THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF TELEVISION IN SWITZERLAND
A matter of neighbours

Over time, commercial television has become widespread throughout Europe. It has affected national TV markets in different ways, including the commercialization of public service broadcasters that lost their monopoly position to the internationalization of the market, with international media firms now playing an active role. The important phenomenon of commercial TV has implications not only on market structure but also on audiences: in fact, in the majority of countries in Europe, commercial television has attained a high degree of success with audiences, playing an important role in entertainment as well as in other genres.

Apart from these developments, there is an interesting case that diverges from the trend: Switzerland, where the national television landscape has not undergone a process of commercialization even though there are several commercial players in the market.

The marginal role played by the Swiss commercial broadcasters is explained on the one hand by the structure of the country, where the media market is not national but rather regional due to the division of Switzerland into linguistic regions. On the other hand, the marginal role of Swiss commercial broadcasters can be explained on the basis of the strong role of the public service broadcaster (currently and historically) and of commercial broadcasters from neighbouring countries (Italy, France, Germany and Austria).

In order to deepen an understanding of the role of Swiss commercial broadcasters and the reasons for their marginality, this paper will present the Swiss television market and discuss Swiss media policy and regulation. In explaining why the Swiss television landscape has not entered a commercialisation process, the authors also highlight the consequences of “non-commercialisation” and the implications for other television operators in Switzerland, in particular for the public service broadcaster.

1. THE SWISS TELEVISION MARKET

The history of Swiss television industry is characterized by the challenging relationship between commercial and public service broadcasters. In the early days, the market had a monopolistic structure, in which the public service broadcaster SRG SSR, founded in 1931, competed only with foreign broadcasters. No national (or regional) private offering existed until the second half of the 1970s, when the first national pirate broadcaster was launched. The dual television system began in 1982, when a decree was issued. The debates on the possibility of ending the monopolistic structure of SRG SSR began in 1980, following numerous requests for private local television. With an
ad hoc decree, the government gave the concession to private broadcasters to transmit for a trial period of five years, resulting in the creation of five Swiss commercial broadcasters. The reinforcement of a regulated and consolidated television industry happened in the ’90s, with the coming into force in 1991 of the Federal Act on Radio and Television (RTVA), which strengthened public service broadcasting and provided additional flexibility to private broadcasters. One of the issues regulated by the RTVA was and is the licence fee. Today, as stated in the updated version of the RTVA, “anyone who has a device suitable for the reception of radio and television programme services (a receiver) that is ready for or in operation must pay a reception fee. The Federal Council determines which categories of equipment are deemed to be suitable for reception and determines in particular the conditions under which equipment which is also suitable for other applications (multi-functional devices) is subject to the obligation to pay fees and to notify” (Art. 68 § 1).

The licence fee collection raised 1.3 billion Swiss francs (1.1 billion euros) in 2011. Most of the fee revenue finances the public service broadcaster; in 2011, 91% of the total (1.175 million CHF / 972 million euros) went to SRG SSR. Of the remainder, about 4% went to private radio and television stations (54 million CHF / 45 million euros), another 4% to the collection agency (55 million CHF / 45 million euros), and the residual 1% was divided between new technology (0.5 million CHF / 0.4 million euros), the Federal Office of Communications (Ofcom) (4 million CHF / 3.3 million euros) and audience research commissioned by Ofcom (2.5 million CHF / 2.1 million euros).

The Swiss television market has developed characteristics peculiar to the features of Switzerland itself. Switzerland has three main official languages (and in total four national ones) and is divided largely into three main regions: the German, the French and the Italian speaking parts, plus a few areas within the regions in which the fourth language, Romansch, is spoken. This internal partitioning is reflected in the contemporary media market, strongly language-linked and fragmented, including the television market as well.

The television market in the three regions presents four common traits: the key role of the public service broadcaster, the marginal role of commercial broadcasters, the important presence of foreign channels and the peculiarities of signal distribution

Let us begin with the important role of the public service broadcaster. SRG SSR reflects Swiss fragmentation: it is made up of six subsidiaries and five Enterprise Units, which work separately in the different languages and produce different content. SRG SSR operates 18 radio stations and seven television channels, each of which holds a prominent position in their respective markets in all regions (market share data are divided according to region). The television market shares are similar: 35,7% (43,2% in prime time) in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland; 28,8% (35,4% in prime time) in the French-speaking part of Switzerland; and 30,5% (38,5% in prime time) in the


The Federal Act on Radio and Television (RTVA) is available in English at http://www.admin.ch/ch/e/rs/7/784.40.en.pdf; English is not an official language of the Swiss Confederation. The translation is provided for information purposes only and has no legal force.

German-speaking part of Switzerland, SRG SSR is the seventh-largest European public television company by revenue, with around 1.3 billion Euro in revenue in 2010. Of these revenues, 70% were derived from license fees and 30% from advertising.

A second important common trait is the marginal role of Swiss commercial broadcasters, which operate at regional or sub-regional levels. Regulated by the Federal Office of Communication, in Switzerland there are:

- thirteen regional broadcasters (with a proportion of licence fees), with the concession to operate in a specific coverage area (smaller than a linguistic region);
- one regional-language TV station, TVM3, with the concession to broadcast through the entire French-speaking area; and
- 104 notified TV programme services, which can operate without a concession and can broadcast via internet, cable networks, satellite or digital platforms.

The number of the commercial broadcasters and their significance in the TV industry differ in the three main regions.

The Italian-speaking part of Switzerland is characterized by the presence of a unique Swiss commercial broadcaster, TeleTicino, with a small market share, 1.5% over 24 hours, that slightly increases to 1.8% in prime time and reaches 2% (over 24 hours) in relation to its coverage area.

The main French-language commercial broadcasters have an aggregate market share of 1.1% (over 24 hours and in prime time) in the French-speaking territories. The main channels are the regional Canal Alpha, la télé, Léman bleu, Canal 9 and Telebilingue (the latter two broadcasting in both French and German). Considering the respective coverage area in which each broadcaster is allowed to operate, their market shares increase slightly. In fact, Canal Alpha has 0.6% market share, la télé 0.4%, Léman bleu 0.6%, Canal 9 1.3% and Telebilingue 1.5% (the two bilingual channels operate on a larger coverage area). Moreover, there is TVM3, the unique regional language TV station in Switzerland, operating in French and broadcasting its programmes throughout the entire French-speaking area, with 0.2% of the market share. Finally, there are also some notified television programme services with market shares so low as not to be registered in the audience measurement with the exception of Rouge TV, at 0.1%.

The Swiss commercial broadcasters active in the German-speaking part have an aggregate market share of 6.6% (over 24 hours and in prime time). As for the other linguistic areas, the market shares correlate directly to the respective coverage area. The main operators are seven regional broadcasters in German: Tele 1 (1.3%), Tele M1 (1.4%), Tele Ostschweiz (1.1%), Tele Top (0.3%), TeleBärn (1%), TeleBasel (1.8%) and TeleSüdostschweiz (0.4%); the bilingual regional broadcaster Canal 9 and TeleBilingue; several notified television programme services, whose market shares are too low to register in the audience measurement except for 3 Plus with 2.3%, Nickelodeon Schweiz with 2%, and TeleZüri with 4.2% of market share in the city of Zurich and the Zurich metropolitan area.

The main financing source of Swiss commercial broadcasters is advertising. If we
consider the ads revenues of the thirteen regional commercial broadcasters in 2010, spitted into advertising revenues and sponsoring revenues, we can see that the total amount is 80.5 million Swiss francs (about 66 million euros). As shown in table 1, at the first rank we can find Tele M1, followed by TeleTop (both channels broadcasted in the German-speaking part of Switzerland).

Table 1 - Advertising and sponsoring revenues of Swiss commercial broadcasters (2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Advertising*</th>
<th>Sponsoring*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tele 1</td>
<td>2.477,196</td>
<td>2.223,726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canal 9</td>
<td>791,216</td>
<td>missing value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canal Alpha</td>
<td>1.357,262</td>
<td>429,093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La telé</td>
<td>1.128,552</td>
<td>36,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemann Bleu</td>
<td>1.257,440</td>
<td>381,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tele M1</td>
<td>33.455,228</td>
<td>1.582,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tele Ostschweiz</td>
<td>835,182</td>
<td>344,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tele Top</td>
<td>19.900,689</td>
<td>810,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TeleBärn</td>
<td>3.784,514</td>
<td>missing value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TeleBasel</td>
<td>2.089,660</td>
<td>1.303,734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TeleBielingue</td>
<td>942,782</td>
<td>896,764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TeleSüdostschweiz</td>
<td>1.448,825</td>
<td>278,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TeleTicino</td>
<td>1.578,834</td>
<td>1.170,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71.047,380</td>
<td>9.458,540</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Values in Swiss francs.

Source: own elaboration from the fact sheet of each broadcaster, available at www.ufcom.ch.

As discussed by Grossenbacher, Hüppin and Neiger, amendments to the law caused revenues to increase and prompted the commercial television industry to recover from the economic crisis.

The third important unifying trait of the Swiss TV market is the strong presence of foreign channels, in particular channels from neighbouring countries. The relationship between the Swiss TV industry and its neighbours is indicated in the market share data.

In the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, commercial and public service channels from Italy have a combined market share of 44.6% (decreasing to 39.7% in prime time), and if we add other foreign channels, the market share of non-Swiss channels totals 62.9% (decreasing to 54.9% in prime time). The biggest market shares are those

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of the Italian public service broadcaster Rai 1 (9.6% and 7.7% in prime time) and the Italian commercial broadcaster Canale 5 (8.6% and 7.4%, respectively).

In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, German and Austrian channels, plus other foreign channels, command market share of 63% (decreasing to 54.9% in prime time), and in particular the German commercial broadcaster RTL has 8.5% (7.3% in prime time) and the German public service ARD has 5.1% (5.3% in prime time).

In the French-speaking part of Switzerland the non-Swiss channels broadcasting (mainly) in French have aggregate market share of 69.9% (decreasing to 63.4% in prime time), and in particular the commercial French channel TF1 has 13.4% (12.4% prime time) and M6 9.7% (10.2% prime time).

The last common feature of the Swiss television industry refers to the TV platforms. Historically, in particular due to the topography of the country, cable has been the main means of diffusion of the TV signal and, even though it registered a decrease in recent years, is still preferred by about 68% of the Swiss households9. Cable dominates over terrestrial broadcasting: in fact, the decrease in cable subscribers corresponds to a considerable growth of IPTV users, and DTT did not record any increase10. This results in access to wider television offerings because cable TV provides a wider range of foreign channels than does broadcast TV.

With regard to DTT, in Switzerland the analogue switch-off was completed quickly given the low penetration of terrestrial television. The low penetration is also a cause of the lack of development of digital native channels. Therefore, the opportunity to have a wide range of (foreign) television channels for Swiss people is offered by other television distribution platforms, like IPTV. The main operator is Swisscom TV, provided by the TLC operator Swisscom with 421,000 subscribers in 2011. Another popular way to watch TV in Switzerland is through internet browsers, relying on systems such as Zattoo and Wilmaa. These platforms make it possible to watch live TV on computers with a broadband connection (both as a web site or by use of dedicated player software), and they offer about 60 channels (from Switzerland and abroad) legally and free of charge.

If we consider the concentration level of the market in the last ten years we can see that the market share of SRG SSR tends to be around 1/3 of the total audience, a little more in the German and Italian parts of Switzerland and a little less in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. We can also confirm the important role of the TV channels from neighbouring countries.

The data suggest that concentration is higher in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. The C4 ratio for 2008 was 84.8%, whereas for the other Swiss regions it was around 70%. This higher concentration for the Italian-speaking region is linked to the large market shares of the public Italian channels and of the channels owned by Mediaset (Canale 5, Italia 1 and Rete 4).

9 In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, among those households with at least one TV set, 76% have cable (of which 49% digital); 16% satellite (67% digital); 17% IPTV and 5% DTT. In the French-speaking part: 66% cable (60% digital); 14% satellite (69% digital); 27% IPTV and 12% DTT. In the Italian-speaking part: 61% (42% digital), 26% satellite (70% digital); 25% IPTV and 15% DTT. For all regions, the total percentage exceeds 100% because some households have more than one platform. Source: Mediapulse.

10 The changes recorded in the last three years (2009-2011) are significant. In fact, in the German-speaking part of Switzerland: cable decreased from 80% (in 2009) to 76% (in 2011); satellite decreased from 18% to 16%; IPTV has grown from 9% to 17% and DTT unchanged at 5%. In the French-speaking part: cable from 72% to 66%; satellite from 16% to 14%; IPTV from 11% to 27%; and DTT from 15% to 12%. In the Italian-speaking part: cable from 68% to 61%; satellite from 25% to 26%; IPTV from 9% to 25%; and DTT from 16% to 15%. Source: Mediapulse.
If we consider Switzerland as a whole the concentration is low in particular because of the accessibility of many foreign channels (in various languages)\textsuperscript{11}.

As we have noted, the Swiss television market is not a single national market, but instead three distinct ones in which different actors operate. In this paper we draw example from the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, since it tends to be underrepresented in scientific research and in publications, and we also discuss it in relation with Italy, which is the national context of reference of this journal\textsuperscript{12}.

In the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, the offer available to the viewers is based on: two television channels, La1 and La2, broadcasted in Italian by the regional Enterprise Unit of the public service broadcaster SRG SSR, named RSI; other SRG SSR channels in French and German; the Swiss commercial broadcaster TeleTicino; several channels of Rai (the Italian PSB), Mediaset and the two La7’s channels (commercial Italian broadcasters); a few Italian commercial DTT channels and some regional channels from Northern Italy, plus many other international channels.

The Italian television networks play a central role in the television landscape of the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland for several reasons in this context. On the one hand there are historical factors, going back to the legal reforms of 1980 and also strongly linked to the Swiss public service broadcaster.

The possibility of receiving television programming from Italy in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland is normal, if not essential, and is stipulated in international agreements. As Mäusli\textsuperscript{13} argues, before the birth of the RSI, the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland already had among the highest rates of television consumption in Switzerland, mainly of the programmes offered by Rai. Even with the advent of RSI, the presence of Italian television programmes in the Italian-speaking territory of Switzerland was never called into question, and indeed the Swiss broadcaster explicitly arranged its schedule to complement the schedule of broadcasters in Italy, focusing on a differentiation between information and documentary, and intentionally renouncing certain types of entertainment production. As Hungerbühler\textsuperscript{14} states, at the beginning of the 1980s, RSI invested in its programming, aiming at their quality especially with regard to their content. The main strategy focused on information and documentaries, seeking not to compete with Italy in the entertainment area.

In addition to historical factors, other factors can be found in the language and in the peculiar characteristics of Rai and Mediaset\textsuperscript{15}. The language issue is self-evident, since the limited number of Swiss TV programmes in Italian makes Italian channels attractive to the Italian-speaking audience in this area. Concerning Rai and Mediaset,

\textsuperscript{14} Hungerbühler R., “Dall’allentamento del monopolio alla sfida della convergenza (1982-2008)”, in \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{15} Cola M., Colapinto C., Prario B., Richeri G., \textit{Il pubblico delle emittenti televisive e radiofoniche private in Ticino. Perché la gente le guarda e le ascolta e perché non le guarda e non le ascolta}, Report for Swiss Federal Office of Communication (Ofcom), 2008.
as Richeri notes\textsuperscript{16}, the two Italians oligopolists operate in a market which is on the one hand more competitive and much more extensive and rich, and on the other hand subject to less restrictive programming rules, with regard to both the PSB and commercial TV.

2. THE MAIN REGULATION ISSUES OF COMMERCIAL TELEVISION

The revised Federal Radio and Television Act (RTVA), which was adopted by the Swiss Parliament in 2006 and entered into force in April 2007, provides the financial support generated by the licence fee not only to the Public Service Broadcaster but also to private broadcasters. As stated in Art. 38 § 1:

\textit{Licences with a performance mandate and fee-splitting (fee-splitting licences) may be awarded to broadcasters of local-regional programme services which:}

\begin{itemize}
  \item[a)] provide to an area that has no adequate financing possibilities for radio and television programme services which take account of local or regional particularities by providing comprehensive information, particularly on political, economic and social matters and which contribute to the development of cultural life in the coverage area;
  \item[b)] contribute to the fulfilment of the mandate under the Federal Constitution in urban areas by means of complementary, non-profit-oriented radio programme services.
\end{itemize}

In the original formulation, the “fee-splitting licences give an entitlement to broadcast the programme service within a specific coverage area (right of access) and to a proportion of the revenue from reception fees” (Art. 2), allowing only “one fee-splitting licence is awarded for each coverage area”\textsuperscript{17} (Art. 3). But, as recently announced by the Ofcom (December 2012), regional television programme services should be available throughout Switzerland. “Licensed regional TV stations should in the future be able to transmit their programme services digitally outside of their regional coverage areas. The public would thereby have simple access to the programme services via cable TV or on the Internet”. Ofcom has launched a public consultation on this project.

The LRTV states that the Federal Council may provide exemptions from the limitation on transmission in the coverage area, and it will allow regional television stations owning a licence with a performance mandate to broadcast their programmes outside of their coverage area digitally, on cable networks and online. The audience will be able to more easily access these programmes, which significantly contributed to the shaping of public opinion.

Despite fee-splitting, the Swiss public service broadcaster still receives the major-


\textsuperscript{17} Art. 39 Coverage areas. 1. After consultation with the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Council determines the number and extent of the coverage in which fee-splitting licenses are awarded, as well as the technical means of broadcasting in the coverage area concerned. When it does so, it distinguishes between coverage areas for radio and for television. 2. Coverage areas in accordance with Article 38 paragraph 1 letter a must be defined so that: a. they constitute a political and geographical unit or are marked by especially close cultural or economic contacts; and b. their existing financing possibilities together with an appropriate proportion of the revenue from reception fees allow the broadcaster to fulfil its performance mandate. 3. Exceptions may be made for regional programme services which are broadcast in at least two national languages in a multilingual area. 4. The number and extent of the coverage areas are examined by the Federal Council periodically but after ten years at the latest. The Department may make minor adjustments to the extent. 5. Before defining the coverage areas and before significant changes, the cantons and the licensed broadcasters directly concerned shall be consulted.
ity of license fee revenue. In fact, the share of the fees amounts to “4 per cent of the revenue from television reception fees for fee-splitting television broadcasters” (Art. 40). This amount can of course vary with the reception fee itself, the number of persons obliged to pay fees, and up to 70% of the operating costs of an individual broadcaster (Art. 40 RTVA and Art. 39 ORTV).

What are the implications of fee-splitting for a private broadcaster? Besides the obvious possibility to benefit financially (very important in the context of the small size of these companies, their small catchment areas and limited funding opportunities), there are also several obligations.

Broadcasters which possess a fee-splitting licence must fulfil the performance mandate defined in the licence. In order to ensure the fulfilment of the performance mandate and of independent programme production, the Federal Council [...] may oblige the broadcasters to produce a mission statement and editorial statutes (Art. 41 § 1).

Moreover, the broadcasters must use the financial resources economically and in accordance with the regulations, and the distribution of profits is not permitted (Art. 41 § 2). Lastly, “the licensee shall submit the accounts to the Federal Office on an annual basis” (Art. 42 § 1).

3. WHAT DO THE PRIVATE BROADCASTERS LOOK LIKE?

In order to create a general picture of the Swiss private broadcasters, we can consider the genres that are part of their schedules. As Bonfadelli and Fretwurst have observed, the programming created by the Swiss commercial broadcasters is mainly composed of news, political news magazines, programmes on cultural and social issues, talk shows, programmes of sport, and weather emissions. Fiction, cartoons and reality shows are uncommon.

A thorough analysis of the schedules carried out during autumn 2010 and spring 2011 observed that the Swiss commercial broadcasters transmit a weekly average between 1.5 (TeleSüdostschweiz, Kanal 9) and 9 (TeleTicino) hours of news magazines and political debates. Furthermore, the regional news (excluding sporting news, weather forecasts and business and financial news) varies weekly between 1 (Canal 9, Kanal 9) and 2.5 hours (TeleTicino, TeleBasel) and in some cases up to 3 hours (TeleBielingue, which sometimes transmits the same programme in two languages, and Tele Top, which has different regional sections). The news programmes often deal with national and local affairs.

Another important issue is the regionality of the news: 94% of the news has an explicit link to the regional reality. In the analysed period Léman bleu, la télé, Kanal 9, Kanal 9,
Canal Alpha, TeleBielingue and TeleBasel had the highest values, with roughly 100% of regional links, while TeleBärn and Tele M1 had the lowest values.

Kolb and Schwotzer\(^{22}\) also observed the important role of the revenues deriving from licence fees. In 2011 there was an increase in the amount of licence fees directed to commercial broadcasters, and this increase allowed these broadcasters to improve and diversify their own offerings.

The programmes of commercial broadcasters are almost entirely self-produced, with rare exceptions of co-productions. For financial reasons, commercial broadcasters cannot buy the broadcast rights for expensive products (such as mainstream films and TV series) or global TV formats (such as game and reality shows), and thus, as already shown above, they are not part of their scheduling. Moreover, many self-produced programmes are broadcast multiple times. Given the cost of broadcast rights often being prohibitively high for small Swiss private broadcasters, these broadcasters devoted limited airtime to first-runs for fiction and sport programmes in 2011\(^{23}\). These companies performed better in the fields of information (quite close to SRG SSR) and entertainment, a genre in which private broadcasters dedicated more airtime to first-runs than did SRG SSR. Information and entertainment programming are usually self-produced by small private broadcasters. These are genres in which it is much harder for them to buy formats and programmes, but affordable to produce news programmes and entertainment such as quiz shows and talk shows.

If we consider the total share of first-runs and reruns, a distinction between SRG SSR and the private broadcasters becomes evident\(^{24}\). The public service broadcaster’s programming is comprised of 41% first-runs and 59% reruns, whereas the private companies broadcast only 29% first-runs and 71% reruns. Particularly significant is the difference in the fields of information and current affairs (38% first-runs for SRG SSR and 11% for private broadcasters) and sport (59% first-runs for SGR SSR and 12% for private broadcasters), while entertainment is roughly the same (42% of first-runs for SRG SSR and 41% for private broadcasters).

4. THE NON-COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE TELEVISION MARKET: CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Since the inception of the Swiss television system, Swiss federalism has contributed indirectly to restrain the proliferation of commercial television.

To summarise the arguments presented in the paper, we can state that the Swiss commercial broadcasters active in the country have three main characteristics in common: the small scope of the company, the small catchment areas, and, despite fee-splitting revenues, limited funding opportunities to produce and buy programmes which attract mass audiences. The Swiss television market is characterised by two main elements: on the one hand the presence of the Swiss public service broadcaster alongside operators from other countries; on the other hand small geographic areas with little chance of attracting investment and therefore little means to produce attractive programmes. In consequence, these two characteristics shape a market where, the Swiss television is not commercialised, the public service broadcaster remains strong, and

\(^{22}\) Ibid.


\(^{24}\) Ibid.
commercial broadcasters have a marginal role and in many regards exhibit the characteristics of public service.

As discussed, historical and social factors and the characteristics of the Swiss television market have influenced broadcasting and contributed not only to the marginal role played by the Swiss commercial broadcasters, but also to the “non-commercialization” of Swiss television in general. Taking once again as example the increasingly competitive media environment of the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, the public service broadcaster RSI has long avoided investing in entertainment and fiction, in particular because the region did not offer sufficient resources for satisfactory productions. The light entertainment culture was lacking, as were cabaret and variety shows and their respective professional resources. There was also the absence of a star system, of a pool of show business professionals and writers focused on working for television. As Hungerbühler\textsuperscript{25} has noted in his interview with Dino Balestra, CEO of RSI, for many years the motto of RSI was, “Do not ape the Italians”. This took into account the fact that the typically Italian “exhibitionistic-voyeuristic relationship” between television and its viewers had no corresponding tradition in the Italian-speaking Switzerland.

These are all crucial elements in the television market in the early 1980s, and these elements also highlight the conditions under which commercial television did (or had to) develop. It is likewise fundamental to mention that the geographical dimension of the territory considered (mainly constituted by the canton of Ticino) is very small, having approximately 266,000 permanent residents in 1980, of whom 83.5\% were native Italian speakers. In 1990 there were approximately 287,000 permanent residents, of whom 81.5\% were native Italian speakers. In Switzerland on the whole, there were approximately 524,000 native Italian speakers in 1990 (decreasing to 471,000 in 2000)\textsuperscript{26}.

Another element useful in explaining the difficulties encountered by commercial broadcasters is the dominant role played by the public service broadcaster. As in many other European countries, the PSB has for many years been the dominant (and unique) point of reference for television. Its role was even greater in Switzerland, since it represented the national (and regional) voice for those viewers already tuned to Italian channels. Despite the fact that the Italian-speaking viewers in Switzerland in the early Eighties, in addition to SSR channels (in French and German), could receive two Italian channels by Rai television, as well as Capodistria and Montecarlo television, Hungerbühler\textsuperscript{27} argues that, until the mid-1980s, the word “television” meant “the” television, as a unique entity, in other words “your own” television – SRG SSR. Even though the television day did not begin until 4pm during the week, TSI was perceived as a reference point, as “our” television, offering an interpretation of what was happening in the world. Many in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland questioned this central position, but not, as in the other European countries, due to the arrival and proliferation of domestic commercial channels, but instead due to the advent of a growing number of foreign broadcasters.

At the time TSI’s competitors in the television market were Rai programmes, and increasingly Mediaset programmes. During the 1980s, the Swiss viewer could receive a growing number of television channels, thanks to the new distribution technologies including cable and satellite. The cable distribution of TV signals in the German-speaking

\textsuperscript{25} Hungerbühler, “Dall’allentamento del monopolio alla sfida della convergenza (1982-2008)”, 236.

\textsuperscript{26} Data compiled by the authors, based on official sources reported in Federal Statistical Office, The Statistical Encyclopedia. Accessed December 15, 2012.

\textsuperscript{27} Hungerbühler, “Dall’allentamento del monopolio alla sfida della convergenza (1982-2008)”. 
part of Switzerland in the mid-1980s brought Italian programming to 600,000 potential Italian-speaking viewers located on the other side of the Alps, which meant further competition for the TSI.

Although several commercial broadcasters hold a significant market share of the Swiss television market, the national market has not undergone a process of commercialization. This is the result of two major factors: on the one hand, as discussed above, the marginal role played by Swiss commercial broadcasters and their public service activity, and on the other the strongly sustained public service role played by SRG SSR.

Commercial broadcasters have acquired a sort of public service role in Switzerland by obtaining fee-licence splitting revenues, which impose on them the obligation to fulfill specific tasks, including ensuring the free formation of public opinion and the provision of information, education, entertainment and attention to the different regions of Switzerland.

With regard to public service broadcasting, as Hungerbühler notes, the RSI, as well as other channels of SRG SSR, has maintained a higher level of quality in its products as compared to private broadcasters. This results from the funding guaranteed by licence fees and from professionalism of the SRG SSR staff. The quality of programming, which remains a key characteristic of public service television in Switzerland, is expressed in a variety of ways, including the completeness of information, the respect for cultural diversity, the variety of genres, the quality of formats (also technical), and the professional performances. The gap between 1) the duty to fulfill the needs and requirements of the remit, and 2) the need to satisfy an audience courted by many competitors has widened since the 1990s.

At the present time, RSI continues to have an extensive offer of news, information and documentary. It is committed to remaining competitive with the Italian products in the field of purchased fictional programming. Lastly, it is maintaining its active cultural role in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, representing the professional pool of mass culture and acting to promote culture in many regards.

**SUMMARY**

Over time, commercial television has become widespread throughout Europe with implications on the market’s features and structure, and on audiences. Switzerland is a peculiar case, where the national television landscape has not undergone a process of commercialization even though there are several commercial players operating in the market (mainly originally from neighbouring countries). In order to deepen an understanding of the role of Swiss commercial broadcasters and the reasons for their marginality, this paper will present the Swiss television market and discuss Swiss media policy and regulation. It will also highlight the consequences of “non-commercialization” and the implications for other television operators in Switzerland, in particular for the public service broadcaster.

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28 Ibid., 234-235.
29 As expressed in Art. 38 § 1, 7.
31 Ibid., 261.
RIASSUNTO

Nel tempo, la televisione commerciale si è diffusa in tutta Europa, con implicazioni sia sulle caratteristiche e sulla struttura del mercato, sia sugli spettatori. La Svizzera è un caso particolare, in cui il paesaggio televisivo nazionale non è passato attraverso un processo di commercializzazione, anche se sono presenti numerosi operatori commerciali che operano nel mercato (in prevalenza, originari di Paesi confinanti). Per approfondire la comprensione del ruolo dei broadcaster commerciali svizzeri e discutere le ragioni di questa marginalità, il saggio presenta il mercato televisivo svizzero e discute le politiche mediatiche e la regolamentazione del paese. Il lavoro sottolinea inoltre le conseguenze della mancata commercializzazione e le implicazioni per gli altri operatori televisivi svizzeri, e in particolare per il servizio pubblico televisivo.