a key marker of difference for PSBs vis-à-vis their commercial competitors. Even in large European markets, and all the more so in smaller territories, the schedules of the US-based transnational children's networks – Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network and their pre-school sister channels – was found to consist largely of wholly owned 'franchises', programmes mainly originating from the United States (see, e.g., Ofcom 2007; Lustyik 2010; D'Arma and Steemers 2012; Enli 2013). For their part, domestic commercial broadcasters operating children's channels typically lack the financial resources and/or commercial incentives to invest significantly in local content (D'Arma and Steemers 2013).

By considering high levels of domestic programmes in the schedule of PSB children's channels as the main indicator of distinctiveness, the article steers away from the tricky territory of debates on *quality* children's television. Thus, no claim is made here about the higher 'quality' of domestically-originated (PSB) programmes. The presumption is only that adequate provision of domestically-originated programmes is desirable on the basis that such programmes are more likely than others to reflect children's own life experiences, their culture and place. Valuing high levels of domestic content for children and considering it as a marker of PSB distinctiveness should not be taken as a form of cultural chauvinism either. As put by Sonia Livingstone (2008, 177-178), and in keeping with Article 17 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Children, the value of programmes reflecting children's

own cultural and social world ‘should not be misunderstood as an either/or claim’, since ‘children also benefit greatly from representations of other cultures, particularly if these are diverse rather than uniform’³.

In order to assess the distinctiveness of PSB children’s output one further criteria is considered, namely the range of genres provided on PSB children’s channels. A mixed diet of children’s programming, including programmes that can be presumed as having higher social value and be more culturally-relevant (e.g., news, factual programmes, domestically-produced live action fiction) can set PSBs apart from commercial channels. For reasons discussed above having to do with the economics of commercial children’s content provision, the latter’s schedules are likely to be dominated by either animated series (on pre-school channels) or imported live-action comedies (on channels targeting older children).

PSB children’s provision in Southern Europe

Italy

At the time this was written, RAI was one of only two European PSBs (the other being the BBC) running two dedicated children’s channels, RAI Yoyo for pre-schoolers and RAI Gulp for school-age children. Both channels were available free-to-air on digital terrestrial and satellite television. In 2014 RAI Yoyo had been Italy’s top-rating children’s channel, with a 1.4% viewing share, which translated into a share of over 10% in the core age group (Milesi 2015: 45). With a 0.6% share, translating into a share of around 5% among its target audience, RAI Gulp had not performed as strongly as its sister channel, due to greater competition in this age group.

The service contract between RAI and the Italian government, valid for the 2010-2012 period (but still in force at the time this was written), requires that 0.75% of RAI’s turnover be invested in children’s animation. RAI is also required to run two dedicated children’s channels targeting different age groups and to devote 10% of the combined output of its three mixed-genre channels between 7am and 10:30pm to children’s programmes (to be shown in the 4pm to 8pm slot). However, under the terms of the contract, RAI was allowed to reduce this quota depending on the successful roll out of digital terrestrial television. Mirroring moves by other PSBs, from 2010 onwards RAI has progressively reduced the time dedicated to children’s programmes on its main channels. The service contract also details a number of more qualitative criteria. Beyond a general commitment to airing ‘high-quality entertainment programmes’ for children, RAI is expected to broadcast programmes that promote positive civic and human values, non-stereotypical gender roles, knowledge of the European Union and a sense of European belonging; programmes that deal with children’s problems and needs; and programmes that support community children’s initiatives.

As shown in Table 1 below, the proportion of national programmes aired on RAI Gulp and RAI Yoyo during the two sample weeks was the highest among the selected children’s channels, at respectively 32% and 15% of transmission *time* and 44% and 38% individual *titles*.⁴ Three of the six commercial children’s channels included in the study aired no national programmes at all in the two sample weeks (Boing, Disney Junior and Nickelodeon). That share was minimal (0.4% of transmission time) on K2

while it was more substantial on Disney Channel and Super! – but still lower than on RAI’s two channels.

Table 1: Children's channels, Italy: Broadcast output by country of origin.

	National		European		USA		Other		Total	
	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>
RAI Gulp (*)	32	38	10	9	39	38	20	16	100	100
RAI YoYo (*)(**)	15	44	54	36	7	16	23	4	100	100
Boing	0	0	25	21	43	53	32	26	100	100
Super!	6	11	6	17	84	61	4	11	100	100
K2	0.4	4	66	36	20	22	14	38	100	100
Nickelodeon	0	0	5	6	92	88	4	6	100	100
Disney Ch.	13	18	2	5	70	59	15	18	100	100
Disney Jr. (**)	0	0	31	48	67	48	2	5	100	100

Notes: Schedule analysis based on listings magazines and channel information. Sample weeks: 4–10 May 2015 and 21–27 September 2015. Broadcast output between 7am and 10:30pm. (*) PSB channels. (**) pre-school channels. Figures may not add up to 100% owing to rounding. For the purpose of this study, a programme was classified as ‘national’ if at least one domestic broadcaster or television producer was involved with a significant role in its production or financing. Similarly, a programme was classified as ‘European’ if at least one European (but not a national) broadcaster or producer had a significant co-production or co-financing role.

The programmes classified as national on RAI’s two children’s channels belonged to either the animation or factual macro-genres (see Table 2). RAI is estimated to invest around 18 million euros annually in financing children’s animation (Osscom 2015). In the two sample weeks, seven of the 31 animated titles airing on RAI’s two channels were classified as national, as opposed to only two of the 84 animated titles shown on the six commercial channels. The animated shows classified as national in RAI’s schedule were mostly international co-productions in which RAI had a major co-financing role, such as *Calimero*, a 2014 French-Japanese-Italian co-production based on a classic series from the 1960s, and *Mofy*, a 2013 Italian-Japanese series based on a Japanese illustrated book for children (fully animated in Italy by Misseri, a Florence-based studio specialising in alternative animation techniques). The most commercially successful case of RAI’s involvement in children’s animation production is the girl-skewed animated fantasy series the *Winx Club* (2004–), airing on RAI Gulp. A co-production between RAI and Rainbow, an Italian children’s animation studio, the series, now in its seventh season, has been sold to over 130 territories.

Table 2: RAI’s children’s channels: Broadcast output by macro-genre and country of origin.

	National		European		USA		Other		Total	
	<i>Min</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>%</i>
Animation	995	14	3,330	48	1,140	16	1,530	22	6,995	100
Fiction	90	3	250	9	1,435	54	880	33	2,655	100
Factual	825	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	825	100

Notes: See Table 1. ‘Animation’ includes animated TV series and feature films; ‘Live action fiction’ includes genres such as comedies, telenovelas, ‘dramedies’, fantasy series as well as non-animated feature films; ‘Factual’ includes magazine shows, live studio programmes, musical shows, news programmes, lifestyle programmes (e.g., arts&crafts, cookery shows), documentary series, interview programmes and special events. The figures in this table refer to the combined output of RAI Gulp and RAI Yoyo.

If RAI's involvement in children's animation takes prevalently the form of international co-productions, in the factual macro-genre RAI's output (including documentary series, magazine shows and live studio programmes) largely originates from RAI's in-house children's production unit in Turin. Both the 'locality' element and public service value of these programmes are more obvious than in the case of some of RAI's animated series. Examples included *Le Storie di Gipo* (RAI Yoyo, a live studio programme on traditional games, music and arts), *Albero Azzurro* (RAI Yoyo, a puppet show and the longest-running children's programme in Italy), *Gulp Inchiesta*, *Stories di Ragazzi* (RAI Gulp, a life stories series) and *Versus, Generazione di Campioni* (RAI Gulp, a series promoting sports culture). As shown in Table 2 above, RAI's entire output in the factual macro-genre in the two sample weeks was originated domestically. By contrast, RAI's output in the *live action fictional* macro-genre (making up a quarter of RAI Gulp and RAI Yoyo's total transmission time) consisted almost entirely of acquired programming, mostly series originating from US-based corporations, e.g., *telenovelas* such as the popular Disney series *Violetta*, *Grachi* (Nickelodeon Latin America) and American sitcoms such as *Shake It Up* (Disney) and *Big Time Rush* (Nickelodeon).

In terms of range of genres (see Table 3 below), one point of difference between RAI and the commercial channels was the slightly higher (albeit still rather low) proportion of programmes in the factual macro-genre (see Table 3 below). Calculated out of total individual titles, factual programmes made up 25% of RAI's total output. In terms of transmission time, however, they accounted for only 8% of total output. Similarly to the other commercial channels, individual titles in the factual macro-genre on RAI Gulp and RAI Yoyo were thus scheduled less intensively than animated and live fictional series.

Table 3: Children's channels, Italy: Broadcast output by macro-genre.

	Animation		Live action fiction		Factual		Total	
	Time (%)	Titles (%)	Time (%)	Titles (%)	Time (%)	Titles (%)	Time (%)	Titles (%)
RAI (Gulp + Yoyo)	67	54	25	21	8	25	100	100
Boing	87	74	13	26	0	0	100	100
Super!	29	56	65	33	5	11	100	100
K2	95	83	0	0	5	17	100	100
Nickelodeon	57	50	43	50	0	0	100	100
Disney (Ch + Jr)	49	37	47	57	5	7	100	100

Notes: See Table 1 and Table 2 (macro-genres).

Spain

Clan TV is the dedicated children's channel run by TVE, Spain's national public broadcaster. Launched in the end of 2005, in the early days of digital terrestrial television in Spain, Clan TV's schedule initially drew on programmes shown on TVE's two generalist channels. Like other Europe broadcasters, after gradually decreasing the number of hours of children's programming on its two main channels, TVE eventually moved its entire children's provision to the dedicated channel in 2010 following the analogue switch off. Clan TV is one of Spain's most popular children's channels, with programmes appealing to both pre-schoolers and older children. In its early years, the channel attracted nearly 4% of the overall television audience. In 2014 its viewing share was down to 2.4% reflecting the growing fragmentation of

children’s television audience since 2005 as a result of the launch of new children’s channels in the intervening years, such as Disney Channel in 2008 and Boing in 2010.

TVE, however, is not Spain’s only PSB organization. After the death of Franco in 1975, the country was organized into self-governing regions (Comunidades Autónomas), each of which gradually instituted their own publicly-owned broadcaster. The largest of these regional PSBs, Televisió de Catalunya runs a dedicated children’s channels, Super3, also included in this study.⁵

The schedule analysis shows that during the two sample weeks the two public service channels analysed aired a higher proportion of children’s programmes classified as national than their commercial counterparts⁶ (see Table 4). In the case of Super3, 26% of transmission time was dedicated to ‘national’ programmes (31% when calculated out of total number of individual titles). Of course ‘national’ here should really be understood as Catalan. Televisió de Catalunya’s remit is to support Catalan culture, language and the local audiovisual industry. Legislation passed in 2013 stipulates that a service contract must specify the proportion of funding to be assigned to Catalan works and set a minimum quota for audiovisual work and for animated series to be produced by independent Catalan producers.

Table 4: Children's channels, Spain: Broadcast output by country of origin.

	National		European		USA		Other		Total	
	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>
Clan TVE (*)	9	15	35	37	34	24	22	24	100	100
Super 3 (*)	26	31	31	31	15	15	28	22	100	100
Boing	1	3	26	19	47	66	25	13	100	100
Nickelodeon	0	0	20	15	71	67	9	19	100	100
Disney Ch.	4	8	14	14	74	71	7	6	100	100
Disney Jr (**)	5	12	36	36	52	42	7	9	100	100

Notes: See Table 1.

The proportion of programmes classified as national in Clan TV’s schedule (9% of transmission time and 15% of total number of individual titles) was considerably lower than in Super3’s schedule, and these programmes were in most cases either acquisitions or external productions.⁷ And yet it was higher than the share of domestic programmes in the schedules of the four commercial channels. The latter devoted little or, in the case of Nickelodeon, no space at all to national programming. As in Italy, the output of the American transnational children’s networks consisted largely of programmes originating from their own, mostly US-based production subsidiaries. Boing too relied heavily on Cartoon Network’s library of American animated series (Cartoon Network’s parent company Turner Broadcasting being one of the two parties in the joint venture).

Table 5 and Table 6 show the proportion of national programmes by macro-genre for Clan TVE and Super3 respectively. The entire factual output of both channels during the two sample weeks was of national origin. By contrast, in the live action fictional macro-genre Clan TVE showed no such programmes, whereas even in this more financially-demanding genre one third of Super3’s output was classified as national. One example is *Family Super3*, whose popular characters lead the annual *Feast of Super3*, a social event for children in Catalonia. Super3 is also the only Spanish children’s channel that runs a daily news programme for children, *Info K*.

Table 5: Clan TVE: Broadcast output by macro-genre and country of origin.

	National		European		USA		Other		Total	
	<i>Min</i>	%	<i>Min</i>	%	<i>Min</i>	%	<i>Min</i>	%	<i>Min</i>	%
Animation	541	5	4,457	37	4,401	36	2,688	22	12,087	100
Fiction	0	0	180	31	156	27	252	43	588	100
Factual	688	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	688	100

Notes: See Table 1 and Table 2 (macro-genres).

Table 6: Super 3: Broadcast output by macro-genre and country of origin.

	National		European		USA		Other		Total	
	<i>Min</i>	%	<i>Min</i>	%	<i>Min</i>	%	<i>Min</i>	%	<i>Min</i>	%
Animation	1,559	16	2,959	30	1,923	19	3,512	35	9,952	100
Fiction	434	33	894	67	0	0	0	0	1,328	100
Factual	1,279	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,279	100

Notes: See Table 1 and Table 2 (macro-genres).

The breakdown of the schedule by macro-genre reveals no difference between PSB and commercial channels (see Table 7 below). During the two sample weeks, animation was the predominant macro-genre in the schedule of all six channels. Clan TVE was in fact the channel with the highest output in the animation macro-genre (and the lowest in the live action fiction macro-genre). None of the six channels devoted more than 10% of their schedules to factual programmes.

Table 7: Children's channels, Spain: Broadcast output by macro-genre.

	Animation		Live action fiction		Factual		Total	
	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>	<i>Time (%)</i>	<i>Titles (%)</i>
Clan TVE (*)	90	89	4	7	5	4	100	100
Super 3 (*)	79	76	11	17	10	7	100	100
Boing	88	85	10	6	2	9	100	100
Nickelodeon	76	57	24	43	0	0	100	100
Disney (Ch + Jr)	68	67	25	23	7	10	100	100

Notes: See Table 1 and Table 2 (macro-genres).

Discussion

The dedicated children's channels of the three PSB organizations included in this study – RAI in Italy and TVE and Televisió de Catalunya in Spain – schedule a higher proportion of domestic content than the main commercial providers. In considering this a marker of distinctiveness, it was argued that: 1) both national and transnational commercial channels lack economic incentives to invest significantly in domestic children's programmes; and 2) the availability of these programmes is normatively desirable for they are more likely than acquired programmes to reflect children's own life experiences, their culture and place. It was also noted that the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Children provides a legal basis for the promotion of domestic programmes, an endeavour that typically falls within PSBs' wider cultural citizenship mandate.

While the study has presented evidence that PSBs' children output in both Italy and Spain is to some extent clearly distinguishable from its commercial competitors, whether it is *sufficiently* distinctive is a different, and a more complex question to tackle. Distinctiveness is a relative concept. Relative their commercial competitors, the output of PSBs in Spain and Italy is distinctive, although in the case of Clan TVE in Spain it was found to be only minimally distinctive. However, if compared with the children's provision of other Western European PSBs, the Italian and Spanish PSBs' efforts in scheduling domestically-originated programming pale in significance. An earlier study adopting a similar methodology (Steemers and D'Arma 2012) found that the PSB children's channels in France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom showed levels of domestic content in excess of 50% of transmission time (just below 90% in the case of the BBC).

The analysis has also identified some important gaps in PSB provision both in Italy and Spain. During the two sample weeks, little time in the schedules of the four PSB children's channels was devoted to factual programmes. In the live action fictional macro-genre, RAI in Italy and TVE in Spain were found to be fully reliant on imported series, mostly originating from the large US-based children's media corporations. From a cultural perspective this is a major gap, considering that live action fictional programmes – with their portrayals of real children, people, geographical settings and social environments – are more likely than animated series to reflect children's own life experiences, their culture and place. The exception here was the Catalan public service children's channel Super3, one third of its live action output being of 'national' (read Catalan) origin.

Among the three PSB organizations included in the study, TVE in Spain was found to provide the least distinctive schedule. Domestic content represented less than 10% of Clan TVE's transmissions while animation accounted for 90% of the channel's output. In order to account for this, it must be noted that TVE is not subject to any regulatory obligations concerning the provision a wide range of children's programmes, including domestic content. Programming decisions then lie solely with the channel's managers. In 2012, TVE announced the possible closure of Clan TV due to severe cuts from that year's budget. Eventually the channel was spared closure, but tellingly when in its tenth anniversary in 2014 a major makeover was announced, no action was taken even then to increase the levels of domestic productions. Both RAI and Televisió de Catalunya, by contrast, are subject to some positive regulatory obligations in this area. Televisió de Catalunya is a special case, for its core mandate is to promote Catalan culture and language across areas of provision (including children's), as a vehicle of Catalan nationalism.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the approach adopted in this study and at the same time to offer a response to some of the possible objections. First, it could be argued that the distinctiveness of public service children's channels simply lies in the provision of a service available for free to all children on a non-commercial basis, even though non-commercialism is an increasingly difficult distinction to sustain, given that PSBs are typically engaged in 'ancillary' commercial operations and partnerships with commercial players (Cunningham and Flew 2015). Secondly, the approach to evaluating the distinctiveness of PSB children's provision adopted here could usefully be complemented with other methods for establishing the 'difference in kind' between PSBs and commercial players (for a discussion see Hanretty 2012: 47-67). Relying on expert judgements (e.g., awards given to children's programmes at television festivals) is one such method. Gathering children and parents' perceptions of programme quality is another. A further approach is to

undertake *qualitative* textual analyses of selected children's programmes in order to reveal more elusive aspects of programme quality. This method would also be helpful in establishing the extent to which domestically-produced children's programmes convey culturally-specific content, thus overcoming one of the possible objections to the approach adopted here, namely that the domestic origin of a programme cannot be taken to be tantamount to the provision culturally-specific content. For instance, Sigismondi (2015) has argued that the *absence* of nationally-specific cultural references is essential for understanding the roots of the global success of RAI's animated children's series *Winx Club* (2004-). However, it is important to recognize that these other methods too have their own limits. In particular, in comparison with the approach adopted in this study, they rely on subjective judgements (either by the analyst, experts or members of the audience) and they also pose greater problems of validity and comparability.

Conclusion

This study endeavoured to evaluate the distinctiveness of the output of PSB organizations in Italy and Spain in the area of children's provision. In today's highly segmented media environment distinctiveness must be evaluated separately within each area of public service provision. Children's television has always been a core element of the public service mandate. In the last two decades children's television in Europe has undergone major transformations and has become one of the most globalized and crowded areas of programming, raising important questions about the continuing role of PSB, given the wide availability of children content provided by commercial operators. However, it was argued that financing and producing *domestic* children's content, especially in factual and non-animated fictional genres, represent a costly and generally commercially unattractive endeavour for private providers. Given the desirability of adequate provision of programmes reflecting children's own life, culture and place, thus, a market failure of sort still arguably exists.

A two-week schedule analysis revealed that the children's output of RAI in Italy and TVE and Televisió de Catalunya in Spain is to some extent distinctive although, in the case of TVE's Clan TV arguably only minimally so. Significant gaps in PSB children's provision were also identified, notably the marginal presence of factual content in the schedules of PSB children's channels and reliance on imports in the live action fictional macro-genre. However, overall the study did find evidence of PSB distinctiveness, albeit this conclusion needed to be heavily qualified. Its wider significance, though, should not go lost. Italy and Spain are arguably 'extreme' cases of PSB organizations within Western Europe. In the comparative literature, RAI and TVE have typically been portrayed as 'failing' PSBs, incapable of asserting their distinctiveness from the commercial sector. If some evidence of PSB distinctiveness in children's provision can be found in this part of Europe, claims about the distinctive contribution of PSB in the area of children's content provision then are likely to be well founded in the rest of the region too.

References

- Achilles, Y. and B. Miège (1994), 'The Limits to the Adaptation Strategies of European Public Service Television', *Media, Culture & Society*, 16:1, pp. 31-46.
- Alexander, A. and J. Owers (2007), 'The Economics of Children's Television', in A. Bryant (ed.) *The Children's Television Community*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence

- Erlbaum, pp. 57-74.
- BBC Trust (2013), 'BBC Trust Service Review: The BBC's Children's Services', September, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/childrens_services/childrens_services.pdf. Accessed 16 December 2015.
- BBC Trust (2014), 'CBBC Service Licence', http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/regulatory_framework/service_licences/tv/2015/cbbc_jul15.pdf. Accessed 16 December 2015.
- Biltreyst, D. (1997), 'European Public Service Television and the Cultural-educational Logic: A Comparative Analysis of Children's and Youth Programming', *Asian Journal of Communication*, 7:2, pp. 86-104.
- Blumler, J.G. (1993), 'Meshing Money with Mission: Purity Versus Pragmatism in Public Broadcasting', *European Journal of Communication*, 8:4, pp. 403-424.
- Cabrera Blázquez, F.J., M. Cappello, S. Valais (2015), *The Protection of Minors in a Converged Media Environment*, Strasbourg: EAO, <http://www.obs.coe.int/documents/205595/8261963/The+protection+of+minors+in+a+converged+media+environment.pdf/7b590454-a03f-40e8-b460-e2b5e6b0bc28>. Accessed 16 December 2015.
- Curran, J. (2002), *Media and Power*. London: Routledge.
- Cushion, S. (2012), *The Democratic Value of News: Why Public Service Media Matter*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cunningham, S. and T. Flew (2015), 'Reconsidering Media Economics: From Orthodoxies to Heterodoxies', *Media Industries Journal* 2:1, pp. 1-18.
- D'Arma, A. and Steemers, J. (2012), 'Localisation Strategies of US-owned Children's Television Networks in Five European Markets', *Journal of Children and Media*, 6:2, pp. 147-163.
- D'Arma, A. and J. Steemers (2013), 'Children's Television: Markets and Regulation', in K. Donders, C. Pauwels and J. Loisen (eds) *Private Television in Europe: Evolutions of Policies, Markets and Content*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 123-135.
- Eurodata TV Worldwide (2015), 'Children's Channels Are Watched by More than Half of Young Television Viewers in Europe', 23 September, <http://www.mediametrie.com/eurodatatv/communiques/kids-tv-report-children-s-channels-are-watched-by-more-than-half-of-young-television-viewers-in-europe.php?id=1327>. Accessed 16 December 2015.
- European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO) (2013), 'Continued Growth of Children's Television services in Europe', 3 June, <http://www.obs.coe.int/en/-/pr-mavise-continued-growth-of-children-s-television-services-in-europe;jsessionid=71B39C2616CF07FB29F32789CDAB4BC5>. Accessed 16 December 2015.
- Enli, G. (2013), 'Defending Nordic Children against Disney: PBS Children's Channels in the Age of Globalization', *Nordicom Review* 34:1, pp. 77-90.
- Hanretty, C. (2012), *Public Service Broadcasting's Continued Rude Health*, London: British Academy.
- Jakubowicz, K. (2003), 'Bringing Public Service Broadcasting to Account', in G. F. Lowe and T. Hujanen (eds) *Broadcasting and Convergence. New Articulations of the Public Service Remit*, Gothenburg: Nordicom, pp. 147-167.
- Livingstone, S. (2008), 'On the Future of Children's Television: A Matter of Crisis?', in T. Gardam and D. Levy (eds.) *The Price of Plurality*, Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, pp.175-182.
- Lustyik, K. (2010), 'Transnational Children's Television: The Case of Nickelodeon in

- the South Pacific', *International Communication Gazette*, 72:2, pp. 171-191.
- McKinsey (1999), *Public Service Broadcasters around the World: A McKinsey Report for the BBC*, January, London: McKinsey.
- McKinsey (2004), *Review of Public Service Broadcasting around the World*, September, London: McKinsey.
- McQuail, D. (1997), 'Accountability of Media to Society: Principles and Means', *European Journal of Communication*, 12:4, pp. 511-529.
- McQuail, D. (2003), 'Public Service Broadcasting: Both Free and Accountable', *Javnost/The Public*, 10:3, pp. 13-23.
- Milesi (2013), 'Le Voci del Mercato', in P. Aroldi and N. Vittadini (eds) *Televisione e Infanzia le Aspettative nei Confronti dell'offerta Televisiva per Bambini*, <http://www.sussidiarieta.net/files/file/TV%20inf%20okok.pdf>. Accessed 16 December 2015.
- Mjøes, O.J. (2010), 'The Symbiosis of Children's Television and Merchandising: Comparative Perspectives on the Norwegian Children's Television Channel NRK Super and the Global Disney Channel', *Media, Culture & Society*, 32:6, pp. 1031-1042.
- Ofcom (2007), *The Future of Children's Television Programming*, <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/kidstv/summary/kidstv.pdf>. Accessed 16 December 2015.
- Ofcom (2014), *Children's Analysis: PSB Annual Report*, http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/broadcast/reviews-investigations/psb-review/psb3/Annex_6.ii_Childrens_Analysis.pdf. Accessed 16 December 2015.
- Plunkett, J. (2015), 'Eh-oh! Teletubbies Creator Warns of Funding Crisis as Kids' TV Goes Retro', 19 April, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/apr/19/teletubbies-twirlywoos-anne-wood-childrens-tv>. Accessed 16 December 2015.
- Rutherford, L. and A. Brown (2013), 'The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Multiplatform Projects: Industrial Logics of Children's Content Provision in the Digital Television Era', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 19:2, pp. 201-221.
- Shivonen, M. (2015), "'We Are More Serious": Children's Television in Finland and Paradigmatic Shifts in Yleisradio's Children's Programming', *Journal of Children and Media*, 9:2, pp. 177-193.
- Sigismondi, P. (2015), 'The *Winx Club* Phenomenon in the Global Animation Landscape', *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, 3:3, pp. 271-285.
- Stemers, J. and A. D'Arma (2012), 'Evaluating and Regulating the Role of Public Broadcasters in the Children's Media Ecology: The Case of Home-grown Television Content', *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, 8:1, pp. 67-85.
- Stemers, J. (2010), 'The BBC's Role in the Changing Production Ecology of Preschool Television in Britain', *Television and New Media*, 11:1, pp. 37-61.
- Tambini, D. (2015), 'Five Theses on Public Media and Digitization: From a 56-Country Study', *International Journal of Communication* 9, pp. 1400-1424.

Notes:

¹ Distinctiveness has no obvious equivalent in Italian and Spanish, while the adjective 'distinctive' does (*distintivo* in both languages). Thus, distinctiveness is usually translated as 'distinctive feature' (*caratteristica distintiva* in Italian; *característica distintiva* in Spanish).

² Establishing the country of origin of a television programme is fraught with difficulties. The production of a television programme more often than not involves creative, technical and/or financial inputs from organizations and people from different countries. See Table 1 for the classification criteria adopted in this study.

³ An important aspect of the mandate of European PSBs is to promote European culture and its diversity. Under European Union's rules, broadcasters based in a member state, including commercial children's channels, are expected to devote a majority of transmission time to European works. For this reason, the proportion of programmes of European origin in the schedule of PSB children's channels was not considered in this study as a marker of distinctiveness.

⁴ In Italy the commercial children's channels in the sample included three US-based transnational networks available exclusively on pay-TV (Disney Channel, Disney Junior and Nickelodeon) and three free-to-air channels available on DTT: Boing (a joint-venture between Berlusconi's Mediaset and Time-Warner's Turner Broadcasting System); K2 (a domestic channel acquired by Discovery Communications in 2013); and Super! (another domestic channel launched in 2012 by De Agostini, an Italian media company).

⁵ The autonomic PSBs in the Basque Country and Galicia also run dedicated children's channels, but these channels are not as popular and well-resourced as Super3.

⁶ In Spain, the selection of children's channels included four commercial channels in addition to Clan TV and Super3: Disney Channel, Disney Junior, Nickelodeon and Boing. The first three are US-based transnational networks. Disney Channel is available free-to-air in Spain (unlike in Italy); Disney Junior and Nickelodeon are pay-TV channels. Boing is the Spanish version of the Italian channel. It is available free-to-air and is run jointly by Mediaset's Spanish subsidiary Telecinco (a domestic terrestrial broadcaster) and Time-Warner's Turner Broadcasting System.

⁷ TVE has often been criticized for failing to comply with in-house production quotas, set at 20 per cent for thematic channels like Clan TV. In February 2014, the Spanish Federation of Animation Producers reported that TVE 'took months, even years', to sign co-production agreements to which it was committed, which delayed the start of productions.