

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING AND CULTURAL POLICY

The Portuguese experience, 2002-2012

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Abstract: It is quite rare the assessment of public service broadcasting as an asset of cultural policy. However, there is a reasonable amount of elements that could feed a debate on this issue, be it political or academic. Considering the Portuguese experience between the years of 2002 and 2012, this paper examines the role of public service broadcasting as a cultural resource, and, specifically, its relevance for cultural public policy. This is an important area for empirical research, according to the standards of economics, sociology and communication sciences. And it implies the analysis of objective conditions, restrictions and possibilities of financial, legal and contractual contexts, and the consideration of the outputs and the impact of concrete broadcasting.

Keywords: Culture; cultural policy; public media service.

1. The cultural relevance of public service media

It is quite rare, in Portugal, the assessment of public service broadcasting as an asset of cultural policy. At the most, we can find impressionist approaches. However, there is a reasonable amount of elements that could feed a debate on this issue, be it political or academic. Some of these elements are the legal and contractual framework, indicators of activity and output or decisions and recommendations by independent regulators.

This is indeed a very pertinent issue.

On the one hand, radio and television are the most pervasive of mass media. All households have access to free-to-air services. The survey applied, in 2006-2007, by the National Plan for Reading reported that 98% of the 2,552 individuals interviewed saw television and 71% listened to the radio on a daily basis (Neves, 2011: 266, 278). ERC, the Portuguese regulator for media, promoted another survey, in 2007, interviewing 2,205 individuals. Table 1 compares the use of radio and television to that of newspapers, magazines, books, cinema and personal computers:

Table 1: Regular exposure to media by age, 2007 (%)

Medium	15-30 years	31-50 y	51-64 y	65+ y
Television	99.1	99.3	99.9	99.8
Radio	79.9	78.7	65.9	55.2
Newspapers	61.4	68.4	59.9	32.9
Magazines	52.5	49.3	40.6	17.6
Books	58.9	41.8	35.1	16.4
Cinema	71.8	41.0	26.1	6.0
Computer	70.4	42.2	21.0	2.4

Source: Rebelo, 2008: 68.

We know that computers and internet are polarizing cultural consumption. This changes, but does not eliminate, the role of television. As Gustavo Cardoso (2006: 229-230, 259) puts it, television is “the key element of the meta-system of entertainment” (which also includes cinema, music or multimedia games) and shares with the internet “the central role” of the “meta-system of information” (see also Cardoso, Espanha & Araújo, 2009). Therefore, cultural policy must consider audiovisuals with the same attention dedicated to other cultural industries and arts.

On the other hand, the educational and cultural relevance of public service broadcasting constitutes, along with independence and pluralism of information, the very fundament of its existence, according to European views. Clearly, culture plays a role in the triadic formula that epitomizes BBC mission: “to inform, to educate, to entertain”, and it also underlies the ambition of public broadcasters to offer a “quality and popular television”.

Empirical research has shown how illusive could be the expectation (so vivid within certain European elites) that public, free-to-air, generalist television would become the great “popular school” (Pinto: 2002: 22). The same occurs in what regards the relationship between television and culture: one cannot deny their discontinuities. “For some forms of culture, Wolton (1999: 123) wrote, television simply is not the best instrument of communication”.

This does not mean that television should be excluded from the system of cultural resources. The end of public monopoly and the rise of private broadcasters, firstly, and then the current transition to digital era, changed the conditions in which public players operate. But, even in the new conditions of strong competition in contents and networks, improvement of pay-tv and other media services, high criticism on the public service broadcasting, the cultural relevance of the later, in all its dimensions, is still both a real fact and an issue for political controversy and decisions.

Indeed, this is one of the pillars of the European legislation. The Directive “Television without frontiers” (1989, revised in 1997) and the one who replaced it, “Audiovisual media services” (2007, revised in 2010) establish some derogation from the general conditions of competition and impose specific obligations (e.g., in terms of language to be used, and the proportion of European works and independent production to be broadcasted). The justification is to protect the diversity of cultural expressions and to promote the cultural identity, both of each Member-State and of Europe as a whole. Logically, these obligations apply mostly to free-to-air television and are especially mandatory for public service broadcasting.

Radio and television can be analysed in terms of civil rights (freedom of speech, right to information, cultural rights), in terms of social cohesion, and in terms of cultural identity and cultural diversity. By any of these criteria, public broadcasters have specific - and, in comparison with private players, additional - goals, obligations and capabilities. To consider the public service broadcasting from the point of view of cultural policy means to look at the potential of these specificities.

2. The Portuguese experience, 2002-2012

The Portuguese case can be examined fruitfully. The decade from 2002 to 2011 is a rather homogeneous period, distinct from its predecessor and, most probably, from the one that is now emerging. Public service broadcasting was submitted to a strong intervention that changed dramatically some of its pillars – namely, funding, organisation and performance.

In the year 2002, according to Alberto Arons de Carvalho (2009: 388), the public television company, RTP, “was probably living the most serious crisis of its history”. In contrast with the European tradition, it was a motive of huge political dispute. Indeed, it was one of the main topics of the electoral campaign that eventually led to the substitution of a new right-wing government for the incumbent socialist government. PSD (the centre-right party) presented as one of its electoral proposals to eliminate some cultural outputs provided by public broadcasting, such as the radio channel dedicated to classical music and the second generalist television channel. Once in office, the new government headed by PSD did in fact moderate that position: neither of the two channels was eliminated. RTP2 (the cultural channel) was then transformed into a rather hybrid legal and organisational figure, formally detached from the general concession of public service but put under the responsibility of the public company in a so-called transitional period to a future delivery to “civil society”. Nevertheless, the

most emblematic cultural programme of the Portuguese public television, “Acontece” (“So it happens”), was conspicuously brought to an end.

So the decade began in a quite unfavourable atmosphere. But subsequently things took, for reasons that are not possible to detail here, a different direction. Through the ambiguous solution just mentioned, RTP2 was preserved; a new management started an important process of financial recover of the company, whose main elements were a sound increment of public funding, the reduction of the debt and reduction of operational costs. This route was pursued in 2005-2011, now under the responsibility of two socialist governments. Its success strongly contributed to overcome the structural crisis of RTP, to win back social legitimacy for the public service and to establish an unprecedented, though fragile, consensus among the main political parties.

In 2011-2012, the new right-wing government announced a new cycle for the public service broadcasting. Until present time, no final and formal decisions have been taken, only postponed. But as a new period is emerging, it’s absolutely pertinent, for analytical purposes, to isolate the years 2002-2012.

3. Changes in public service television

During the decade of 2002-2011, public service suffered relatively few changes in what regarded radio. The contractual framework – that specifies obligations and terms of assessment – remained the one signed between the State and the company in 1999. Its funding continued to be provided by a tax paid by households. And its cultural relevance followed two main guidelines: the promotion of national language and culture; and the promotion of cultural diversity by means of a specific attention paid to minority expressions, with particular focus on classical music, to which the public radio allocates a channel.

On the contrary, public service television undertook deep and significant changes. We shall concentrate on them.

First, the whole legal, contractual and regulatory framework has changed. In 2007, Parliament passed a new law that reinforced the obligations of all the broadcasters and the assessment of their compliance by the regulatory committee. At the same time, the specific obligations of public service were also reinforced. These two major guidelines were preserved in the revision Parliament approved in 2011, when the European Directive on Audiovisual Media Services was transposed into Portuguese legislation. The second channel (RTP2, the cultural channel that lived, since 2003, in a rather ambiguous and hybrid “public-private” regime) returned to the general concession. The

contract signed by the State and RTP for the 2008-2011 quadrennium established quantified standards for compliance with the legal and contractual obligations, in all channels. Tables 2 and 3 highlight the standards for programmes dealing with culture, knowledge and education, showing this move forward: with no interference on editorial autonomy, the public authorities emphatically demanded more attention to the cultural objectives of the public service broadcasting.

Table 2: Cultural and educational obligations of RTP1, according to the 2008 concession contract (CC)

Genre	Clause CC art paragraph	Minimum Obligations	Frequency	Monthly average CC
CHANNEL 1				
ENTERTAINMENT	9 ^a - 10 b)	Information programmes about the political institutions and the promotion of citizenship; debate and interview programmes; and programmes of cultural dissemination	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>4</i>
	9 ^a - 7 a)	Entertainment programmes that promote the integration of social groups and generations, promoting contact between residents in different regions of the country and between them and the communities living abroad; and promotion of the Portuguese language and culture, and of the national cohesion		
	9 ^a - 7 b)	Entertainment programmes with an educational dimension, which contribute, in particular, to the promotion of general culture and knowledge		
	9 ^a - 10 d)	Great cultural or artistic performances and programmes dedicated to the Portuguese music	<i>Bi-monthly</i>	<i>2</i>
	9 ^a - 7 c)	Original and creative entertainment programmes, that stimulate the presence of new values on Portuguese television		
	9 ^a - 9 c)	Regular programmes with large cultural or artistic performances , live or recorded, such as operas, concerts, plays, ballets and other performing arts		
	9 ^a - 9 d)	Regular programmes dedicated to Portuguese music		
DOCUMENTARY AND CULTURAL DISSEMINATION	9 ^a - 10 c)	Great reportage and documentary programmes	<i>Monthly</i>	<i>1</i>
	9 ^a - 6 f)	Regular broadcasting of original documentaries, focusing on social, historical, cultural, artistic, scientific and environmental Portuguese reality		
	9 ^a - 10 b)	Information programmes on the political institutions and the promotion of citizenship, debates, interviews and programmes of cultural dissemination	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>4</i>
	9 ^a - 9 a)	Regular programmes of dissemination of works, creators and cultural institutions in Portugal		
FICTION	9 ^a - 10 c)	Exhibition of Portuguese full-length movies	<i>Monthly</i>	<i>1</i>
	9 ^a - 9 b)	Regular programmes of full-length Portuguese movies exhibition		

Table 3: Cultural and educational obligations of RTP2, according to the 2008 concession contract

Genre	Clause CC paragraph	Minimum Obligations	Frequency	Monthly average CC
CHANNEL 2				
DOCUMENTARY AND CULTURAL DISSEMINATION	10 ^a - 14 d)	other programmes	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>4</i>
	10 ^a - 11 d)	Regular information programmes and cultural debates , with special attention to the artistic national events		
	10 ^a - 11 e)	Regular programmes of interviews with personalities of Portuguese cultural life covering literature, arts, heritage, thought, science and other areas		
	10 ^a - 11 f)	Regular programmes of debate on social issues , taking into account the plurality and the representation of non-governmental organizations		
	10 ^a - 12 b)	Regular programming spaces dedicated to dissemination and debate of themes that promote the exercise of citizenship , such as political participation, environment, consumer protection, social solidarity and gender equality		
	10 ^a - 12 c)	Regular programmes devoted to distance learning		
	10 ^a - 13 b)	Regular programmes of dissemination of books and reading		
	10 ^a - 13 h)	Regular programmes of education to media , promoting critical awareness		
	10 ^a - 13 j)	Regular programmes specifically targeted to people with special needs		
	10 ^a - 13 l)	Regular programmes specifically targeted to the immigrant communities and ethnic minorities present in Portugal		
FICTION	10 ^a - 14 c)	Full-length cinematographic works of the modern Portuguese cinema	<i>Monthly</i>	<i>1</i>
	10 ^a - 13 c)	Regular programmes of dissemination of full-length cinematographic works of the modern Portuguese cinema, which includes productions of the twenty years prior to the broadcast		
	10 ^a - 14 d)	other programmes	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>4</i>
	10 ^a - 13 d)	Regular programmes dedicated to the cinophilia , with a strong educational component, relating the works broadcasted to the history of cinema		
	10 ^a - 13 e)	Regular programmes dedicated to European cinema and filmmakers less represented in the commercial exhibition		
	10 ^a - 13 f)	Regular programmes dedicated to short movies and animation		
MUSICAL AND CLASSICAL	10 ^a - 14 b)	Debate programmes on social issues and performances representing cultures or arts with less-visibility	<i>Fortnightly</i>	<i>2</i>
	10 ^a - 13 a)	Regular programmes, live or recorded , of performances representing cultures or arts with less-visibility, namely and in a balanced manner, concerts of classical music, ethnographic and jazz, plays or ballets;		
	10 ^a - 14 d)	other programmes	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>4</i>
	10 ^a - 13 g)	Regular programmes of promotion and dissemination of the Portuguese musical production		

On the other hand, the legislation and contract above mentioned urged RTP to invest first and foremost in the areas of youth and knowledge, in the process of transition to

digital television. The public broadcaster received a license to develop channels dedicated to those areas.

Finally, the changes decided in 2006-2008 gave a new central role to regulation and assessment issues. The ERC, Regulatory Authority for Media, was founded in 2006, this representing a new and robust public independent regulator, elected by at least two thirds of the Members of Parliament. The Opinion Council of RTP, a body that includes several representatives of civil society along with personalities elected by Parliament, was reinforced. For the first time, two Ombudsmen were appointed, one for public television and the other for public radio. And Parliament incremented its powers of scrutiny and assessment of the public broadcaster's activity, both at management and editorial level.

So, at the end of this three-year period, a new frame was designed, increasing the requirements and accountability of public service broadcasting.

Of course, it is easier to mark conspicuous normative alterations than to point out effective changes in real performance and output. Unfortunately, impressionist opinions do contaminate the public debate. But we can consider a few empirical researches that prove to be useful.

Information is the main subject of these researches. Among others, Estrela Serrano (2006), analysing the television coverage of the presidential election of the year 2001, concluded that public and private television channels converged, but this did not mean that RTP's approach was a "copy" of the private channels. Nuno Goulart Brandão (2006) examined primetime news of the year 2003, in all channels, observing that all of them followed the same criteria for relevance of the facts reported, giving priority to emotional, dramatic and spectacular features. And Felisbela Lopes (2007), focusing on television programming on the last week of November 2006, compared the diversity of genres exhibited by the public channels to the monothematic nature of the private channels' agenda.

We can also turn to more normative essays on the mission and identity of public service broadcasting. To our knowledge, the most interesting is the contribution of the University of Minho to the public debate hold in Portugal in 2003-2004. The leading idea was that "the orientation towards citizenship should be the ultimate guideline of the structuring" of RTP (Pinto, 2005: 49).

Taking into account all these elements, this paper proposes another set of criteria and materials to scrutinize the cultural relevance of public service broadcasting. We shall

consider (a) the legal and contractual obligations, (b) the degree of compliance to them and (c) the financial resources engaged. And we shall use, as materials for assessment, (a) the reports that RTP must deliver annually to demonstrate the fulfilment of legal and contractual requirements, (b) RTP's activity and budget annual reports, (c) the independent audits of ERC (the regulator) and (d) relevant reports from the Opinion Council and the Ombudsmen.

4. An assessment of cultural relevance...

In order to avoid unreasonable levels of subjectivism, we chose as criteria to assess the quality of public television those to which refer the European legislation and recommendations. One can summarize them according to four different dimensions. First of all, the defence, promotion and development of national, linguistic and cultural identity, as well as the promotion of sociocultural cohesion (generalist television as a “social link”, as Wolton [1999] adequately expressed it). Secondly, the promotion of cultural diversity – be it the singularity and distinctiveness of Portuguese culture, compared to others, or the plural expressions that internally constitute our culture, in terms of regions, genres, artistic schools, social groups or audiences. Thirdly, the promotion of “creativity and cultural excellence” (we quote the White Paper on BBC in digital era, see Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2006), this meaning a commitment to a large and comprehensive view of creativity, as freedom, experimentation, innovation and challenge. Finally, the support of national arts and cultural industries, naturally focusing on cinema and audiovisuals.

None of these obligations bind exclusively the public service broadcasting. They apply to all free-to-air broadcasters, public or private. But the intensity and modalities they assume in public service broadcasting are indeed specific, attributing broader responsibilities to the former, in what concerns national identity, diversity, creativity and partnership with the artistic milieu. In this sense, we can and must speak of the specificity of public service – versus commercial programmes – and of its linkage to public cultural policies.

Therefore, one has some sound questions to address. Do the generalist programmes of public service broadcasting favour diversity? Do they promote public communication and the spreading of several cultural forms? Do they configure an alternative to commercial broadcasting? Do they participate in the public endowment for arts? Do they establish a benchmark for national audiovisual production?

However, these are not simply theoretical questions. We cannot answer them reasonably if we don't consider the concrete circumstances in which the public

broadcaster operates. Two of them are especially important: the available financial resources; the characteristics and trends of audiences.

Table 4 compares, according to different variables, the Portuguese situation in 2009 with the average of 13 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom). One easily sees that cost restrictions are stronger in Portugal, drawing a limit to managerial and editorial options in terms of production and broadcasting.

Table 4: Financial indicators of the public service broadcasting, in international comparison (2009)

	Portugal	Average	Deviation (%)
Operational costs per inhabitant (€)	27.76	67.96	-59.2
Public Funds per inhabitant (€)	22.21	52.37	-57.6
Public Funds per each point of the share of audience (M€)	5.48	21.24	-74.2
Advertising revenue/ Total revenue (%)	16.00	16.00	
Public Funds per GDP unit (%)	0.14	0.17	-17.6

Source: Opinion Council Report, RTP, 2010, quoting European Broadcasting Union

On the other hand, the two generalist public channels (RTP1 and RTP2) had in fact recovered and then stabilised their share of audiences during the period 2002-2010, achieving a level that means real social influence (see Table 5; SIC and TVI are the two private broadcasters). Still, it is very thin the spectrum of the most viewed programmes, limited to “telenovelas” (a kind of soap operas), primetime news, quiz shows, talk shows, reality shows and football matches (see Table 6).

Table 5: Share of the generalist channels and of pay-tv channels, 2002-2010 (%)

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
RTP1	21.1	23.8	24.7	23.6	24.5	25.2	23.8	24.0	24.2
RTP2	5.3	5.0	4.4	5.0	5.4	5.2	5.6	5.8	5.3
SIC	31.5	30.3	29.3	27.2	26.2	25.1	24.9	23.4	23.4
TVI	31.4	28.5	28.9	30.0	30.0	29.0	30.5	28.7	27.5
PAY TV/Others	10.6	12.3	12.7	14.1	14.0	15.4	15.2	18.2	19.7
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Marktest, quoted by Obercom, *Anuário de Comunicação, 2009/2010*.

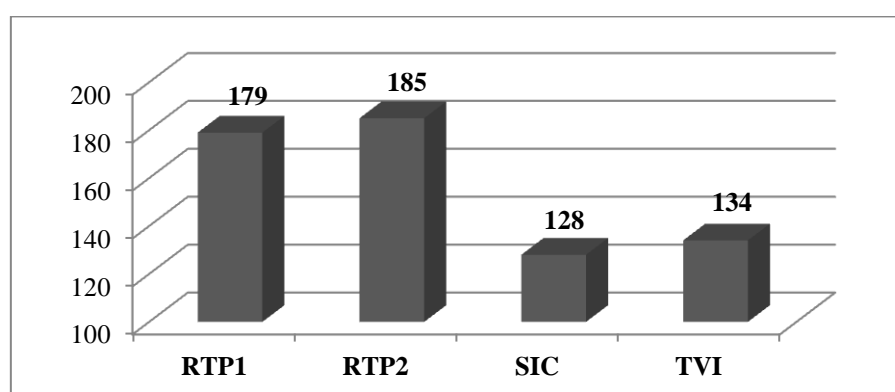
Table 6: Audiences by class of programmes, in all generalist channels, 2008-2010 (%)

	Total		RTP1		RTP2		SIC		TVI	
	2008	2010	2008	2010	2008	2010	2008	2010	2008	2010
Art and culture	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
General culture/ knowledge	3.5	3.2	2.5	2.7	23.4	20.9	2.5	1.9	1.2	1.3
Sports	5.3	4.6	6.5	7.2	12.2	9.2	2.4	3.2	5.5	2.5
Entertainment	18.2	20.0	31.4	31.3	2.1	5.0	17.5	16.3	11.6	16.0
Fiction	31.4	29.7	13.6	11.9	15.9	16.8	35.1	36.0	45.1	42.5
Information	22.6	23.8	33.3	35.0	11.2	11.4	21.8	22.6	16.9	17.5
Youth	2.7	2.7	0.1	0.1	31.1	34.6	1.9	1.3	0.2	0.2
Others	3.2	2.6	2.9	2.4	2.7	0.9	3.5	2.8	3.2	3.1
Advertising	13.1	13.3	9.5	9.4	1.3	1.2	15.3	15.9	16.2	17.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Marktest, quoted by Obercom, *Anuário de Comunicação 2009/2010*.

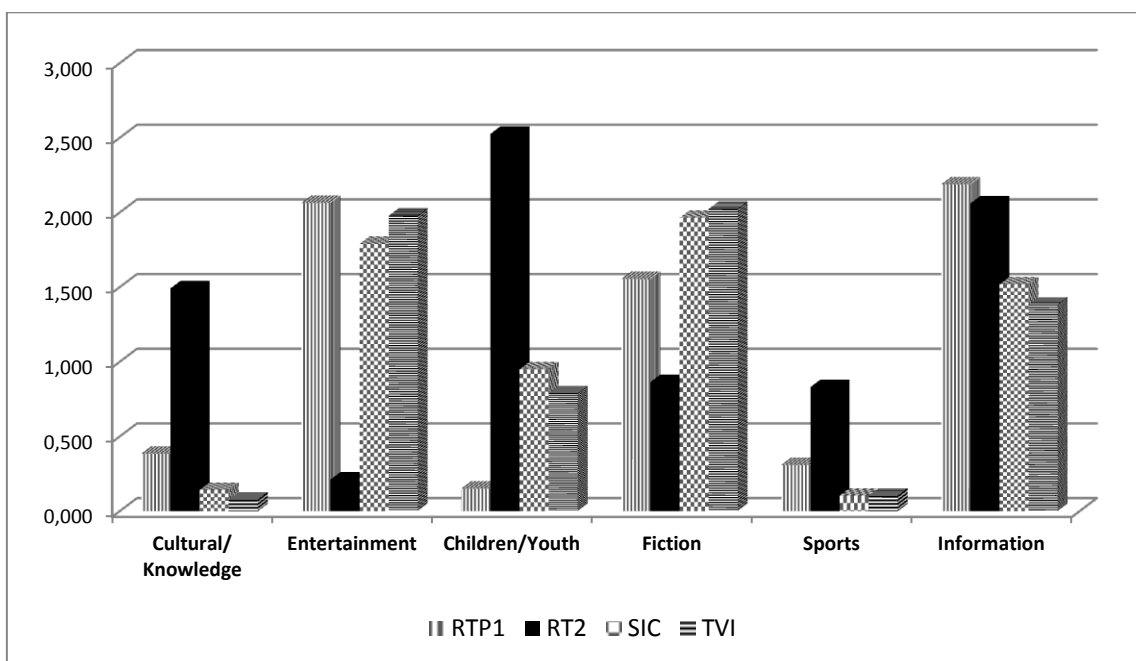
Let's now look at the information available for the year 2010 (or the nearest one), in order to see if the programmes broadcasted by the public television satisfied the criteria of diversity, differentiation and cooperation with the artistic milieu and audiovisual industries.

Figures 1 to 4 show successively that: a) the diversity of genres obtains its maximum in RTP 1 and RTP 2, the two public channels; b) RTP 2 leads in what regards programmes dedicated to “general culture and knowledge”; c) comparing to other European countries, the Portuguese public broadcaster has a rather weak cultural performance, in the first generalist channel, but inversely its second channel has the best position.

Figure 1: Number of different genres exhibited by the Portuguese generalist channels, 2010

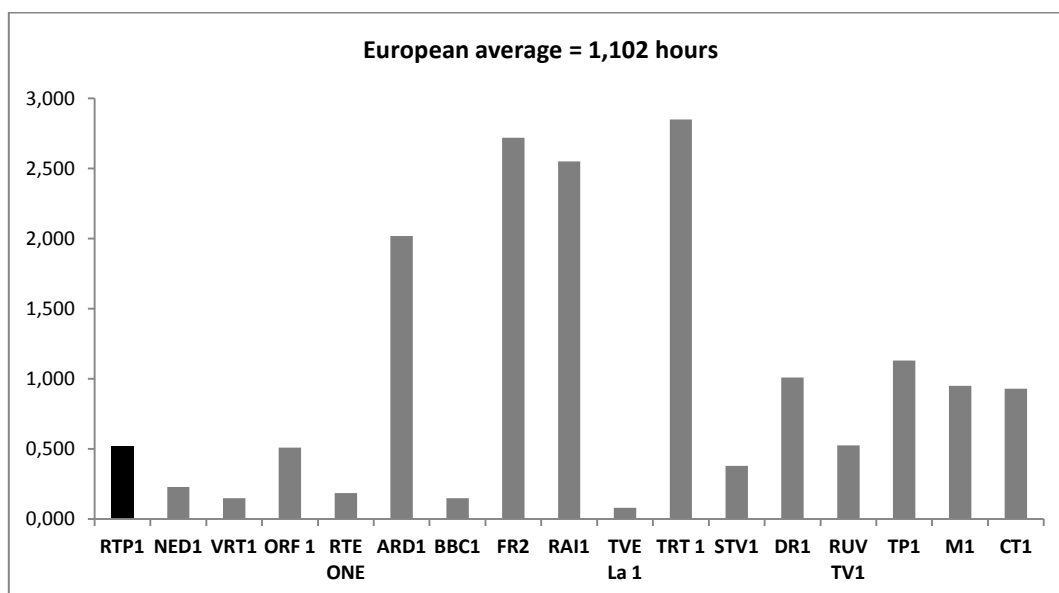
Source: RTP, *Public Service Compliance Report 2010*.

Figure 2: Programmes of the Portuguese generalist channels, according to six genres, 2010 (hours of broadcasting)



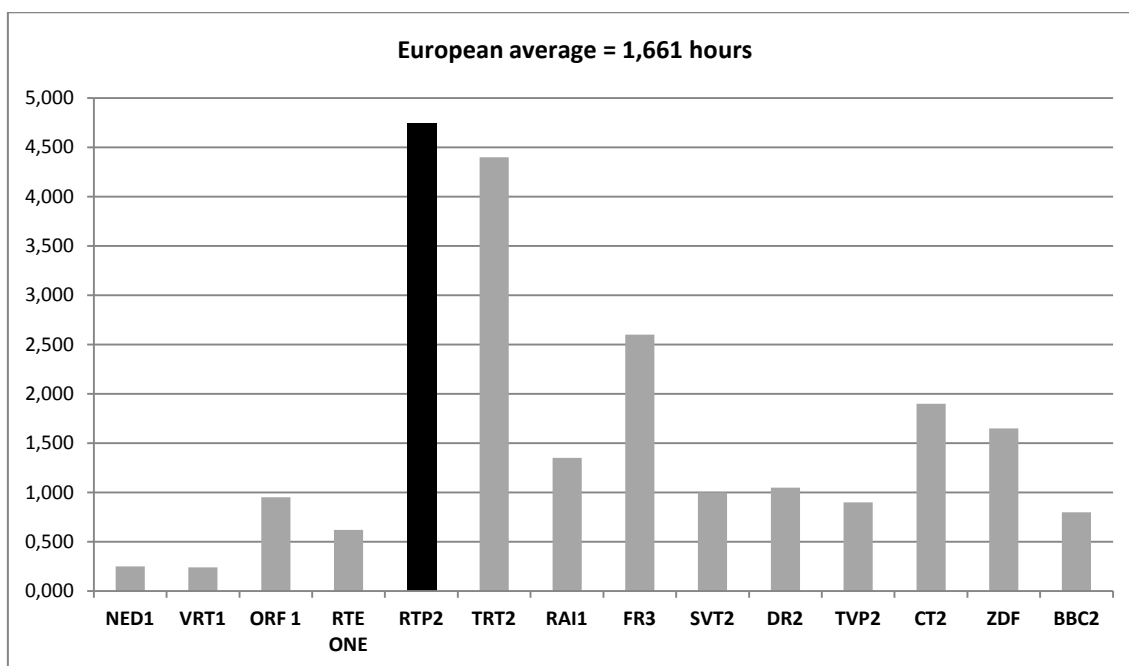
Source: ERC, *Regulation Report, 2010*.

Figure 3: The cultural programmes of RTP 1, in European comparison, 2008 (hours of broadcasting)



Source: RTP, *Public Service Compliance Report 2010*, quoting *EBU GUIDES – EBU Member's TV Programming – Total Broadcast Output Hours – 2008* (July 2009).

Figure 4: The cultural programmes of RTP 2, in European comparison, 2008 (hours of broadcasting)



Source: RTP, *Public Service Compliance Report 2010*, quoting *EBU GUIDES –EBU Member's TV Programming – Total Broadcast Output Hours – 2008* (July 2009).

Regarding the participation of the public broadcaster in artistic production and in the film and audiovisual industry, it's important to notice two facts. First, in a context in which the primetime of one of the private broadcasters is monopolised by Brazilian soap operas, and the primetime of the other private broadcaster is monopolised by internally produced soap operas, the differentiation of RTP is based in television series referred to a more demanding pattern (e.g., historical series and/or dramatisation of Portuguese novels). Secondly, by reason of legal and contractual obligations, RTP is the only broadcaster that, besides the participation in FICA (the fund for investment in cinema and audiovisuals), is a partner of the public institute for cinema (ICA), supporting in this framework the production and exhibition of Portuguese films, according to artistic and cultural standards.

5. An assessment of financial impact

Since the year 2003, the public funds that ensure the activity of RTP are strictly allocated to different structures and contents. (Advertising incomes can only be used to pay the company's debt). For instance, in 2010, using a total amount of 285 million euros of public funding, 43 million were allocated to the radio, 143 million to RTP1, 42 million to RTP2, 16 million to the international channels, 17 million to the regional channels (Azores and Madeira), 2 million to the partnership with the Institute for Cinema and Audiovisual, and so on.

Concerning television, as data from 2008 show the structure of the programmes broadcasted, according to genre typology, we can calculate the relative costs of cultural programmes, thus drawing a picture of cultural investment in the two public generalist channels. Looking at table 7, we may point out that the total cost of genres “culture and knowledge” and “fiction” represented, for RTP1 and RTP2, 48 million, 20% of total public funding.

Table 7: Public funding allocated to cultural programmes, RTP1 and RTP2, 2008

unit: 1,000€	RTP1	RTP2
Allocated public funds	131,083.6	41,921.7
Compensatory allowance	71,076.8	
Audiovisual tax	10,884.7	41,921.7
Capital injection	49,122.1	
Genres Distribution		
Culture/ Knowledge	6%	17%
Fiction	22%	10%
Children/Youth	2%	27%
Sports	5%	12%
Information	30%	27%
Entertainment	32%	1%
Institutional/Religion	2%	6%
Allocation by genres		
Culture/ Knowledge	7,602.9	7,168.6
Fiction	28,838.4	4,066.4
Children/Youth	2,359.5	11,276.9
Sports	6,947.4	5,114.4
Information	39,849.4	11,151.2
Entertainment	42,340.0	503.1
Institutional/Religion	3,146.0	2,683.0
Total	131,083.6	41,963.6
Selected items total	36,441.2	1,235.0
	47,676.3	
Share in total aggregated funds TV	20.3%	

Authors' calculations, crossing data from *Relatório de auditoria à empresa concessionária do serviço público de televisão, Rádio e Televisão de Portugal, S.A.* (ERC, 2008) – in order to obtain the public funds allocation - and – allocation by genres – data from *Relatório de regulação de 2008* (ERC).

Now, please see the distribution by key areas of the budget available for the Department of Culture in the Portuguese government, according to the Government Budget for 2012 and as it was presented, at Parliament, on November 2011, by the Secretary of State of Culture (Table 8)

Table 8: The 2012 Budget for Culture, concerning key areas of public policy (million euros)

Activity Areas	2012	%
Sociocultural Activities	13.17	8%
Arts	44.32	27%
Archives and Libraries	21.18	13%
Cinema	15.47	9%
Heritage	60.96	36%
Administration and staff	12.01	7%
Total	167.1	100%

Source: Secretary of State of Culture, *Government Budget 2012*, November 2011, Portuguese Parliament, Budget Commission (see www.parlamento.pt).

There is an obvious point to make: the 48 million euros spent, in 2008, by RTP in cultural programmes would compare to the 44 million approved by Parliament to public endowment for the arts, in 2012. But we can try another test: add the investment made, in that year of 2008, by public radio, in all its main channels, in the genres “music and concerts” (see Table 9), and one should reach a total amount of 66 million euros of cultural investment by the media public service. That is, the equivalent to the funds allocated in the national budget for 2012 to public support of arts and cinema, or the equivalent to all the money reserved for heritage...

Table 9: Public funding allocated to cultural programmes, in the main public radio channels, 2008

unit: 1,000€	ANTENA 1	ANTENA 2	ANTENA 3
Allocated public funds	18,083.0	6,126.0	5,834.5
Genres Distribution			
Information	24.6%	1.1%	2.0%
Sports	11.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Music dissemination, music broadcasting and concerts	47.3%	91.6%	80.0%
“Words programmes”	14.4%	5.6%	12.0%
Institutional/Religion	1.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Continuity	1.3%	1.5%	6.0%
Allocation by genres			
Information	4,446.6	66.8	121.4
Sports	2,027.1	0.0	0.0
Music dissemination, music alignment and concerts	8,553.3	5,611.4	4,653.6
“Words programmes”	2,604.0	343.1	690.8
Institutional/Religion	217.0	12.3	11.7
Continuity	235.1	91.9	357.1
Total	18,083.1	6,125.5	5,834.6

<i>Selected items Total</i>	8,553.3	5,611.4	4,653.6
	18,818.3		
Share in total aggregated funds Radio	42.0%		

Source: see Table 7.

Of course, this is a rather rough estimate. We did not discuss the meaning and quality of the contents that broadcasters and regulators classify, for budgetary and contractual scrutiny, as “cultural programmes” and the like. For instance: not all the series and films would be considered, in a more detailed and exigent assessment, as “culture”; and inversely, some of the news magazines – all of which were excluded of our typology – would demonstrate cultural relevance.

But, limited as it is, this estimate powerfully highlights the financial magnitude of the public resources mobilised by the public service broadcasting, comparing to the scarcity of equivalent resources allocated to the Culture Department. This is to say, it highlights the huge potential of the public service broadcasting for cultural policy. In fact, a multidimensional potential: in terms of audiences, of social influence and of financial capability. Social scientists can and must put this in evidence. Politicians and public opinion should consider this as a critical issue for debate on, and implementation of, public policies for media, audiovisual, culture and arts.

6. Looking ahead

In the year 2002, a new cycle begun for the Portuguese public service broadcasting. The financial context improved significantly, in terms of public funds available and in the regularity of its processing to RTP, the public company. At the same time, operational costs were substantially reduced and the company was modernized, organisationally and technologically. Stability and professionalism became the rule of management: in 2005, for the first time in history, a change in Government (from right to left) didn't cause an equivalent change in the company's administration; and the same stability was again respected, in 2011, when the Portuguese Government moved from left to right. None of the media services provided by the public broadcaster was eradicated; on the contrary, they were in general incremented. Legal and contractual obligations were reinforced, and in 2008 a new set of mandatory quantitative goals was put in practice. The Law emphasized the editorial and professional independence of managers (versus the Government) and of content directors (versus managers and politicians); and it also created new mechanisms of accountability and assessment, as well as social participation in, and public scrutiny of, the public broadcaster's activity and outputs. The Parliament, the ERC (the independent regulator for media), the Ombudsmen and the Opinion Council fully became stakeholders of public media.

That evolution did not produce an abundance of means and resources for RTP – nor was this its purpose. As Table 2 has demonstrated, costs and revenues of the Portuguese public broadcaster are significantly below the average of their European equivalents. However, this process didn't put an end to the constant political and social debate on the mission, structure and performance of public service broadcasting. Its cost effectiveness, political independence and quality were, and still are, the main topics of such debate. Many people acknowledged that real achievements were accomplished in what regarded audiences, economic efficiency, differentiation when compared to the monothematic nature of private channels' programming, and credibility and relevance of information (news, documentary, opinion, and political or social controversy). Still, RTP faces huge challenges, the challenges and threats that upset the European model as a whole, but have in Portugal a particularly dramatic configuration.

Some of these challenges go back to the 1990's, related as they are to the way in which state monopoly was eliminated and the sector was opened to the market. Others have to do directly with the new digital context. Public service broadcasting lives under a double-nature crisis – a legitimacy crisis and the breakdown of its social influence (see Carvalho, 2009: 152-171) – and no one can assure the crisis will be defeated.

As a matter of fact, consumption modalities and schedules have changed dramatically. There are multiple platforms and networks for broadcasting, archive and reception. Thematic channels and on-demand services substantially enriched the contents available for different audiences. Subsequently, the influence of generalist, free-to-air television is decaying, and social duality configures a new issue, that has never been addressed before: some of the television content, including the more appealing and/or creative, is now subject to specific payment. Competition seems ferocious, namely for commercial advertising, product placement and the like of it. And, of course, since 2008, the economic environment is absolutely unfavourable.

In this context, how can those founding values of public service broadcasting, such as universality, citizenship, creativity and excellence, be addressed? How can the critical goals of independent and pluralistic information, cultural and artistic diversity, popular education, commitment to social integration and cohesion, attention to minorities and promotion of national language, culture and identity, be assured?

This is an unavoidable debate – a very urgent and necessary debate. Here, we cannot but suggest an approach, which has been too often forgotten: the role of public service broadcasting as a cultural resource, and, specifically, its relevance for cultural public

policy. This is an important area for empirical research, according to the standards of economics, sociology and communication sciences. This means to abandon impressionistic categorisations in terms of taste and the reductionist political controversy. This implies the analysis of objective conditions, restrictions and possibilities of financial, legal and contractual contexts, and the consideration of the outputs and the impact of concrete broadcasting.

This paper provides a very preliminary and rough exercise. Still, we dare to draw from it four main conclusions.

The first one underlines the progress made, from 2002 to 2012, concerning policies for public service broadcasting. The requirements and goals to achieve were clarified and reinforced, as well as the instruments to scrutinize compliance and to measure performances.

Secondly, public service broadcaster did, firstly, recover and then consolidate some kind of differentiation from private, market-driven television, thus conquering more specificity in the audiovisual landscape. We can always discuss if the differentiation could be broader, but we can't deny its increment.

The third conclusion is that one of the stronger elements of this differentiation refers to culture, science and education. Of course, there are other elements, with equal relevance: independent and pluralistic information, citizenship rights, access of interest groups, trade unions and political parties to the television primetime, universalism or specific programmes for Portuguese communities that live all around the world. Nevertheless, culture, science and education really belong at the core of the public service's identity and value added.

Finally, the human, material and financial resources that are engaged in the cultural and scientific dimensions of public service broadcasting represent a large sum of assets that are available and usable as crucial means for cultural policy. And indeed, the scarcity that undermines this policies – so incipient and weak, in terms of resources, professionalism and political stability and continuity – is an additional argument to explain how important it would be, in countries like Portugal, to mobilise the energy, people and outputs of public service broadcasting for cultural purposes.

Of course, this approach of the cultural relevance of public service broadcasting raises one equally decisive issue, that is, the guidelines that should orient public policies concerning media and public service media. But that would call for an entirely new paper.

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