

GARCÍA LEIVA, M. T. *Políticas públicas y televisión digital. El caso de la TDT en España y el Reino Unido*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2008. ISBN: 978-84-00-08652-7.

BY ISABEL SARABIA ANDÚGAR

Lecturer at the Audiovisual Communication Department of the Universidad Católica San Antonio in Murcia.

isarabia@pdi.ucam.edu



Examining public DTT policies in Europe

The implementation of digital terrestrial television (DTT) in Europe is an open process that continues to pose enigmas. The role DTT will play in the audiovisual market is still uncertain, as is this new technology's contribution to the democratisation of communications. María Trinidad García Leiva tackles these issues in her work *Políticas públicas y televisión digital. El caso de la DTT en España y el Reino Unido* through a detailed analysis of the factors and stakeholders playing a part in introducing DTT in Europe.

This work's contribution to the scientific community is relevant since, from a critical perspective and taking European measures as a benchmark for digital television, the author probes DTT policies in the United Kingdom and Spain and compares them in an unprecedented approach. The added value of this study with respect to others published recently in Spain (Bustamante 2008, Marzal and Casero 2007 and Caballero 2007) lies in its methodological proposal for analysing public digital television policies and evaluating the Spanish and British experiences within the European context. Furthermore, this book is a must-read for scholars in this area of research, given its documental rigor and vast amount of information, as well as the organisation of its contents.

The work, fruit of exhaustive research, is divided into six chapters. In the introduction, the author explains the study's objectives: on the one hand, to interpret the public DTT policies applied in the United Kingdom and Spain in the European arena and, on the other, to analyse the television models stemming from them. However, the ultimate goal of this lecturer at the Complutense University is "to understand the challenges posed by the so-called digital age" (p. 23). García Leiva comfortably surpasses her goal by properly identifying the challenges posed by the digitalisation process of Hertz-based television and the ominous risks and goes so far as to proffer suggestions for tackling these obstacles.

The decision to study the United Kingdom and Spain is due to the existence of major points of coincidence (these two

countries were the first to attempt to implement DTT in a payment platform model and failed in the strategy), yet also because of the interesting divergences between them that emerged during the DTT relaunch.

The study and subsequent comparison of policies in both countries is based on the application of a complex and interesting methodological tool: a table of analysis devised from a critical point of view, which is explained in chapter two in a detailed lesson on the conditions and stakeholders who may play a role in configuring digital television policies. These elements, which are described in full and illustrated with examples from Europe, are focal points of an analysis that encompasses different categories, each of which represents a divergent political option. The researcher, who claims that "a communicative policy that can truly be described as such must always have citizens at the centre of its concerns" (p. 59), formulates her proposal by evaluating policies in terms of democratisation and, in doing so, achieves her main goal: to determine the degree of social participation in the different areas of public policy, such as message production, decision-making and devising the policies themselves.

Chapter three contains a detailed description of the gestation process of DTT policies in the European Union to introduce readers to the European context. Next, the author studies the British and Spanish experiences meticulously by following the proposed methodology, which allows her to diagnose the degree of democratisation in each country's policies and offer the results of the comparison.

In the author's view, the United Kingdom and Spain share a DTT model that is far removed from constituting a plural, democratic service, since the existing order in Hertz-based analogue television architecture is being preserved - something that prevents the entry of new stakeholders - and as a result, the integration of factors from the audiovisual market is also being promoted. The analysis also sheds light on the ambiguous role of British and Spanish public television in implementing digital terrestrial television. Furthermore, it verifies that these countries' discourse tends more towards the economic-

industrial or political potential than towards the new technology's social and cultural benefits. Moreover, service receivers are being treated by operators as mere customers and not as citizens and the participation of social stakeholders in developing DTT is almost imperceptible.

As for the main divergences in these countries' performance, García Leiva highlights those stemming from the regulator's characteristics (there is one sole, independent and convergent regulator in the United Kingdom, whereas there are multiple public figures in regional and national arenas in Spain, each with its own political criteria). Another difference can be traced to the forms of regulation: while regulation in the United Kingdom is based on the "dictating of norms and the incessant search for consensus" (p. 298), in Spain, it is based on "governmental and regulatory-type" mechanisms (p. 299). Two different approaches are also noted with respect to DTT coverage, which is more local in Spain and more national in the United Kingdom. Although the author does not seem to consider this question very important, it needs pointing out that the extension of Hertz-based TV digitalisation in Spain is taking place from the start at three levels: national, regional and local. This undoubtedly hinders the process of implementing DTT, while it enriches it in terms of pluralism and democracy. The results of its application notwithstanding, this obvious strength in Spanish public policies contrasts markedly with the lack of interest in local television observed in British policies, which will only take this possibility into account after the digital switchover and always as a possibility, since no bandwidth has been reserved for it and it will have to enter into financial competition with other operators and uses when the spare bandwidth is auctioned off by Ofcom to the highest bidder.

In any case, aside from these divergences, the common indubitable fact in both countries, as demonstrated by García Leiva, is that the opportunity to democratise the service is being wasted. In view of this, the author proposes to reorient European DTT policies towards major public intervention and regulation through a comprehensive legal framework that encompasses the entire audiovisual sector. She also believes that guaranteeing the transparency of the entire process is indispensable and advocates subjecting all decisions to public consultation to this end. In the name of pluralism, the author believes that frequencies and licenses should be distributed by balancing "new/existing, local/regional/national, public/private, for profit/not-for-profit stakeholders" (p. 317). This diversification of stakeholders will lead to an expansion of the offer of content, which will be accompanied by greater innovation, quality and the guarantee of open access. García Leiva believes it is fundamental for public service to recover its leadership in the process, not only to promote itself but also to correct possible discrimination, yet she also believes it crucial to find a viable business model that provides continuity to the service without risking new failures.

In short, García Leiva's book vindicates a policy that establishes a democratic DTT model to guarantee universal access

to the service, understood as a way of incorporating citizens into the Information Society and as an alternative for achieving "a fairer and more social model" (p. 319).

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