

Zeitschrift: Studies in Communication Sciences : journal of the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research

Herausgeber: Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research; Università della Svizzera italiana, Faculty of Communication Sciences

Band: 10 (2010)

Heft: 2

Artikel: Securing quality in public service television entertainment

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-790994>

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Full Papers

Studies in Communication Sciences 10/2 (2010) 7–25

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Securing Quality in Public Service Television Entertainment

The objective of this paper is twofold: First we discuss what can be regarded as quality in TV entertainment and how it's promoted or regulated by different media systems. We argue that the public value of entertainment depends on its quality. Thus, there should be a difference between entertainment programming in public service and commercial broadcasts. A brief review of discussion on media quality is provided in order to distinguish the perspective of recipients, producers and regulators. We find three different types of quality criteria: Minimum standards apply to all broadcasters, while Public Service Broadcasters (PSB) must address rather fuzzy additional criteria derived from their respective mandates. Small states impose additional criteria to protect their market and culture. To fulfill our second objective, we present findings from a comparative study in five European countries with different media systems about the role perception of TV commissioners in the production process of entertainment programming and their commitment to quality content. We find that commissioners at PSBs have generally internalized their programming mandates. They allocate higher importance to quality dimensions that address a public value, however, when it comes to tangible commissioning decisions they generally use the same decision criteria in the same ranking as their counterparts in commercial broadcasting.

Keywords: TV entertainment quality, public service broadcasting, regulation, TV commissioners.

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1. Introduction

For much of the 20th century, common wisdom had it that Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) provided quality content and commercial broadcasters focused on profitability rather than program quality. Some observers believed this held true for information as well as entertainment, yet others reasoned it would lead to task-sharing in a dual TV market, with PSBs focusing on information and education while commercial broadcasters focused on “cheap and dirty” entertainment. However, an increased need to justify license fees in a world of abundant content coupled with a general trend towards converged content diminished the separation between the two poles of the TV industry. Nevertheless, PSBs are asked to provide public value and must prove through elaborate tests that content proposals will actually contribute to a public value (Collins 2007; Kops 2009). Public value has become a politically charged concept, used by supporters of PSB to point out benefits and by critics to question merits. Although the term “public value” is used extensively across Europe in discussions about PSB, there is no consensus on what it stands for. In the UK it is attributed to the public purpose of the *BBC*, which centers on integration, education, stimulation and representation (BBC Trust 2007). In Austria the PSB *ORF* interprets public value as independence, and a responsibility for producing culture, education, and high-level entertainment (ORF 2008). Meanwhile, in Germany politicians, broadcasters and academic reviewers in the German equivalent to the public value test ponder the extent to which financial efficiency should be part of a public value assessment. In Switzerland no official public value test has been introduced yet, however the license obliges the PSB to offer quality and includes a fairly exact definition of what is to be considered as such. The national regulator commissions research whether or not the quality standards are met.

Research in this field is disputed. Some authors regard the program of a PSB as a combination of public value elements and elements that lack public value, such as entertainment (Brown 1996). Others demand viewers should be regarded as enjoyers, which ties quality to the task of providing the audience with pleasure (Costera Meijer 2005). Neither academia nor professionals specify major differences between commercial and public service entertainment. At times, entertainment is seen as a

necessary evil to securing the licensing fees (Brown 1996; van der Wurff 2004) or serving as social glue.

We endorse the argument that common welfare can be the result of commercially motivated individuals and firms, however we believe the concept of market failure is essential to the idea of public value. Without PSBs the common welfare output of the broadcasting industry would be lower, perhaps even detrimental to society. This argument is generally agreed upon when it comes to informational and educational content, however not so when it comes to entertainment. Dehm & Storll (2003) show that orientation is another relevant aspect of user motivation for content regarded as entertaining. Several authors point out that entertainment programs convey values and orientations that form society in a manner far more effective than that of newscasts (Thomass 2003; von Rimscha & Siegert 2008). Entertainment that contributes to common welfare may be regarded as a merit good. According to Lobigs (2004) this argument demands that entertainment programs of PSB meet higher standards than the market would provide. Therefore the public value of entertainment programming basically equals its quality. Cynics might say we trade one fuzzy term for another – however we believe that four decades of research on elements of TV quality has unearthed consolidated, measurable criteria. In the following paragraph we provide a brief review of the ongoing discussion on media quality distinguishing the perspective of recipients, distributors, producers, critics, and regulators.

2. Perspectives on Quality

Recipient's perspective: Research on purpose of use suggests that entertainment content is primarily used to fulfill needs in the areas of aesthetics (harmony, beauty, etc.), mind (distraction, escape, stability, relaxation, joy – but also stimulation and diversion, etc.) and social mind (orientation, integration, recognition) (Bosshart 2006). Put simply, we can attribute quality to programs that satisfy these needs. However, doing so would thus make quality basically synonymous with acceptance. In contrast, Wober (1990) noted that the audience uses different criteria to assess quality: judgments of liking differ from judgments of quality with the latter usually being much more rigorous. Thus quality is recognized and

deemed socially desirable, but not necessarily in demand. When asked for a clear indicator of quality TV, 27 percent of Wobers' respondents say a program must be amusing and entertaining, while only 12 percent mentioned properties such as "informative" or "enlightening." Informative programs are more strongly associated with quality than TV movies, and entertainment shows rank last. Costera Meijer concludes that quality is understood as a genre characteristic of serious broadcasts rather than as a neutral trait that influences the audience to watch a particular program (2005: 37). Even if entertainment is only about fun and pastime, it still has a social function and thus a level of quality in terms of public value. The German poet Schiller once described the integrative power of art through the sharing of commonly perceived enjoyment (Shusterman 2003: 304).

The *producers' perspective* on quality is less researched than the recipients' perspective. Quality is scarcely mentioned in textbooks for professionals. In the 1990s, Nossiter (1991), Blumler (1991), Albers (1992), and Leggatt (1993) each performed interview studies with producers to pin down concepts of quality. Results show that quality is a relative term that has no precise definition but serves more as a positive – albeit vague – ideal. Indicators might be found in the technical implementation, in producer traits like passion, in program traits like seriousness and relevance, in innovation, resources and finally in the reaction of the audience. Producer and program traits in particular remain highly normative indicators, since relevance needs to be defined and the value of objectives like passion may be disputed. From a producers' perspective, quality is subjective, meaning not to produce the most obvious and profitable content.

From the *distributors' perspective*, quality can be assessed by answering the question: "How well does a program serve the purpose of the organization – be it commercial or provided with a public mandate?" In the case of a commercial broadcaster this means establishing a solid ratio between the cost of content procurement and advertising revenues. PSBs also need to control costs; however, the fulfillment of the program mandate with its social and cultural obligations should be more important than the audience rating. Controlling at a PSB therefore includes a quality assessment. Even a PSB seems to meet the minimum principle: A sufficient level of quality should be achieved at minimum cost rather than a maximizing utility with a given budget.

The *perspective of critics* is apparent in the criteria utilized when individual broadcasts are awarded prizes. With awards assigned by peers implicit professional standards are of importance as well as off-topic criteria such as sympathy or seniority. Those awards using explicit criteria focus on objective formal aspects rather than contestable content traits (Albers 1996). In general the critics' perspective of quality is interspersed with subjective value judgments indicating a private agenda. Before becoming Deputy Head of Programming at the German PSB ZDF, Janke postulated TV critique would need to be political (1980).

From the *regulators' perspective*, the statutory commitment to quality must be measured in order to render the presence or absence of quality a litigable fact. Thus, the regulators' perspective should provide us with a set of unambiguous traits indicating quality. However, the opposite is true. A review of the relevant legal texts for PSBs in Europe shows that the problem of quality is either neglected or sketched in vague legal terms that need to be deciphered (see following section). An explicit definition of quality might be misconstrued as censorship violating the freedom of art and expression. There are two strategies for noting how this contradiction is addressed: Either quality is dealt with at a meta-level when broadcasters are required to establish a system of quality assurance and reporting. Alternatively, a non-exhaustive list is included in the program mandate specifying which subject matter and which means of program production must occur together with a general statement that program output of a PSB must differ considerably from that of its commercial competitors.

When the public value of an entertainment program is assessed, the different perspectives on quality are not equally relevant. The recipients' perspective can be largely neglected as it can only provide an aggregated assessment of the value but misses the "public" perspective. The critics' perspective tends to be subjective and elitist. The distributors' perspective puts the focus merely on the relation between quality and cost. The regulators' perspective on quality is the only one that clearly has to embrace the idea of public value. At best, it includes aspects of the other perspectives. Therefore when analyzing differences in entertainment quality in the programming of PSB and commercial broadcasters, the regulatory framework and how it's put into practice by TV commissioners should be analyzed as well.

3. Regulating Quality

It is evident that there cannot be a universal definition of entertainment quality in PSB programs as local parameters and the legal framework of a specific media system must be taken into account. Media regulation shapes the market structures and sets basic principles and ground rules for media organizations (McQuail 1997: 521). The typology of a media system and the size of a state affect the character of a media system and therefore influence the media regulation. The well-known typology of Hallin & Mancini (2004) describe three basic models of media markets. They distinguish the *liberal model* (US, Canada, UK, and Ireland), the *democratic corporatist model* (Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Nordic Countries) and the *polarized pluralist model* (France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece). The liberal model is characterized by a relative dominance of market mechanisms and the regulatory intervention is low. Democratic corporatist countries are characterized by a relatively active but legally limited role of the state. Finally, in polarized pluralist countries the role of the state is quite strong. Regarding the size of the state Puppis (2009: 14) argues that small countries often have to adopt specific media policies in order to enable competition with foreign media. There are two strategies used by small states: the first is interventionism by which governmental support stimulates and protects the domestic media. The other strategy is protectionism in which the state tries to protect domestic media organizations by fostering, actively or passively, media concentration, or at least by not preventing it. In small states like Switzerland or Austria there's an influx of TV signals from larger neighboring countries with the same language and the domestic media faces international competition. Thus, media regulation is even more important in these places than in a country like Germany, for example. Media in small states face more difficulties in fulfilling their cultural and social obligations than media in larger countries. All kinds of political regulation and control concerning the media therefore become crucial (Siegert 2006: 202). "*A small country can only viable affirm its audiovisual identity and produce quality programming by defending the role of public service*" (Burgelman & Pauwels 1992: 174).

PSB and commercial broadcasters must act on the policies of media regulation. These mission statements, issued by the government or result-

ing from licensing, affect the actors of PSB and commercial broadcasters. Aside from such mission statements, the organizations have internal contracts to interpret the normative orientations and goals in internal parameters. Both impose these internal contract additionally or complementarily on employees in the sense of a negotiated agreement.

Bardoel (2003) states that PSBs now tend to have more detailed mission statements, but the law does not differentiate between information and entertainment. Regarding the quality goals laid-out in the regulatory framework or mission statements by the broadcasters, precise guidelines about quality are scarce for PSBs as well as for commercial broadcasters. The term “quality” is used in external and internal documents but there are no specifications about what quality actually means and how it’s to be assured by the broadcasters and their employees. Comparisons of the documents show similarities regarding the regulatory frameworks of the quality goals and the mission statements formulated by the broadcasters. The separation of ads and editorial content, compliance about protection of minors, guaranteed freedom of opinion, the preservation of diversity of opinion and specific ratings are obligations which must be fulfilled by PSB and commercial broadcasters alike. However, PSBs are supposed to offer more “sophistication,” “higher standards,” ensure programs which foster the integration of society, and finally, from an industrial promotion perspective, PSBs shall cooperate with the audio-visual industry.

As mentioned before, the size of a state affects the character of a media system and therefore influences media regulation. For small states like Switzerland and Austria there are more detailed specifications in the relevant legal documents regarding quality. In Switzerland the Federal Act on Radio and Television (RTVG) and the Ordinance on Radio and Television (RTVV) each devote a chapter to “Safeguard diversity and promote program service quality.” The license of the PSB *SRG SSR idée suisse* combines the program mandate with a quality obligation. Four dimensions of quality are specified: *credibility*, *a sense of responsibility*, *relevance* and *journalistic professionalism* (Art. 3 Konzession SRG). The PSB needs to define and publish quality standards in form and content and provide accounts of its quality management.

Similar to Switzerland, Austria is a small state bordered by larger neighbors who share the same language and whose media is heavily utilized by

the population. Thus, a protection against foreign influence is regarded as an important objective of media regulation policies. In contrast to media laws in other European countries, the Federal Act on the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF-G) points out the public relevance of entertainment and calls for an adequate sense of responsibility. A specific feature of the ORF-G is the reference to the employees of the broadcaster. By law they must be aware of the objectives in the mission statement and actively collaborate to achieve them.

A summary of concrete statements defining quality is and how it should be assured are scarce in the government-issued programming mandates or those resulting from licensing, as well as within internal documents like mission statements. Clear explanations of quality are missing. In this context, the nature of a state's media system has no impact on the legal framework. Thus, legal documents of democratic corporatist or polarized pluralist media systems do not differ from one another concerning quality. State size in contrast has a factual relevance for PSBs. In small states that border larger, language-sharing neighbor countries, there's greater intervention of the state, especially regarding the responsibility to fulfill cultural and social obligation of PSBs.

4. Commissioners' Quality Orientation

To analyze the quality orientation of commissioners, we relate the work of Albers (1996) and Leggatt (1996) who tried to frame the producers' perception of program quality. Contrary to their studies, we focused on commissioners of PSB and commercial broadcasters rather than producers, which allowed for comparisons between the two types of broadcasters. We surveyed 30 entertainment commissioners¹ in five European countries with either democratic-corporatist or polarized pluralist media systems (Hallin & Mancini 2004). The sample focused on persons who work directly for a specific program rather than personnel in executive positions. By doing so we hope to frame the everyday relevance of quality standards rather than a well-rehearsed repetition of the mission statement.

¹ We use "commissioner" as an umbrella term encompassing commissioners, program buyers, and individuals that act as editor-producers for in-house productions.

We focus on the most important PSB and commercial broadcasters of the two small states Switzerland and Austria, which can be characterized as democratic corporatist media systems. Germany can be considered a large neighbor with a similar media system, as well as France and Italy, as neighbors with polarized pluralist media systems. Broadcasters most important on the audience market are integrated in our sample: for Switzerland all subsidies of the *SRG* (PSB) and *3+* as commercial broadcaster are included, for Austria *ORF* (PSB), for Germany the *ARD* (PSB) and the commercial broadcasters *RTL* and *Sat.1*, for France *france2* (PSB) and the commercial broadcaster *M6*, finally for Italy *RaiUno* as PSB and *Canale5* as commercial broadcaster. Following Bonfadelli & Meier (1994: 390) this sample allows us to compare broadcasters of different media systems and at the same time broadcasters of small and large states. We evaluate the factual relevance of the legal framework and mission statements of the broadcasters in the daily work of commissioners and identify the decision criteria used by commissioners when selecting entertainment content. Because PSBs must fulfill a program mandate and generate public value and therefore quality, it is important to analyze whether commissioners of PSBs perceive their responsibilities and the regulatory frameworks and mission statements in another way than commissioners of commercial broadcasters. We therefore formulate the following research questions:

- How do the legal framework and the mission statements of the broadcasters bias the commissioners and how much are they restricted by these documents in their daily work?
- Which decision criteria use commissioners when selecting entertainment content? Are there differences between PSB and commercial broadcasters?

4.1. Awareness and Influence of Internal and External Quality Framework

To clarify how the mission statements of the broadcasters influence the commissioners and whether they feel restricted by these documents in their daily work, the commissioners were asked to indicate the existing documents in the company and – if existent – describe their program mandate. On five-point scales (1 for “no influence/restriction at all” to 5 for “strong influence/restriction”) the commissioners were asked to declare how

familiar they were with these documents and rate the influence and the restrictions they hold over their daily work. The results show that few commissioners in PSB and commercial broadcasting are familiar with existing legal documents or internal guidelines. Only 28 percent of the commissioners of PSB and 27 percent of the commercial broadcasters acknowledged there were documents with mission statements and only 23 percent of PSB and 36 percent of commercial broadcasters mention the guidelines. Our inquiry shows these texts actually are in place in one form or another at all broadcasters in the sample. Compared to commissioners at PSBs none of the commissioners of commercial broadcasters mention the availability of quality documents. Sixteen percent of the PSB commissioners are aware of the existence of their companies' documents on quality. On the other hand, 18 percent of the commissioners of commercial broadcasters mention the code of conduct, whereas only 7 percent of the commissioners of PSB do so. A code of conduct can be understood as a document which outlines (more precisely than other documents) acceptable ways in which specific goals should be achieved. Most notably, commissioners of PSB state more about quality documents than commissioners of commercial broadcasters. This suggests they are aware of the importance of quality for PSBs.

We found that prevalent commissioners of PSB as well as commissioners of commercial broadcasters perceive an external control through the legislator or regulator. Not only PSB have guidelines. Commercial broadcasters are also bound to guidelines, for instance the protection of minors, separation of advertising and editorial content, domestic or European production quota and freedom of opinion. Regarding the perception of the "external" guidelines there are no differences between PSB and commercial broadcasters. Small differences emerge only in regard to the guidelines formulated by the broadcasters themselves. Commissioners of PSBs stress the relevance of quality as defined in mission statements. However, the effect on their daily work seems limited. We found that the individual perspective on quality does not necessarily match with the quality goals pointed out in the regulatory framework or mission statements by the broadcasters.

Table 1 shows the perceived influence on the daily work and restriction of the external documents on the daily work of commissioners. Since we find no differences between small and large states or between democratic corporatist and polarized pluralist media systems only the results for

Table 1: Commissioners Perception of Influence and Restriction of the External Legal Framework

	PSB mean (SD) (n = 18)	Commercial broadcasters mean (SD) (n = 5)
Influence on daily work	3.9 (.94)	2.4 (1.95)*
Restriction of daily work	2.1 (.94)	1.2 (.45)

Rating scale from “1 – no influence/restriction at all” to “5 – very strong influence/restriction.”

* The majority of commissioners at commercial broadcaster argue that an external legal framework would not exist. Only five commissioners rated the influence and the restriction caused by the external legal framework on their daily work.

PSB and commercial broadcaster are presented. Commissioners of PSBs (3.9) perceive a stronger influence of the guidelines set by the legislator or regulator on their daily work than commissioners of commercial broadcasters (2.4). Commissioners of PSBs are aware of the fact that they have a program mandate and in some sense also are responsible for the education of the population. They do not perceive the guidelines as negative or feel restricted by them but rather find them necessary for a distinguished PBS.

In our summary, commissioners at PSB are well aware of their obligation and feel influenced but not restricted by the program mandate and the self-imposed mission statements. Thus, a constitutive precondition for quality in PSB is at place. In the following section we address the question of how this orientation translates into concrete programming decisions.

4.2. Quality Dimension in Programming Decisions

We presented the commissioners with a list of 28 criteria that might be relevant in the programming decision (see Table 2). The individual items can be attributed to different quality dimensions, which are aggregated into quality indices (see Table 3).

The results show that many criteria influence the programming decisions. On average, only the personal taste of the commissioner is rated below the scale center. Items connected to the quality dimensions'

Table 2: Average Importance of Criteria in Programming Decisions

Criteria	Quality Dimension	PSB (n = 27)	Commercial broadcaster (n = 15)
Audience affected	<i>relevancy</i>	4.7	4.3
Accordance to program mandate	<i>sense of responsibility</i>	4.7	2.9
Dramaturgy	<i>professionalism</i>	4.6	4.2
Fitness for time slot	<i>programming/scheduling</i>	4.6	3.9
Workmanship	<i>professionalism</i>	4.4	4.1
Reference to the daily life of the target audience	<i>sense of responsibility</i>	4.4	4.5
Rating expectation of the broadcaster	<i>cost-effectiveness</i>	4.2	4.6
Exclusivity	<i>relevancy</i>	4.2	4.4
Consistency of the plot	<i>credibility</i>	4.2	4.0
Reference to national culture	<i>relevancy</i>	4.2	3.4
Artistic value	<i>aspects of art and taste</i>	4.2	3.3
Number of episodes	<i>programming/scheduling</i>	4.0	3.6
Relevancy of topic	<i>relevancy</i>	3.9	4.2
Domestic value creation	<i>sense of responsibility</i>	3.8	2.6
Price	<i>cost-effectiveness</i>	3.7	3.9
Duration	<i>programming/scheduling</i>	3.6	3.1
Reputation of the producers	<i>aspects of art and taste</i>	3.5	3.1
Age rating	<i>sense of responsibility</i>	3.4	3.6
Topicality	<i>relevancy</i>	3.4	3.5
Prominence of the director/moderator	<i>relevancy</i>	3.4	2.9
Language	<i>relevancy</i>	3.4	2.7
Industry trend	<i>relevancy</i>	3.3	3.5
Rating hit in country of origin	<i>programming/scheduling</i>	3.3	3.5
Suitability for cross media exploitation	<i>cost-effectiveness</i>	3.3	3.2
Market success of original	<i>cost-effectiveness</i>	3.1	3.5

(continued)

Prominence of the actors/ players, candidates, etc.	<i>relevancy</i>	3.1	2.9
Suitability as an advertising environment	<i>cost-effectiveness</i>	2.7	3.9
Personal taste	<i>aspects of art and taste</i>	2.7	2.7

Rating scale from “1 – not at all important” to “5 – very important.”

relevancy (applied rather than normative) and professionalism are rated highest.

Major differences within small states can be found concerning the item “exclusivity.” Swiss and Austrian broadcasters rely on German broadcasters to pay for dubbing and thus cannot claim exclusivity. On the other hand, they put greater emphasis on items such as “reference to national culture” indicating the need for tailor-made content for self-assurance in a small state. In general, PSB commissioners assign very high importance to their program mandate. They seem to feel a responsibility in economic as well as cultural terms as they rate “domestic value creation,” “artistic value” and “language” much higher than commissioners at commercial broadcasters. Relevancy of the topic seems to be more important among commercial broadcasters; however, the interviews show this may trace back to a relatively lower standard about what is to be regarded as relevant. License fees allow PSB commissioners to largely neglect the question of whether a program is a good advertising environment; however they remain rather price sensitive, especially the PSB commissioners from small states.

We combined the 28 decision criteria to seven indices to allow for a more clearly arranged analysis. Four indices relate to quality dimensions as laid out in the license of the Swiss PSB (professionalism, credibility, sense of responsibility, and relevancy) and three additional indices derive from the discussion of different perspective on quality: cost-effectiveness and scheduling aspects derive from the distributors perspective and aspects of art and taste from the producers’ and critics’ perspective.

The indices are additive and unweighted, with every item included carrying the same relevance. To compare the indices we standardize them so that the maximum value equals 100 the minimum 0.

Table 3: Importance of Quality Dimensions of Programming Decisions

	PSB (n = 27)	Commercial broadcaster (n = 15)
Professionalism	89	83
Credibility	83	80
Sense of responsibility	81	68
Programming/scheduling	77	71
Relevancy	75	71
Cost-effectiveness	68	77
Aspects of art and taste	69	61

Maximum index value standardized at 100.

Overall the quality dimensions as laid out in the license of the Swiss PSB seem to be very important for PSB commissioners in general but in part also for commissioners at commercial broadcasters. Professionalism and credibility (in the sense of coherence) are the single most important dimensions for both. PSB commissioners show a considerably higher sense of responsibility and attribute more importance to aspects of art and taste. They seem to interpret the program mandate as educational duty in terms of taste and culture. Relevancy is a little bit more important for PSB commissioners than for their commercial counterparts, however, necessities of program planning and scheduling rank higher. As expected, cost-effectiveness is more important among commissioners at commercial broadcasters.

A factor analysis would allow generating the decision criteria from the data rather than using an index that does not perfectly fit the data. However, since our sample consists of subsamples of fiction and non-fiction commissioners, the number of cases in each subsample is too small. A factor analysis of the complete sample produces distorted results since some items are more important with fiction programming than with non-fiction and thus they level each other out. The resulting factors contain only residuals that occur in all contexts but never rank as most important; therefore we do not present them here. The small case number also brings about difficulties when testing the significance of our results. An alternative approach with small case numbers is to run a cluster analysis. If indeed

PSB commissioners differ significantly from those at commercial broadcasters two clusters should emerge separating the two groups. Running a cluster analysis cannot confirm the differences between the two groups. Either the differences turn out to be too small resulting in just one cluster, or if we force two or more clusters, they don't correspond with differentiation concerning PSB, market size or genre. Thus, the reported differences need to be understood as tendencies rather than statistically significant differences. A replication with a higher number of cases could confirm our results, however it might also turn out that the differences between commissioners at PSBs and commercial broadcasters lie in the orientation (see first part of the result section) but not the actual programming decision.

To summarize, we can observe that commissioners at PSB assign greater importance to quality dimensions derived from the regulators perspective on quality while commissioners at commercial broadcasters try to also address the aspect of cost-effectiveness.

4.3. Decision Criteria in Commissioning

We asked those individuals who commission productions which criteria are most important when choosing a production company (see Table 4).

The most important criteria for commissioners both at PSBs and at commercial broadcasters are workmanship and the reputation of the

Table 4: Importance of Commissioning Criteria

	PSB (n = 13)	Commercial broadcaster (n = 7)
Workmanship	4.5	4.9
Reputation of production company	4.1	4.3
Price	3.8	4.1
Personal relation with contractor	2.9	3.1
Compliance with domestic production quota	3.0	2.4
Geographical proximity	2.5	2.4
Corporate ties	1.8	2.4

Rating scale from "1 – not at all important" to "5 – very important."

production company. Price is also important however less so for PSB commissioners and less so in small states where the competition in the production sector is less fierce. Although TV production is frequently described as people business (Manning 2005) personal ties with the personnel at the production company are rated less important.² Domestic production quotas are of medium importance. PSB commissioners care more about this aspect, which can be attributed to the quality dimension sense of responsibility. Geographical proximity is less important and corporate ties hardly play any role for PSB commissioners. The regulation concept whereby diversity of ownership shall lead to diversity of content and opinion and thus quality is not apparent in the answers. Commissioners at *Rai* do not seem to have any trouble commissioning a show from *Endemol* owned by Berlusconi's ubiquitous *Mediaset*.

5. Conclusion

Entertainment on PSB channels can and should have a public value which distinguishes it from entertainment on commercial channels. Enlarged program choice has increased the pressure on PSBs to justify their entertainment content. The public value of entertainment content can be largely defined by the quality of the program. Thus PSB programming should have a quality that is not provided by the market. This means the perspectives on quality of recipients as well as distributors fall short of framing public value since they focus on individual and private value. The regulators' perspective on quality is suited to focus on the public value. However, regulators provide only little framework for quality and avoid clear definitions. Besides universal requirements, bans and rules, there are little specifications on how entertainment in the programming of PSBs should stand out. In small states the relative importance of quality dimensions that create public value is shifted. Integrative functions may be more important than diversity and controversy, and in small markets domestic production is patronized at the cost of concentration.³

² Maybe the interviewees played down the importance of personal ties in order to dispel possible allegations of corruption.

³ France with its obsession for national champions might be an exception here.

Although we find that (with the exception of Switzerland) the regulatory guidelines on quality in an entertainment context are rather meager, commissioners at PSBs seem to be aware that they are expected to deliver higher quality. They are well informed about the regulatory framework and indicate a high relevance for their daily work. When put to practice this means that public value oriented dimensions of quality such as responsibility and aspects of art and taste are more important in programming decisions for commissioners at PSBs compared with their commercial counterparts. However for tangible decisions about commissioning, the differences between PSB commissioners and those at commercial stations seem to be less explicit. Thus we can conclude that securing quality in public service entertainment is not so much about tightening rules or specifying quality more precisely, but about assuring that an existing quality orientation is reliably put into practice. The media system has less influence on entertainment content than on information.

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Submitted: 22 March 2010; Resubmitted: 24 August 2010; Accepted: 1 September 2010; Refereed anonymously.

