

Other pluralisms: future perspectives for the analysis of pluralism

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- *As a final evaluation of this edition, this article stresses the need to be plural and to respect the "otherness" of the media as a fundamental basis for democracy. The author looks to the future with regard to the monitoring of pluralism carried out regularly by the CAC, which must adapt itself to the appearance of more channels with digital terrestrial television, must introduce qualitative parameters in its reports on the observance of political pluralism and must find ways to measure other pluralisms.*

Keywords

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I often say, by way of provocation, that there is no such thing as objectivity and that what gets closest to it are the efforts made towards plurality. We are objective insofar as we integrate the variable of pluralism – of pluralisms, in plural – in the everyday work of journalism. It's a question of rebuilding the broken mirror, every piece of which helps us to reconstruct the puzzle of a multi-faceted reality. This metaphor has a universal value, indeed it has been used by Espriu and Tagore, and it tells us that truth is reflected in a broken mirror, where each piece reproduces a small part and the more pieces we can put together the closer we will get to the whole truth. There is also another metaphor used by the writer José María Ridaó in a recent book, which tells of a soldier who was patrolling the corridors of a building. Suddenly he came across a uniformed man, armed with a rifle, with an expression of panic on his face. Instinctively, he readied his own weapon and fired: his enemy didn't fall down but his own image broke into a thousand pieces... the soldier had shot himself, reflected in a mirror.

These two metaphors help us to underline a need and to warn against a danger. The need to be plural, to integrate pluralism as one of the functions of broadcasting media. And the danger of projecting our own fears onto others, of believing that the best way to assert an identity is to destroy the identity of another, or rather "otherness". This is an atavistic phenomenon, accentuated, however, by the very complexity of globalised societies. In this context, the media's dual task is to preserve plurality and respect otherness. Respect for pluralism in all its forms therefore becomes a need of the broadcasting system as a whole and the specific task of public service, as stated by the broadcasting act in Catalonia.

Specifically, article 115 of this act attributes to the Audio-visual Council of Catalonia the role of "safeguarding respect for political, religious, social, linguistic and cultural pluralism, and also for territorial balance". This is the job carried out by

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the analysts of the CAC's technical services, a kind of *hired brain* for the whole organisation, and the articles contained in this edition of *Quaderns*, with the contribution by Professor Joan Botella, former member of the Catalonia Broadcasting Council.

This is a consolidated work, both in terms of its methodology as well as the different reference concepts. So, as from September 2002 and after different trials, the CAC has prepared and published its systematic reports on the observance of pluralism on radio and television, every month but with sliding quarters, so that the data have a dual reference, both monthly and quarterly. It is from this solid and consolidated base, totally preserving those analytical tools that have proved their effectiveness, that the Content Analysis Service plans to take a new step forward in a three-fold direction: implementing the pluralism observance model within the context of the multiplicity of programmes due to the introduction of local TDT, introducing elements of qualitative evaluation in the data and systematically analysing other pluralisms, with quarterly reports and reports on trends, which will be added to its monthly reports on political pluralism.

With regard to the monitoring of political pluralism, it's worth noting that the introduction of qualitative parameters allows us to evaluate not only the quantitative nature of this pluralism but also the quality of political news. This is a major factor, as the full assembly of the Council reminded us, since quality news favours the democratic choice of citizens and therefore reinforces the quality of democracy itself. From this point of view, the Council carried out an initial qualitative evaluation of the *Specific pluralism report during the campaign for elections to the parliament of Catalonia 2006*, which stated that the two thematic indicators appearing with the highest frequency - almost 50% - were *political dynamics*, defined as generic allusions to the candidates' attitudes (political squabbles in colloquial language) and *electoral and post-electoral pacts*. "The result (we stated at the time) means that programme issues and issues that most concern the electorate, from infrastructures to immigration, are relegated to second place. (...) We are faced (we concluded) with a phenomenon that concerns all parties, those taking part in the news story and the professionals choosing it, and which, to a greater or lesser degree, is not alien to a downward account of electoral participation".

The introduction of new qualitative parameters in the monthly reports on political pluralism will help to advance an analysis of the quality of news and will allow us to measure, for example, the degree of *governmentalisation*, the presence of the different governments in speaking time as a whole. However, monitoring other pluralisms, such as social, cultural, territorial and religious, is the future challenge facing this Council and also other regulatory bodies of a similar nature in globalised societies of the twenty-first century. We should remember that, from this perspective, the Catalan broadcasting act not only attributes this specific task to public service but also "the active promotion of civic community spirit, the plural and democratic development of society, knowledge of and respect for different political, social, linguistic, cultural and religious options and manifestations present in Catalonia. Within this context it is necessary to use all the languages, formats and discourses that, as a part of respect and attention to diversity and pluralism, allow dialogue, understanding and cohesion between the different options and the different areas of the territory of Catalonia" (article 26.3.g).

Reading these principles allows us to glimpse the task still to be done, namely to encourage and promote other pluralisms, as well as monitoring their observance and the right to access the public broadcasting space on the part of significant social and cultural groups (article 26.4). This space does not exist nor is now the time to make specific proposals, but it is the time to reflect and explore the different paths for the *route map* to be followed.

With regard to territorial balance, proximity-based radio and television is one of the differential features of the Catalan communication model. They need to continue to be so and, in this respect, it is also necessary for the gradual implementation of local TDT to ensure they continue. The factors of proximity and interactivity of these media are also instruments of territorial and social cohesion. Notwithstanding this, the public service broadcasting media of the Generalitat also need to accomplish their specific mission of respect for territorial balance, even more so when the data in this edition show a notable deficit: municipalities of under 5,000 inhabitants that appear in the news on TV3 do so primarily in news items because of environmental events or catastrophes. It is therefore necessary to correct this tendency and ensure a better distribution of television throughout Catalonia.

On the other hand, regarding social pluralism, we need to foment the presence of public broadcasting media at a national and local level for the different social sectors, including the so-called *new immigration*. There are two equally perverse dangers appearing on the horizon. The first, in the short-term, is a tendency to sensationalise news, with combinations of items that blur or sully the face of the other. The second risk, in the medium-term, is the emergence of community-based media, i.e. those media that focus on a specific social community to the detriment of being open to all communities, which should be the role of public service.

With regard to religious pluralism, the rules of secularism are being imposed, respect for freedom of religion and beliefs, with a charter of rights and duties shared by everyone, given the temptation of a secular deviation steeped in old anticlerical tics. Regarding the new religions on the scene, neither should we forget that, if we want their members to accept and observe the duties imposed by citizenship, then they must also be able to enjoy the same rights, including respect for freedom of religion and beliefs. The consolidation of these principles in public broadcasting is a pending issue, as well as for religions with a longer historical tradition.

Here, at the end, are some brief points on the task to define and measure other pluralisms. The complexity of this exercise lies in the growing complexity of society itself. We need to avoid answers in black and white. The media, however, are not used to greys. Moreover the audience, made up of so-called *fast thinkers*, using an expression by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, give simple answers to complex problems. An example of this trend is the programme *59 segundos* (59 seconds) on TVE, with a format that feeds demagoguery instead of the pedagogy we might expect from a public broadcaster. The tendency towards sensationalism, added to the cult of emotion, are two undercurrents in the media system as a whole and broadcasting in particular, which encourage a shift from *homo sapiens* to *homo videns* (Giovanni Sartori) and to *homo sentiens* (Michel Lacroix). It is the specific function of the public service to preserve the balance of the system in order to put a brake on this mutation of the species.

We should note that democracy is not synonymous with the absence of conflict but rather a civilised way to resolve conflict and to make sure the general interest prevails. It is

based on contradictory debate, with a minimum common denominator of values that are not subject to "demoscopia" or public opinion polls. These values are written down in constitutions, for example the abolition of the death penalty in Europe, so that the vessel of our democratic systems does not get carried away by the song of the sirens of neopopulisms. These constitutional values, *republican values* they are called in neighbouring France, are tied to the Constitution in the same way that Ulysses tied himself to the mast of his ship so as not to succumb to the sirens' song. Today, when their song is heard clearly and populism and demagoguery are gaining ground in political and media terms, it is also the specific mission of public broadcasting to know how to fasten these values to their daily news and programming. And it is the job of this Council to continue to safeguard their observance.