

The Public Service as a forerunner in the implementation of Digital Terrestrial Television: the case of Catalonia.

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Abstract

Together with the United Kingdom and Sweden, Spain was one of the first countries starting Digital Terrestrial Television services within the European Union. The chosen business model was a pay-tv platform that had serious problems to compete with the premium contents and the wider multi-channel offered by satellite and cable operators. After two years (2000-2002), the Spanish pay-DTT operator Quiero TV, following the steps of ITVDigital at the UK, collapsed economically and after stopping its broadcasting lost the licence that had been assigned to exploit 14 digital channels.

The Government did not reassign the licences and the DTT project was stopped for more than 3 years. In July 2005 the new Government passed a law of urgency measures to reactivate the implementation of Digital Terrestrial Television. In the end of the year, the incumbent analogical operators started to broadcast two digital channels in addition to the one they were already simulcasting. It seems that the citizenship has considered the relaunch of DTT as something positive since the sales of receivers are increasing. However, the contents and services offered are still in a very embryonic state.

Despite this delay in the deployment of DTT at the national level, the regional level has been much more active. A very interesting case to analyse is Catalonia. This region has an own language and culture, which has been a cause and objective to develop a strong Public Broadcasting Corporation. Since it was created in 1983, *Televisió de Catalunya* has been a reference in the Spanish market concerning not only the development of the public remit but also the content innovation and quality. Since the DTT project was started in 1997, the Public Catalan Television has had a forerunner role in different fields like technology development, implementation tests, programming or public communication. The following could be highlighted: the creation of a 24 hours news channel, the release of interactive contents, the research about social obstacles for migrating to digital or the creation of companies as TVCMultimedia, specialized in technical solutions and interactive applications development.

These actions have been carried out due to the support of the Catalan Public Administration. A complete plan for the deployment of Digital Terrestrial Television and the end of the analogical broadcast in 2008 has been designed.

The objective of this paper is to offer an overall look at the actions that have been carried out by the Public Broadcaster and the Administration in Catalonia in order to favour the implementation of DTT. This analysis might detect the key factors that are necessary for the Public Service to have an active and reference role in this field. The fact that Catalonia is a region within a state sometimes generates consequent disputes at the public level. This might be useful as an example for other regions within Europe. This case can also illustrates how public intervention in the field of digitalisation can be materialized through the Public Broadcasters.

Key words: Public service, Digital Terrestrial television, Public intervention.