

The programming output of the Swiss regional television channels in 2018

Summary

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Starting point and objectives

In 2018 it was exactly ten years since the last significant round of licence awards to private regional radio and television stations in Switzerland. In their performance mandates, the regional television broadcasters who were licensed in 2008 are obliged, among other things, to broadcast primarily relevant local and regional information in the areas of politics, economics, culture, society and sport during prime time. Topics, opinions, interests and the people and groups of people who get a chance to speak must satisfy the diversity obligation. In addition, the licensed regional television broadcasters must take into account in their reporting the entire coverage area allocated to them. In return, the regional television stations receive a share of the reception fees for radio and television, amounting to between CHF 2.5 and 4.2 million depending on the coverage area. From this support out of public funds arises the requirement from the legislature and the regulatory authority respectively to periodically examine compliance with the performance mandate. The results of the present study are intended to contribute to this. On the basis of the analysis of the programming broadcast by the individual licensed regional television stations, the regulator should be provided with information on how the broadcasters are implementing their licence.

Methodology

A total of 13 regional television stations from the same number of licensing areas were surveyed. These 13 stations broadcast 14 channels. In addition, for purposes of comparison, the survey also included TeleZüri, a broadcaster which is merely subject to registration, which does not have a performance mandate and which therefore does not receive a share of the radio and television reception fee. For the survey, a sample made up of two artificial weeks was taken which included all five working days from Monday to Friday and which was spread over the entire year. The survey focussed on the prime time between 18:00 and 23:00 which is explicitly mentioned in the licence, during which the regional television stations are obliged to provide local and regional information offerings. For each station, 50 hours of programming were recorded over ten test dates; for all 13 stations a total of 750 hours of programmes were recorded. Methodically, this study is based on a **quantitative content analysis** of the channel, transmission and feature levels. The research question posed above – how the broadcasters are implementing their licence – was first transposed into appropriate indicators and then into measurable variables. The key performance indicators which can be derived from the licence are **topicality, relevance, and diversity** - a distinction is made between diversity of topics, opinions, participants and forms - the **language** used and **regional relevance**.

Methodological profile

Method	> Quantitative content analysis
Channels surveyed	
German-speaking Switzerland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Kanal 9¹ > TeleBärn > Telebasel > Tele M1 > Tele 1 > Tele Top > TVO > Tele Südostschweiz > TeleZüri (<i>broadcaster without performance mandate/fee-splitting</i>)
French-speaking Switzerland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Canal 9¹ > Léman Bleu > La Télé > Canal Alpha > TeleBilingue²
Italian-speaking Switzerland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > TeleTicino
Random sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Two artificial weeks, in each case Monday to Friday > 10 test days > Duration of recording: 5 hours per day > Per station: 50 hours of programming > Total: 750 hours of programming
Determination of the test days	> Distribution of the test days over the whole survey year, in order to avoid distortions of the sample due to specific seasonal characteristics
Period	> Prime time: 18:00 to 23:00

¹ The licence was granted to the Canal 9 **station** and specifies that for the German-speaking and French-speaking part of the coverage area (the canton of Valais plus the Aigle district in Waadt canton) a respective editorial **programme window** is to be broadcast in prime time (under the name Kanal 9 and Canal 9 respectively) (Art. 6 of the licence). The Kanal 9 programming is listed under the broadcasters of German-speaking Switzerland and that of Canal 9 is listed under the broadcasters of French-speaking Switzerland.

² According to its own information, TeleBilingue is the "only genuinely bilingual regional television station in Switzerland" (<http://www.telebilingue.ch/de/team>, 07.05.2019). The broadcaster is listed as one of the broadcasters of French-speaking Switzerland. The degree to which each language is spoken is an open question which is to be clarified empirically, and which is answered in the framework of the detailed research report.

2018 results

The programming of all regional television stations during the prime time surveyed consists in principle and **for the most part of information transmissions**. Between the 14 regional television stations with a performance mandate and fee-splitting, as well as TeleZüri, **only small differences** are apparent on this point. Thematically, with few exceptions, politics and government plus society predominate for all broadcasters. This is followed by events in economics, culture and sport. For most broadcasters, "softer" subjects, such as, for example, human interest or "bad news", constitute **only a relatively small proportion** of the duration of the information features surveyed. Specifically: for the 14 regional television stations with a performance mandate and fee-splitting, the themes mentioned explicitly in the licence (politics, economics, culture, society and sport) add up in total to approximately 90 per cent on average of all information features. For French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland, the cumulative shares of these five licence-related ranges of topics tend to be higher than those for the regional television broadcasters from German-speaking Switzerland. For TeleZüri, as a broadcaster without a performance mandate, information on the subjects of politics, economics, culture, society and sport constitute over 80 percent of the information features. The station's shares for human interest and "bad news" are accordingly distinctly higher. It is possible to discern a **different emphasis** for each station in its choice of subjects, but at the same time it is clear that no broadcaster opts for monothematic content or sectoral programming in its reporting.

The distribution of broadcast subject areas is also to be found in a similar form in terms of the **participants** taking part in the programming. If a subject area is extensively reported, corresponding prominence of the participants in this area is generally to be expected. In the present survey, participants who can be classified in the sectors of **politics and government, society or economics** are accordingly to be found most frequently. Reportage therefore features **established groups of participants**, but on average none can account for a share in excess of 50 percent.

This **pluralism** of various participants who appear contrasts with the **rarity** with which the regional television broadcasters distinguish themselves by **embedding different opinions or pointing out an additional, second perspective**. In their very clear majority, the information features **are matter-of-fact** and offer **no opinion** on the circumstances of the event. Neither does the reporting of the regional television stations feature a multi-faceted, multi-perspective presentation - at least not in the prime-time information broadcasts. This finding is also confirmed by the result of other performance indicators: the majority of the features surveyed are relatively **matter-of-fact** features. Though the repertoire of various journalistic forms employed is relatively broad, ultimately, however, the shares of the main categories of discussion and talk, reporting and reportage and features dominate.

In the information features surveyed the **use of stylistic elements** is also handled somewhat **reservedly**. It is an open question whether the reasons for this lie in an effort to achieve neutrality and objectivity or in modest, efficient reporting which deploys the fewest resources possible. In any event, it is hardly possible to find categorisation by a broadcaster's journalists in the form of a commentary

or criticism. The focus is on **information** and the **effort to ensure objectivity**; categorisation and orientation play a distinctly smaller role.

The current results relating to the dimensions of **event location** and **regional relevance** are confirmed by earlier findings: regional television stations' reporting is heavily weighted in favour of **events**, which have occurred **within the licence's coverage area**. At the same time, some relevance to the region is very often realised in the information features. However, this does not apply to the same extent to all the channels surveyed: for the broadcasters in the CH-Media broadcasting family (TeleBärn, Tele M1 and TeleZürich), the lowest proportions of reporting are clearly apparent in terms of events located within the area covered by the licence. This finding is also reflected for these three broadcasters in the dimensions of participants and the range of topics. On the one hand, the proportion of foreign participants is above average for the three channels mentioned; on the other hand, a relatively high proportion of topics of international significance is evident. Overall the trends towards rather internationally oriented reporting is being consolidated for these three channels.