The emergence of ITV has been regarded as a watershed moment for national television in Britain. In recent years, however, the national identity angle that studies of British television have been approached from has been challenged both by those using a wider, international, comparative approach and those using a tighter, regional-centric focus. This paper adopts the latter, focusing on the regional context of ITV using Southern Television as a case study. Specifically, it addresses the identity of Southern Television that was evolving throughout its first ten years of operation, from the point it was awarded its contract by the Independent Television Authority (ITA) in 1958 until 1968, by which time it had gone through two contract renewals and streamlined its operations accordingly. While this work focuses on Southern Television as an end of itself, it is still necessary to consider the regional variations of ITV in order to fully understand the nuanced history of Britain’s first commercial television network. Moreover, the early days of ITV were characterised by its franchise model; ITV itself was neither a single entity nor a single channel, but a complex network of companies all serving different areas, of which Southern was one.

The Television Act of 1954, which heralded ITV, explicitly stated that part of the role of the ITA was to ensure that the programmes broadcast from any station or stations contain a suitable proportion of matter calculated to appeal specifically to the taste and outlook of persons served by the station or stations.  

In other words, regional identity was one of the factors that the ITA was put in place to judge. Jamie Medhurst’s work addressing the various Welsh franchise companies – Teledu Cymru in particular – has aided the creation of a history of ITV that takes its constituent companies into account. As Medhurst states, the period between 1956 and 1963 witnessed the “rolling out” of the ITV service across the UK as new transmitters were opened and new regions created. 

The idea that regions could be created in order to give structure to a television service is an interesting one. These regions were organised around the VHF transmitters that were owned by the ITA, so it was the regulator who defined the geographical boundary that

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each company had to serve. Broadcast historians have noted the irony that the ITA – a centralised, London-based regulator overseen by the Postmaster General – held such executive power over the regions. Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock explain that “it is debateable whether the ITV system, as constituted, truly provided a regional [service]” for the franchises “were largely based on the locations of transmitters”, rather than on cultural areas3. However, this irony is yet to be explored in greater depth, and the question of what really constituted an ITV region has yet to be resolved.

However, before interrogating this intersection between geography and identity, it is worth establishing a few key ideas central to this paper. Firstly, the identity that this paper charts is the identity that Southern Television was establishing from within. In framing the emergence of commercial television as a wider, pan-European trend in the 20th century, Jonathan Bignell and Andreas Fickers note that geographical boundaries do not necessarily tally with a cohesive identity in the media. Bignell and Fickers say that the “cultural identity of ‘Europe’ is a contested discursive and material space”4. When discussing the identity of any discrete area, it has to be a given that boundaries may be fixed, but identity is something more fluid and changing.

Of course, the question of what really constitutes the identity of any area, region or community is one of the key debates among cultural theorists, and is tied closely to the discourses surrounding nationalism and globalism. This research would not be the first to recognise the usefulness of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” as a concept for understanding British regions and the functions of their media5. However, not only has the application of regionality (as opposed to nationality) in media studies been sporadic, that application has usually been to regions that have at least some cohesive imagined identity underpinning them. The nationalism of Wales or Scotland is an obvious example, but even less tightly defined areas such as “the North” have some semblance of regional pride, often born out of a rejection of the cultural and commercial epicentre of London6. As discussed later in the paper, Southern Television’s region was a composite of the central South and the South East, though it did not include London. The geography of this region suggests that identity was a more complex and nebulous phenomenon without a centre that an urban hub like London could provide. It is arguable that the key question in this paper is how Southern Television contrived its region in order to serve it.

In such a way, this paper circumvents the question of defining regional identity, in favour of considering how that identity was assessed and reassessed by Southern Television. As a television producer, Southern became mediator between the area and its inhabitants. Chris Barker says that the

plasticity of identity […] is one of the reasons why the concept has political significance, for the shifting and changing character of identities, and their theorizations, have intimate social and political practices7.

It is fluid, but that is exactly why it applies to television. Television as a medium is understood to reflect identity, but such a definition assumes, borrowing from Barker’s critique, that prospective audience members are “unified agents who have a universal fixed identity”\(^8\). If the identity of a region is a flexible, malleable phenomenon then television engages with that process when it attempts to represent that identity in broadcasting. However, I would like to distinguish between that identity – however impermanent or imagined it was (and still is) – and the identity that Southern Television constructed for itself, which I shall hereafter refer to as the regional narrative.

In particular, I shall be referring to certain company documents from Southern Television throughout the 1960s that highlight the peculiarities of its region. These include maps detailing the broadcast areas and the positioning of its stations and infrastructure, marketing materials that describe the area from the broadcaster’s perspective, and some of the metrics the station used to monitor how representative its broadcasts were. Essentially, these documents demonstrate that the company not only sought to ensure that the contents and themes of its programmes resonated with viewers, but they also wanted to judge the scope of the region itself.

This research has been drawn from the Southern Television document collection held at the BFI National Archive in Hertfordshire. The collection is broad (it spans across hundreds of boxes) and it is uncatalogued, so the evidence has all been accrued via a hand-typed finding aid. While these documents offer an insight into the institutional structures and internal workings of the company, the programmes themselves become almost secondary to the research question at hand. Bignell and Fickers state that such paper-driven case studies neglect “television as a visual, programme driven medium”, even if they do reflect “the political and social conflicts in broadcasting organisations”\(^9\).

This challenge is by no means unique to the case of Southern Television: Jamie Medhurst, for example, likened the experience of “researching the origins, operation and eventual demise of Teledu Cymru” to “an archaeological dig”\(^10\). Nevertheless, it offers a perspective on region and identity, and the crossovers between them, that is perhaps obscured in the schedules and in the programmes.

1. THE REGION AND THE STUDIOS

As Bernard Sendall explains, a powerful triumvirate of media magnates founded Southern Television: the Rank Organisation, Associated Newspapers and Amalgamated Press, “clearly the most powerful” of the nine original applicants “in terms both of finance and media resources”\(^11\). Upon submission of their application for the Southern contract, none of the partner organisations had any relation to the central Southern area; the bid reflected the interests of three London-based organisations\(^12\). The link between the

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\(^8\) Ibid.


\(^12\) The Rothermore dynasty that owned Associated Newspapers hailed from Kent, which would later receive television from Southern when it expanded into the South East, but in 1957 none of the parties had offices in the Southern region.
founders of Southern Television and the region they wished to serve became yet more tenuous when Amalgamated Press sold its shares in the company, which were eventually acquired by DC Thomson and Co. Ltd – the publisher based in Dundee and famous for the Scottish comic characters *The Broons*. Despite the lack of representation from Southern England in the group, it was awarded the contract in 1957, and the new company was registered with input from the ITA. The irony in Southern’s organisation was apparent; even the name Southern Television was not decided upon until after the ITA had approved the application. Arguably the only thing inherently southern about the company was the name; everything else had to be negotiated. The problematic presentation of the region in independent television discourse is driven by the conflation of physical regional franchise and the idea of “regionhood”. In reality, the “region” that Southern Television had to represent was simply the area that the broadcast signal reached – and this was made even more complicated by the fact that Southern had two signals from two separate transmitters. The case of Southern Television amply demonstrates the fallacy of coherent regional interests and tastes, as illustrated by the maps detailing the area (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). The first of these maps, circulated by the ITA in 1961, marks the original area that Southern Television won the contract for, and its extension into the South East with the opening of the Dover studio and transmitter. The shaded area around Southampton denotes the area that the signal emanating from the Chillerton Down relay station built and maintained by the ITA in 1958 on the Isle of Wight (it should be noted that the signal also reached the island of Jersey, which for a time was included in the coverage analysis figures before it was deemed outside the company’s remit in 1963).

Figure 1 - Close-up of a map produced by the ITA detailing ITV transmitter locations and their broadcast areas

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14 Original annotated maps held at the BFI: Southern Television collection, BFI National Archive, Berkhamsted.
15 The Rowridge station, also on the Isle of Wight, provided transmission for all BBC radio channels (including BBC Radio Solent), BBC1 and, later, BBC2.
Already, it is apparent that Southern Television’s area could not be simply described in a single phrase, like other cross-county regions such as the Home Counties or the West Country or East Anglia. A marketing and media handbook, produced in-house by the company in 1966, explains that

Between its eastern and western extremities at North Foreland, Kent, and Lyme Regis, Dorset, respectively, the Southern Independent Television area covers some 200 miles in distance and over 6,000 square miles in area. Within its boundaries lies great physical diversity.\(^{16}\)

The catch-all descriptor most commonly used in documentation from both Southern Television and the ITA from 1958 was “the central Southern region”, and from 1961 onwards was “the South and South East”. Furthermore, despite the fact that Hampshire, Dover, Sussex and Kent were well populated counties, with over 1 million homes owning a television set in 1966, those counties were sparse with many smaller towns alongside cities like Bournemouth, Portsmouth, Brighton and Southampton.\(^ {17}\) While the region stretched across county boundaries, none of the constituent counties were covered in their entirety, and the boundary stretched into small parts of Somerset, Wiltshire, Berkshire and Surrey.\(^ {18}\) This was the compromise that Southern Television had to accommodate; they had to find a mode of broadcasting that resonated as much with the residents of the Isle of Wight as the Surrey residents just south of London.

The region was further complicated by the addition of the South East in 1961 (Fig. 1). The ITA had designated this area for inclusion in the Southern contract since before opening the contract to applications, but without a transmitter in the South East peninsula the Chillerton Down signal was not strong enough to reach it. Interestingly, though the region had always been conceived of as the South and the South East, it was never really considered a homogenous whole. The distinction between these two sub-regions was emphasised by the building of a separate, smaller station in Dover. This secondary station was used by Southern as an occasional venue for broadcasts just for the South East sub-area of Southern’s region. For now let it be understood that Southern Television had to negotiate a compromise between finding a coherent regional “voice” for the channel, and representing the real physical area as it was presented to them. Essentially, the station had little to no authority over its regional boundary; the area was defined by the scope of the relay stations, which were in turn owned by the ITA.\(^ {19}\)

The second map (Fig. 2) is a close up detailing the crossover area between the South and South East divisions of Southern Television in and around West Sussex. The dotted line represents the areas in Hampshire, Berkshire, Sussex and Surrey where the broadcast area coincided with the London region. Residents in these areas could tune their television sets to either the London signal or the Southern Television signal. The executive of Southern were aware of this, and though these areas were not a priority for representation – they contained only 3% of the area’s population – it was a point of pride for the company when a majority of viewers chose their regional service over the London one, even though the central London contract was such that their focus skewed toward national representation.\(^ {20}\) These areas were the most difficult to incorporate into


\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Television Act 1954.

a wider regional narrative. In terms of identity, they straddled the boundary between the South and South East, between the coast and central England. In terms of practicality, they lay the furthest away from either the Southampton or Dover studio, and were thus the furthest to reach, both physically and metaphorically. They were also areas with the most commercial competition; in 1964 Southern’s Programme Controller, Berkeley Smith, commented that the “long avaricious arms of B.B.C.2 are already stretching down into Kent”, adding to the pressure of wanting to draw audiences away from the company’s London ITV counterpart. Once the Southern Television region was completed in the early 1960s, the company began systematically measuring the demographics of its region, with an eye to reaching out beyond Southampton and Dover.

Figure 2 - Close-up of Southern England map, with hand drawn boundaries of the South Eastern Gas Board, the Southern Gas Board and Southern Television

2. THE METRICS OF ANALYSIS

Across the years Southern employed several methods for gauging how they represented the region. Coverage analysis was carried out regularly on broadcast outputs, though it is plain that finding the right metric to quantify representation was a recurring issue. In the early 1960s, the coverage analysis division – headed by Michael Crawford – instigated a practice of recording a tally of “programme mentions” in their broadcasts each quarter. Crawford defined a programme mention as a mention of

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any item or performer, in a local programme, likely to interest viewers in a particular area. The total mentions for each area, over a 16 week period, is then expressed as a share of 1.000 to compare the coverage with the population share per 1000 for the same area.\(^{22}\)

Initially, Crawford’s department split Southern Television’s broadcast area into 50 subdivisions. The share of the area’s population was expressed as a share per 1.000 occupants; so, out of 1.000 residents in Southern’s area, 55 were said to live in Southampton – so the population share for Southampton stood at 55. Equally, in the second quarter of 1961 (when these records began), out of 1.000 programme mentions, 96 of those mentions pertained to an item or performer from Southampton.\(^{23}\) By comparing the share of programme mentions to the share of population in each subdivision of Southern’s area, the company could measure which areas were overrepresented, and which were underrepresented. Because Southampton had a greater share of programme mentions than it had a share of the populace, it could be described as overrepresented.

The figures were circulated among all the top-level executives of the company, in order to raise awareness of those areas that were not being represented as often as they should.\(^{24}\) There is no evidence that the mentions directly influenced the planning and production of programmes – rather, they were there to keep the executives aware and to caution against disproportionate representation. There is, however, at least some evidence that these figures were heeded, or considered, by those responsible for producing programmes. In a memo to Chief Executive David Wilson, dated 10\(^{\text{th}}\) January 1962, L.V. Barnett displayed an understanding of how the figures could be used to positively impact viewership across the region at large:

I do not know if you have yet had time to study carefully the programme coverage analysis distributed by Michael Crawford but it occurs to me to say that, although I appreciate programming cannot be carried out on a formula based on populations, there are quite clearly some areas where we are not throwing in sufficient weight and where, by adding to the effort, we might be able to improve viewership.\(^{25}\)

Barnett’s memo suggests that content analysis was not only useful for estimating how fair the representation of the region was, but also offered the chance to improve the commercial success of the channel by appealing to all the constituent areas of the region. However, despite the effort to encourage fairness, and arguments for its necessity beyond appeasing the ITA, the actual improvement in representation was negligible. Two years after he first flagged up the numbers to Wilson, Barnett seemed to repeat himself when noting that “the latest report shows a lack of balance in both directions in certain areas”. Almost a year after that, another memo from Barnett stated that “we are falling down badly on coverage of the overlap areas”.\(^{26}\) The “overlap” areas Barnett referred to were those areas the crossed the boundary into the London contract area, and that lay between the South and South East hubs. Again, Barnett is implying that the issue of regional representation had ramifications for the commercial viability of the channel,

\(^{22}\) Crawford M., memo to Southern Television’s executive, 3 January 1962, Southern Television collection, box 128, item 509, Berkhamsted: BFI National Archive.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) The copies of the programme mentions held at the BFI National Archive (Southern Television collection, 128: 509) are the copies sent to L.V. Barnett, and include carbon copies of memos written by Barnett to the Chief Executive, C.D. Wilson, in response to the mentions.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) Ibid.
only this time the commercial skew is made explicit by noting the direct competition posed by an opposing ITV company.

As Barnett’s memoranda indicate, generally speaking Southern Television were over-representing the coastal metropolitan areas where their operations were based, and largely ignoring the suburbs and towns that lay further inland. The table below depicts the most overrepresented areas as defined by the research department at Southern Television between 1961 and the end of 1963, as well as the proportion of programme mentions afforded them (Fig. 3). Below that table are the most under-represented areas from the same time period (Fig. 4).

Figure 3 - Table showing the difference between the share of programme mentions and population share of subareas with the Southern Television area, 1961-1963

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population share per 1,000</th>
<th>Ave. programme mentions, 1961-1963</th>
<th>Differential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dover</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>+40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southampton</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>+32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsgate</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>+19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bournemouth/Wareham</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>+19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folkestone</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>+16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unsurprisingly, given that Dover and Southampton were the sites of Southern Television studios, those areas were the most overexposed in the 1960s. In particular, Dover’s spot at the top of the table is stark because, relatively speaking, Dover represented barely more than 1% of Southern’s consumer base, and its overexposure therefore threatened to annoy residents of other, more populous areas in the South East peninsula. For example, Medway Towns had a differential of -14, despite a population share of 52, compared to Dover’s 12. In fact, Dover, its close neighbour Folkestone, and Ramsgate were some of the very few areas in South East that were overrepresented – most of those areas were in Hampshire, Dorset or West Sussex. One reason for this particular discrepancy could be the fact that the Dover branch of Southern Television only began operation in 1961, and as a consequence the station was only just getting to grips with this sudden expansion of remit. Either way, it was apparent that coverage was broadly centred around the Solent, and that incidents of interest happening in the immediate vicinity of Southern Television’s studios was dominant in the station’s output.

Interestingly, while all of the most overrepresented areas are on the coastline, three of the most underrepresented areas are also populous seaside areas of Fareham, Portsmouth ad Worthing, though the last of these towns is situation in the identified troublesome area between the South and South East. However, it is worth reiterating that these areas were not necessarily short on programme mentions, just that the mentions did not compare well proportionally to their share of the population. Even so, this demonstrates that there was a definite disparity between the towns where Southern had stationed its equipment and employees, compared to similar towns in which it had not. It is arguable

27 Ibid.
that Portsmouth, due to its proximity to Southampton, was often overlooked in favour of the immediately accessible area just outside the studio. Also, as Barnett said, the metrics were not a perfect measure of fairness in broadcasting, but they certainly indicated where the discrepancies lay. While Newbury and Shaftesbury were the least represented of all the inland areas, it is worth stating that nearly all the areas further inland had little to no programme mentions whatsoever.\footnote{Ibid.}

Figure 4 - Table showing the difference between the share of programme mentions and population share of subareas with the Southern Television area, 1961-1963

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population share per 1.000</th>
<th>Ave. programme mentions, 1961-1963</th>
<th>Differential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fareham/Havant</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portsmouth/Gosport</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlborough/Newbury</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthing</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherbourne/Shafesbury</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1964, the subdivisions were reorganised into 64 new subdivisions, making direct comparison tricky.\footnote{The reasons for the redefining of the subdivisions are not made clear in the documentation.} While Southampton and Dover were still overexposed on Southern Television, the Dover subdivision was expanded to include nearby Eastry, thus upping its population share and decreasing the degree of over-representation. Canterbury was a new addition to the top five, most likely due to regular religious broadcasts from Canterbury Cathedral. Otherwise, though the numbers had evened out, it was still evident that the same populous coastal areas near or equivalent to the studios had the lion’s share of coverage.

Figure 5 - Table showing the difference between the share of programme mentions and population share of subareas with the Southern Television area, 1964-1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population share per 1.000</th>
<th>Ave. programme mentions, 1964-1969</th>
<th>Differential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Margate/Ramsgate/Broadstairs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>+29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southampton</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>+27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury, Bridge Blean</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>+23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dover M.B. &amp; R.D., Eastry</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>+22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folkestone, Elham, Hythe, New Romney, Lydd, Romney Marsh</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>+20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6 - Table showing the difference between the share of programme mentions and population share of subareas with the Southern Television area, 1964-1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population share per 1,000</th>
<th>Ave. programme mentions, 1964-1969</th>
<th>Differential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sevenoaks R.D., Malling</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havant, Waterloo</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthing M.B. &amp; R.D.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Grinstead, Uckfield, Cuckfield R.D.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frome U.D. &amp; R.D., Wincanton, Mere, Tisbury</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last table (Fig. 6) also demonstrates the difficulty Southern had in using these metrics; while Portsmouth was no longer in the top five underrepresented areas, its close inland neighbours of Havant and Waterloo were. Worthing remained in limbo between Southern’s two sub-regions. Sevenoaks, East Grinstead and Frome all lay right on the periphery of Southern’s area in Kent, East Sussex and Somerset, respectively. It would seem that while Southern made mention of representing the entire region fairly, a strong regional narrative was appearing which favoured the coastal border over the inland border.

The key consideration here is that while the numbers are not directly comparable, it is evident that throughout the 1960s Southern Television were not only aware of the need to represent other places in the broadcast area – as both a stipulation of their contract and a strategy for maximising viewership – the company was also concerned with defining and quantifying that representation in a manner that was workable and attainable. While members of the company identify the limitations of “programme mentions” as gauge of progress, they also accepted that on some level they could not satisfactorily represent everyone in the four counties, because there was no homogenous personality from which to draw. Yet the incorporation of “mentions” of all the areas in their region in programming also indicates that the station was concerned with getting out into the field and diversifying the landscape broadcast on their channel. These figures provide evidence of the intent of representing the entirety of the region.

3. CONCLUSION

It could be argued that any and all of Southern Television’s attempts to satisfy the ITA’s requirement for regional representation were done in vain. As suggested in the introduction of this piece, it is impossible to define the “taste and outlook” of a region so sparse and fragmented\(^30\). When the physical geography of the region is taken into account, the nebulous notion of regional identity becomes ever more apparent. It is also arguable that these tenuous values of the ITV network, enshrined in the Television Act of 1954 and mandated by the ITA, said more about Britain’s desire to avoid

\(^30\) Television Act 1954.
repeating the centralised, seemingly London-centric structure of the BBC\(^{31}\). Even so, the fact was that all the franchise companies were reliant on the ITA, and had to adhere to the rules governing it.

In the process of appeasing its regulator – and also of creating a commercially viable channel – Southern Television evidently became concerned with understanding and measuring the scope of its region. While an analysis of regional programmes would demonstrate the result of this endeavour, it would not necessarily illuminate the company’s own consideration of its peculiar region. What these maps and figures show is that Southern Television was not only reliant on the figurative, aesthetic or emotive symbols that characterised and illustrated the region; the company also went through a pragmatic and systematic process of mapping and quantifying the region. In a way, the company was attempting to define itself and measure itself as a regional alongside producing programmes and schedules for regional broadcasting. The evidence from this mapping process arguably reinforces the argument that the incidental nature of ITV regions problematised the initial drive toward a regional service. In fact, the figures produced by Southern suggests that the company were not able to present an all-encompassing identity of the South and South East.

Of course, if Southern Television did not have an entirely satisfying way to define and monitor its success as a regional television provider, then the next logical step is to define what it produced in its stead. This is where an analysis of its programmes, schedules, reports and reception becomes necessary. Whether or not it was able to reconcile its boundaries with its identity, Southern Television had to produce a certain amount of programming that catered specifically to its local audience. The fact that Southern retained its contract up until 1981 suggests that the regional narrative it managed to create across the borders of its wide, fragmented area was at least successful enough by the ITA’s standard for local service. However, any such analysis of its regional narrative should be predicated on an understanding of the reality of being an ITV region, rather than the ideals of regional identity that were aspired to during the emergence of independent television in Britain.

**SUMMARY**

Discussions of the emergence of ITV in the UK have largely focused on the national significance of commercial broadcasting. The regional franchise model of the ITV network – and its relation to identity – has been explored but the prevailing discourse has tended towards analysis of the national social and institutional context. However, one of the most interesting presumptions at the time of the 1954 Television Act (and, by association, subsequent historical accounts) is that the regional franchises had a pre-existing, homogenous identity. This article questions that presumption, using Southern Television as a case study. Through an analysis of selected documents from the company’s archive, including maps, marketing and memos, this article shows that Southern was engaged in a process of assessing, evaluating and characterising the South and South East region that it was bound to represent. This analysis reveals that the company were ultimately unable to reconcile the wide geographical area and diverse demographics of its region, and suggests that the company had to use other means to prove to the Independent Television Authority (ITA) that it was adhering to the regional agenda peculiar to the ITV network. As part of a larger extended study of Southern Television and its regional identity, this article establishes the local context of the company’s franchise within the national structures of the ITV network.

RIASSUNTO

Le discussioni sulla nascita di ITV in Gran Bretagna si sono in gran parte concentrate sul significato nazionale del broadcasting commerciale. Il modello di *franchise* regionale del network ITV – e la sua relazione con le varie identità – è stato esplorato, ma le analisi prevalenti si sono dedicate al contesto sociale e istituzionale nazionale. In ogni caso, una delle presupposizioni ai tempi del Television Act del 1954 (e, per associazione, dei resoconti storici seguenti) è che i *franchise* regionali avessero una pre-esistente identità omogenea. Il saggio mette in discussione questo assunto, usando come caso la Southern Television. Mediante un’analisi di documenti selezionati nell’archivio dell’impresa, tra cui mappe, documenti di marketing e annotazioni, il saggio mostra che la tv fu coinvolta in un processo di definizione, valutazione e caratterizzazione della regione del Sud e Sud-Est che doveva rappresentare. L’analisi svela che la televisione non è stata capace di conciliare l’estesa area geografica e i vari pubblici della sua regione, e suggerisce che dovette ricorrere ad altri mezzi per dimostrare alla Independent Television Authority (ITA) che stava comunque perseguendo l’agenda regionale tipica di ITV. Parte di uno studio più ampio sulla Southern Television e sulla sua identità regionale, il contributo fissa il contesto locale del *franchise* dell’azienda televisiva entro le strutture nazionali del network ITV.