

LOCAL TELEVISION STATIONS, BASQUE AND MINORITY LANGUAGE NORMALIZATION

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1.-The Television Landscape in the Basque Country

If the necessary technological infrastructure is available, when you switch on a television set anywhere in the Basque Country, you can gain access to a wide range of differently transmitted channels, such as terrestrial analogue, satellite or cable. All these systems are available at this moment in history when soon digital technology will allow us to enjoy a greater number of channels.

If we look at terrestrial analogue transmission, which is the traditional and most widely-used television broadcasting system, we see that the northern and southern parts of the Basque Country receive French television (six channels, three state ones and three private ones) and Spanish television (five channels, of which two are state ones). Although on the border between the two states and on the coast both signals can be received, the most normal thing is to fall within one or other of the two broadcasting areas. However, as far as our work is concerned, Spanish and French television broadcasters have a very centralized vision of their programming, content and news references, and they each use the official languages of their respective states. There is, therefore, scarcely a single programme in which elements specific to the Basque Country as regards information, culture or language are present and the news “opt-outs” of some of these channels make up for a very small part of the total broadcasting time.

In addition to the above-mentioned terrestrial analogue channels, and using the same technology, there is ETB, the national television broadcaster, which has two channels, one broadcasting in Basque and the other in Spanish. There is also a great number of local stations which have proliferated during the last few years and which are discussed below.

As far as satellite television is concerned, the number of channels broadcasting in Basque compared to those in Spanish or those broadcasting from elsewhere is, unsurprisingly, less than proportionate. In fact, although they were not conceived for domestic use, only the two satellite channels of Euskal Telebista, one for America (Canal Vasco) and another for Europe (ETB Sat) have products made in the Basque Country in which Basque is, increasingly present, albeit to a rather limited extent so far.

Cable television, a broadcasting system which is still not widely found in the Basque Country, is mostly used simply as a way of channelling the current terrestrial signals, rather than being a widespread means of communication. That is to say, cable includes the above-

mentioned terrestrial and satellite channels and, in some cases, carries the signals of local stations belonging to capital cities of provinces which do not have an exclusive television service for their users.

2.-Euskal Telebista: a great step towards linguistic normalization

As is widely known, the Basque Country is a nation situated within the French and Spanish states which has no political or administrative organization which can draw it together. Thus, the three northern Basque provinces are under French administration and they have no political or administrative entity which can represent them. Out of the four southern Basque provinces, three are included in the so-called Basque Autonomous Community and the fourth, Navarre, is a separate entity within the Spanish state.

This political and administrative division is reflected on television in ways discussed below.

Before the advent of Euskal Telebista (ETB) in 1982, the Basque Country had no means of providing a television service originating from the Basque Country or aimed at it either totally or partially.

The legislation which established the Basque television broadcaster sets two main objectives: to establish ETB as a means of communication and to contribute to the cultural and linguistic normalization of the country.

The achievement of these objectives, which were established more than twenty years ago, has met with numerous obstacles, although important progress has been made.

On the one hand, Euskal Telebista's signal is not broadcast in the normal way outside the Basque Autonomous Community due to the obstacles placed in the way of this by the Navarrese political authorities, who are deeply contemptuous of Basque culture and the Basque language. Something similar happens in the north, where agreements have been reached only on a local basis and only a weak network of terrestrial analogue television relay stations has been created, covering almost the whole territory.

Therefore, Euskal Telebista is, essentially, a television station for the three provinces of the Basque Autonomous Community, which, nonetheless, reaches the rest of the Basque territories in the north and Navarre.

Both before and since the establishment of Euskal Telebista, the rest of the television stations available in the Basque Country have had just a few non-centralized broadcasts, mainly short daily news programmes in which the use of Basque language, as mentioned above, is merely symbolic.

ETB's Basque speaking channel has a smaller audience and children's and sports programmes predominate, making it a second rate station within a highly competitive TV context. ETB2, on the other hand, with an all Spanish schedule, is struggling to become a leading television channel.

The news programmes give attention to social, cultural and political matters of specific relevance to the Basque Country, but the rest of the programmes have little to distinguish them from those found on channels in Spain, France or elsewhere. There is still

no synergy between the different channels and no common frame of reference has been attained.

3.-The relationship of the public to Basque language and culture.

The fact of belonging to two different states and the political and administrative fragmentation within them, as well as a highly diverse electoral allegiances to pro-Basque, pro-Spanish or pro-French parties in the different territories make the different television channels into ideological instruments for conveying confronting ideologies. For example, it might be said, based on the features enumerated above, that ETB is a pro-Basque channel with its own vision of the country's reality and aiming at the construction and transmission of an identity, in which the Basque language, on one of its channels, is at the heart of its work. The Spanish and French channels, on the other hand, deny the Basque identity by ignoring it, and make no use of the Basque language, which, for them, has no value and is not worth promoting.

In this context, it is clear that television can be a powerful instrument for political normalization as well as for the strengthening of culture and identity.

Nowadays, the levels of knowledge and use of the Basque language are quite low and vary from area to area.

-Monolingual (Spanish or French):			63%
-Bilingual	-Basque	6,6%	22%
	-balanced	7,1%	
	-Sp/Fr	8,3%	
-Passive bilingual			14,5%
-Monolingual (Basque)			0,5%

However, in addition to these statistics, while bearing in mind that they show trends, we will also give some indication of people's desire to be able to speak Basque and of the degree to which people are interested in sending their children to schools in which Basque is the *lingua franca* of all or most of the subjects.

-63% of the population totally or partially agree with the following statement: "It is essential that all children should learn the Basque language".

-60% of the population totally or partially agree with the following statement: "To join the public administration of the Basque Country, spoken Basque should be necessary".

(Eusko Jaurlaritza 1996)

When people in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country were asked, "If you had children, which linguistic model would you choose for their studies?", they answered as follows, 86% being in favour of the Basque or bilingual model:

-A Model (Spanish)	10
-B Model (Basque and Spanish)	40
-D Model (Basque)	46
-Foreign Language	1
-NA	3

(Basque Government Presidential Dept. 2002.)

As far as media consumption is concerned, Spanish or French products predominate, and newspapers, radios and magazines in Basque are still weak. The same situation can be seen in television, where the presence of Basque is quite low, as are audiences. However, if the surveys show that 42% of the population totally or partially agree with the following statement: “All radio and television broadcast in the Basque Country should have more programmes in Basque”, we can see that the potential is still substantial, that is to say, public opinion is in favour of the use of the Basque language in the media and consequently, all pro-Basque local, provincial or autonomous governments in the Basque Country should use all means necessary to work for linguistic normalization.

We will now focus on the use of the media, mainly local television, in order to make an assessment of the current situation as well as to propose a series of positive policies the Basque Autonomous Government in Vitoria-Gasteiz and local governments should develop.

4.- Local television presence in the Basque Country: recent development and current situation

The first Basque local television stations were developed at the end of the eighties by individuals or social groups with audiovisual skills and no profit motive in mind. The emergence of local stations took place in the face of a legal threat for there was no specific legislation regulating local television. There were similar processes in other parts of the Spanish state, such as Andalusia, Catalonia, Valencia and Madrid.

Although in 1995 legislation was passed, aiming at regulating the ever increasing local television presence in the whole Spanish state and in the southern part of the Basque Country this law was never enforced. Instead, what was called local television (a concept which was becoming vaguer and vaguer) developed in a rather unbridled manner. This proliferation of channels came along with very important qualitative changes and they have given rise to the current framework in which the following are intermingled:

- local television channels belonging to small municipalities, together with stations covering larger areas;
- television channels developed by bodies in the public sector with social objectives and those created as trading companies with profit motives;
- in addition, there has been a recent trend towards stations specially created for a city by big media groups or which have been absorbed by them or by local networks from all over the Spanish state;

-there are stations broadcasting for specific niches and those broadcasting a variety of programme genres every day;

-finally, even though most of them broadcast exclusively in Spanish, there are also a few local channels broadcasting only or mainly in Basque;

The outlook is quite similar in the whole of the southern Basque Country as far as terrestrial analogue broadcasting is concerned. Provinces under French administration are in a different position because in France there is a central body regulating licences and television broadcasting (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel-CSA). Also, legislation is stricter and has greatly conditioned the development of local networks. Thus, there is only one local channel, allowed to broadcast sporadically which gives it a clearly provisional character.

Finally, although we will not examine them in depth, in the south of Navarre there are some twenty local cable stations broadcasting for their municipalities. These channels, with a modest range of programmes, are quite powerful and maintain the idea of networks developed in the public sector with socially beneficial objectives.

These are the channels currently broadcasting grouped by province.¹

Province	# stations	Public sector / associations	Part of TV station	Complete Programming	Presence of Basque Language
Araba	5	1	4	3	1
Bizkaia	8	1	3	7	2
Gipuzkoa	15	3	4	11	8
Nafarroa	21	10	3	7	0
Total	49	15	14	28	11

5.- Local televisions at a crossroads and facing conflicting pressures

5.1.-Uncontrolled proliferation of local stations and the new *status quo*

It is a widely-held opinion that the increase of television channels available from home is positive in itself, regardless of the quality and originality of their programmes and content.

But this increase in the number and variety of television stations has provoked considerable turmoil around the concept of proximity television and it is necessary to start a debate on the role such media play in society and the role political and administrative institutions must play.

¹ On this list you will find included stations using terrestrial analogue transmission and cable. For the latter we will only refer to local television channels with regular broadcasting, leaving out those on air during town festivals or special social or cultural events.

We have omitted audiovisual services on the Internet, of which there are four at present, three in the northern part of the Basque Country and one in the south.

The **lack of regulation** of local television networks by political and administrative institutions (i.e. mainly the Spanish and Basque governments, the case of the government in Navarre being quite different) has created an environment in which the business sector has been more important than the social one². The responsibility of the different executive powers, and of the Basque Government, for this issue is enormous, since they have allowed a *de facto* situation to grow which is far from the aim of achieving television provision which takes all citizens into account and is close to them.

The development of the main big local stations came about as a result of a process of **colonisation of the local space** and has prevented the existing small stations from developing in their own way.

Moreover, the local stations in the capital cities of provinces have widened their coverage areas and have spread through the surrounding towns. They can even cover the whole province by means of cable. This means that the local territory is saturated and that development of local stations in small villages is impossible.

On the other hand, the need to get large audiences in order to be able to competitively take part in the advertising market has pushed local televisions to resort to the same multigeneric patterns as those used by televisions with a bigger coverage, that is, quite a commercial schedule and a substantial number of programmes produced externally.

This current framework, in which the laws of the market outweigh other considerations, must be regulated so that local television channels, which are so necessary to the citizenry, can maintain or recover³ their power as instruments for territorial articulation, social integration and the transmission of information, matching educational, political and social expectations and aiming at the cultural and linguistic normalization of the Basque Country.

5.2. –Some aspects to be regulated in relation to local television channels

As noted above, the number of local stations has increased in the last few years and this has brought about a new landscape in which the concept of local television itself has become vaguer. As a result, the 1995 act and the changes made by the Spanish government at the end of 2002, although the Basque Government has done nothing on this issue, may be used to reshape the local television landscape.

² The recent modification of the 1995 local television law has sown many doubts around the concept of local television itself, which appears to be typified as digital, as well as the future of existing local television channels, the role of the autonomous institutions as regulators and, in short, its application in practice.

³ When defining local television, Moragas and Prado (2002) say “...the local space is a space which democracy cannot give up, for it is a space for local identity and these functions will only be effective when local television channels act as ‘proximity’ channels. For us, proximity television is television addressed to a territorially delimited community, doing so with content relating to the viewers’ ordinary experience, their worries, their cultural heritage, their historical memory, and so on, aiming at increasing the social participation of the community. Therefore, proximity refers to the geographical area of broadcasting (local), and mainly it refers to the social use of content. The concept of proximity applied to television implies the recognition of a scenery shared by the broadcaster (television channel) and the audience, and this must be reflected in the final content of their programming...”

Implementation needs to be **balanced, with regard to territory and population**, so that local television channels develop homogeneously in the different parts of the country, town by town, region by region, seeking ways in which performance can be optimised. The regional organization of local television comes from the deeply-rooted traditional organization of Basque society (gangs or “cuadrillas” in Alava, “merindades” in Navarre, regional communities, councils, etc...) and with the organization of electoral districts for provincial parliaments, for example. The expansion of coverage by television channels in capital cities of provinces constitutes a threat, distorting closeness and reference, creating dynamics tending to centralization based on big towns or capital cities.

Furthermore, it is necessary to regulate the presence of public channels alongside private ones, and seek **new methods of management and new administrative frameworks** through, for instance, public-private mixed management systems which could make smaller towns’ local stations viable.

On the other hand, it is necessary for institutions to establish guidelines for content and linguistic models to be followed by local stations. To this end, however, **the creation of a body to regulate audiovisual matters** is very important, along the lines of the French CSA or the Consell de l’Audiovisual in Catalunya, in order to reorganize and control the activity of all audiovisual media and, of course, local television networks.

Finally, public institutions must do their best to ensure that local television stations become audiovisual production unities creating their own industrial network. This **cultural and industrial infrastructure** should seek synergies with others and establish bonds between the different networks in the provision of programming and offer a wide and varied range of audiovisual products. The relationship between local channels themselves and Euskal Telebista must be fostered as much as possible.

5.3.- Local television as a public service and a means of social participation

Despite the fact that in recent years television has acquired a function primarily of providing entertainment through the “spectacularization” of the contents of ordinary channels, local television must recover its **information and public service character**. The objective of local stations should not be to compete with more general channels as regards geographic coverage and content, but rather to serve as a complement in their search for information and for subject matter of local, cultural, social and historical relevance.

To give local television a remit of this sort, which could be translated into the compulsory broadcasting of a given percentage of information and public service content or in-house productions, could mean a fall in current local television audience levels or the loss of channels in the future, but would boost quality even if at the expense of quantity.

Besides, the philosophy of local channels as a means of serving the communities they broadcast for would allow the development of innovative formulae for the integration of municipal institutions, new information technologies, audiovisual creativity and citizens.

5.4.- Local television and linguistic normalization

Basque political, administrative and educational institutions as well as many social institutions are involved in the process of linguistic normalization of the Basque Country, a process local television cannot ignore.

The plans for linguistic normalization approved by the Basque Government in different areas, but mainly in education, must be developed in the field of media. The linguistic imbalance in the media in general and in television in particular is so overwhelming that it makes it necessary for the Basque Government to act in those cases where it has the capacity to do so, local television being one such area⁴.

The linguistic normalization process applied so far to the education system has a perfect ally in local television, where quotas for the use of Basque can be applied either in relation to screen time or to programmes promoting linguistic normalization. These formulae do not have to be the same all over the country, but should in any case aim at normalization and balance in the use of the different official languages and of Basque in particular given its much more delicate situation.

5.5.- Models of local television for the development and normalization of Basque

The present local television scene and, above all, its future development, need the application of models that are consistent with the objectives and that make possible the communicative structuring of a society and a country.

It is interesting, in connection with this, to look at the situation in Catalonia and some of the existing cases in the Basque Country itself.

As for Catalonia, the following are some aspects that could be applied also to the Basque Country:

- the assumption by the institutions and other social agents of the strategic value of local media in general and local television in particular;
- the regulating and organizing role of the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia, the government and provincial and town councils;
- the search for balance between commercial and social initiatives and, in any case, the application to all initiatives of some minimum conditions as regards content, linguistic models and other factors;
- the application of forms of collaboration among the different local stations and even with ETB in order to extend broadcasting times, diversify the supply and thus offer the audience attractive, and at the same time personal, television programming.

In the Basque sphere, the analysis and establishment of a series of local television models, that are applicable to different areas in the country, can be very interesting. The search for references that can be exported to other channels or areas has already proved successful in the local press scene.

From the existing models, we shall single out GoiTB for the aspects listed below:

- local television is at once a means for the transmission of information and content, social integration, the reinforcement of identity and linguistic normalization;
- local television emerges and develops in parallel and synergy with other local media: the press, radio stations, web sites...

⁴ “The Basque Country will be able to regulate, create and maintain its own television, radio and press and, in general, all media for the achievement of its purposes.” (Statute of Autonomy, article 19.3, 1979)

- the body supporting the local television broadcaster has sought the integration of two forces: the popular initiative and that of a more institutional nature (town councils, town council associations...). The ownership and management of the television station are shared in the first case and independent in the second. Municipal support provides interesting possibilities for the development of the contribution made by volunteers and citizens;
- the application of mixed financing formulae that supplement advertising income with public subsidies;
- the drawing up of attractive programme planning that extends from an information basis to the cultural, sports and even entertainment spheres, but always within the limits of technical and financial feasibility. To this end, programme planning has to take advantage of multibroadcast systems (which deal with the timing of repeat broadcasts in such a way as to avoid too monotonous a schedule) and automation mechanisms, (software packages that automatically fill certain slots in the schedule with such material as weather forecasts, stock exchange figures, traffic information etc);
- the assumption of a leading role as regards linguistic normalization, that is, to be ahead of others in terms of the level of use of Basque.

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