

1st International Film and Media Conference in Istanbul

Communication Proposal:

“The Migration to Digital Television in Europe: the response of Public Service Broadcasters”

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Abstract

The migration to digital television is one of the most notable transformation processes that the European Audiovisual sector is facing up at this moment. It supposes not only technological innovation but also great changes in the structure of the sector, the need to redefine the regulatory framework and the implementation of new business models; all together in an international scenario of convergence and globalisation. But in addition, this migration also raises questions related to the social nature of communication, concerning the needs and rights of citizenship and the role of public institutions in the whole process.

An area where this public intervention is specially challenged is the implementation of Digital Terrestrial Television. The strong links between public service and terrestrial broadcasting create a specific context where the migration strategies that have already been used by satellite and cable commercial operators can not be directly applied. Furthermore, the terrestrial broadcasting has a national character, being an important tool to create or shape identities and public opinion.

For these reasons, despite the involvement of the European Union and other international economic or political forces, the migration of the terrestrial broadcasting towards digital is a process that Member States wish and have to deal with by themselves. Among the several topics related to this transformation process, the public intervention and the role of public broadcasters are central questions. They can be forerunners and promoters of the migration but also need to maintain a social accountability and become guarantors of access and universal service.

Considering the theoretical framework of Communication Public Policy and within the research context of analysing the implementation of Digital Television in Europe, the first main objective of this paper is to contribute with the identification of the main current challenges that European Public Broadcasters should confront when migrating to digital in the terrestrial platform (DTT). In addition, as this process has already been started and established in several European States, now it could be a good opportunity to analyse and compare how it has been carried out. The second aim of this communication is therefore to offer a comparison of the roles that have been played by Public Broadcasters. The cases selected are the United Kingdom, Sweden and Spain, the three first states in developing DTT services.

Keywords: Digitalisation, Public Service, Comparative Analysis

Robert Suárez works as assistant lecturer in media structure and economics at the Journalism and Communication Dept. of Pompeu Fabra University. He is also finishing his PhD dissertation about the public intervention over the implementation process of DTT in Europe. For more information about his research interests and publications you can visit <http://www.robertosuarez.es> (English version available).