

**Andreas Masouras**

**Understanding Competition and  
Diversity in Television Programming**

Economic crisis & TV



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## Abstract

This research examines and analyses the diversity of television content. More specifically, it provides an in-depth study of the development of television content. We attempt to study content through the concept of diversity, which is considered as being a methodological tool that records and describes trends in television programming. Through the methodological use of diversity, the rationale behind the programming structure is presented and, therefore, the structures that create and constitute the content can be shown. A detailed discussion is developed, as well as a new approach to television diversity, in light of the methodological examination. This research is based on theoretical approaches to the study of diversity of content, such as, for example, Napoli's approach, which divides the study of content into three levels: 'Source diversity', 'content diversity' and 'exposure diversity'. Another example is the approach developed by Valcke, based on the levels of 'supplier', 'product' and 'outlet'. This research focuses on Greek television, as a case with its own characteristic features and particularities, which are analysed throughout this research. The Audio-Visual Laboratory of Athens University was the main source of data, but other sources are also analysed using this methodology. More specifically, this study examines television content with respect to three structures: The degree of diversity of programming genres, the diversity of news content (viewpoint diversity) and diversity at the level of programming production (source diversity). The research objectives of this study are as follows: to determine if the degree of content diversity is a function of specific factors that are related to the frequency of genres (i.e., reruns, broadcast frequency), to examine news content as a separate genre and how this has evolved, based on which factors, and to examine the diversity at the level of sources, meaning the level of production, and how these decisions regarding the content impact the level of diversity. The methodological categorization of television content diversity into these three levels constitutes a basis that allows for an increased understanding of the way television programming is developed and how these structures, namely genre diversity, viewpoint diversity and source diversity, interact with each other, thus affecting the total degree of content diversity. The findings of this study, such as, for example, the impact of the restructuring of television markets based on content, the impact of source diversity on genre diversity, the influence of exogenous factors, such as, the institutional frame and other issues that are discussed in the last chapter help us move towards a better understanding of the structures that constitute the methodological and conceptual diversity of television content.

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Dedicated to the memory of the journalist Andreas Christodoulides and to  
all those who fight cancer.

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## CHAPTER ONE: *INTRODUCTION*

### 1.1. The television content in question

The importance of Newton Minow's (1961) classic speech on television, which was delivered at the National Association of Broadcasters convention, is still valid today, since the forming of television content, its tendencies and the parameters for its study, evaluation and assessment are still debated today. Minow's words, in the following quotation, illustrate the unrelenting significance of the matter: "...But when television is bad, nothing is worse. I invite you to sit down in front of the television set when your channel goes on the air and stay there without a book, magazine, newspaper, profit-and-loss sheet or rating book to distract you – and keep your eyes glued to that set until the channel signs off. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland. You will see a procession of game shows, violence, audience participation shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, Western bad men, Western good men, private eyes, gangsters, more violence and cartoons. And, endlessly, commercials – many screaming, cajoling and offending. And most of all, boredom. True, you will see a few things you will enjoy. But they will be very, very few. And if you think I exaggerate, try it." (Minow, 1961).

The relevance of the above quotation of Minow's (1961) for the following research lies in the fact that forming the content of television – the issue in question in this research – is not a simple and straightforward matter. It involves various forms and levels of analysis and it cannot be addressed in a one-dimensional and simplistic way; rather, it requires a wider approach in order for the parameters that form, constitute and finally construct the content to be understood. The concept of content can refer to various notions and it can consist of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Krippendorff, 2004).

The complexity of assessing content comes across in Minow's speech (1961), an excerpt of which is set out above. This complexity is centred upon the basic question of how television content is evaluated and assessed. For instance, the belief that television programming is of increasingly low quality – a typical opinion among viewers – is a quite straightforward conclusion, which, however, contains within it a complicated and multi-levelled methodological issue. Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) describe television as an aesthetic object, which has its nucleus within the content. Interestingly, the authors, even though they approach the matter from the cultural perspective of content, argue that its study should employ the textual levels and the various forms that constitute the content.

Within the problematic issue of studying content, the concept of diversity, which is the key concept studied in this research, holds a leading role. It is a key concept for the study of content but, at the same time, equally problematic. The challenging nature of diversity stems from the fact that it functions in a multi-levelled way and it can be applied, but not as a single-concept, to a number of parameters and matters (McDonald and Dimmick, 2003). McDonald and Dimmick (2003), in their study on the conceptualization of diversity, classified the concept on a quantitative basis, distinguishing between three dimensions according to its methodological orientation. The first dimension of diversity is the classification of data that one wishes to examine within the framework of diversity, for example, the classification of data regarding types of firms or programming. The second

methodological dimension of diversity concerns data distribution within the categories; this involves, in other words, classifying subcategories. In the case of television content, for instance, this occurs when programmes are categorized into genres and subgenres. The third dimension of diversity according to McDonald and Dimmick (2003) is that of “dual-concept” diversity which examines two different parameters simultaneously; the authors define dual-concept diversity as: “...a two-dimensional construct that holds a central place of study in many fields, including communication” (p.60). McDonald and Dimmick locate the notion of dual-concept diversity in Junge’s work (1994), who originally uses it in the field of psychology and uses this dual terminology in considering the number of classes and in the extent of the homogeneity of the data distribution has in a piece of research. McDonald and Dimmick, based on Junge’s rationale, explain the conceptual extension of dual-concept diversity to the area of media content: “One dimension reflects the categories of classification, and the other reflects the distribution of elements within those categories. This “dual-concept” diversity (in Junge’s, 1994, terminology) is central to virtually all conceptualizations of diversity” (p.74). It is essentially a theoretical construct, as is, for instance, Stirling’s approach (1998) on variety, disparity and heterogeneity, which is discussed in the third chapter and can be applied to a wide spectrum of fields, from natural sciences to social sciences. More specifically, McDonald and Dimmick (2003) argue that: “The general concept of diversity has been applied to a number of different areas” (p.62). Ruta and Gabrys (2001), also refer to diversity as a general concept which can be broadly applied: “Diversity among classifiers is the notion describing the level to which classifiers vary in data representation, concepts, strategy etc. That way perceived multidimensional diversity has many faces but its effects observed at the outputs of classifiers are the same...” (p.1).

This general approach used by McDonald and Dimmick, which initially – as it was mentioned above – was developed as a “dual-concept” terminology by Junge, differs greatly from context-specific conceptualizations, such as Napoli’s (1999), which deals with media content policies. McDonald and Dimmick argue that: “In the present study, the term dimension refers not to contexts of application but instead to characteristics of the diversity concept that are present in all contexts. We seek to specify general guidelines related to measures of diversity that might be found in many contexts or applications in which diversity is an issue. It is our contention that the clarification of the concept of diversity and an evaluation of its measures can lead to greater clarity in the research literature in all fields in which diversity is a central concept.” (p.63). Junge (1994) fleshes out the concept of diversity with the attribute of quantity: “In statistical terms a measure (index) of diversity is a summary description of a population with a class structure. More generally, quantification of diversity is related to the apportionment of some quantity (e.g., number of elements, time, and mass) into a number of well-defined classes...” (p.16).

Returning to the matter of content, the relation between content and diversity appears in a number of research studies examining this particular subject. In the third chapter, where empirical approaches are discussed, such research studies will be addressed, as, for instance, Napoli’s study (1999) on content diversity, and diversity will be analysed both as a policy issue and as a non-policy objective in an attempt to render its notional boundaries clear and discernible and to further discuss its methodological orientation. That is, the way in which diversity is approached as a tool for assessing various content parameters and the limits – if any – to its use as an approach. This research does not limit content study strictly within the context of diversity of genre – a typical approach when the issue of content diversity is examined – but it moves outside this framework, exploring television content and its development from other perspectives as well. It is claimed here that for a complete study of

content, a multifaceted approach is required; this is the reason why, as it will be shown below through the research queries, content diversity is examined using a multi-levelled approach.

## **1.2. Quality in television and the link with diversity**

The concept of quality is discussed in this subchapter because of the close correlation between content quality and diversity. Quality and diversity are frequently confused, as, for instance, with regard to the popular idea that if there is content diversity in scheduling, this will automatically entail quality or, even, that the quality of a schedule depends on specific programming genres and that broadcasting certain genres instead of others may raise or lower the quality of the programming. However, such conclusions are clearly subjective, since quality genres do not automatically promote content diversity. In other words, content quality does not necessarily promote diversity of genre and content, or the other way round.

In this study, it is not worthwhile or relevant for us to engage in a conceptual discussion of terms, such as quality, since – as is detailed below – the polysemy of the term would make this very difficult. It is more relevant for us to study the correlation between quality and diversity and to discuss certain components of their relation. Moreover, the relation between quality and diversity, and the way it is formed through shared features, can contribute to a deeper understanding, through new variables, of media policy design.

Some further discussion is, however, necessary to underline the fact that quality cannot be defined, as it is a dynamic, changeable and sometimes general and abstract concept. These features are attributed to the methodologically problematic nature of the concept of quality, since it cannot be assessed on the basis of specific variables, nor can unequivocal conclusions on its nature be attained (Taylor, 2003). When a researcher attempts to interpret and approach the term, the provided definition is de facto constructed through subjective interpretations. By far the majority of the efforts to define it are semantic, aiming to eliminate this academic “softness”, ambiguity, liminality and dissonance, in order to encourage and promote research on this specific issue. An approach attempting to conceptually specify the various levels of quality was presented by Celata and Albani (2005). The authors distinguish between seven levels of quality (perceived quality, expected quality, requisite quality, acquired quality, ethical quality, delivered quality, organizational quality). Celata and Albani (2005) attempt to clarify quality, firstly, through the above-mentioned classification and, secondly, by placing it within the context of customer satisfaction, technological impact and the financial management of quality. The authors (2005), referring to the quality of television programming, argue that the study of content quality has purely financial standards with respect to its approach and the way it is assessed. They mention, for example, the issues of production cost or of licence fees for programming and advertising inflow that a schedule can incur as matters that place the concept of quality within a financial context. On the other hand, the authors (2005) claim that the quality of television programming is not independent from the creative part, since through the process of content creation or, more specifically, of creating a programme, certain variables may be established, which can shape the quality of the programming (2005).

The assessment of content quality is closely related to concepts which can define the various aspects of quality. One such concept, which can establish variables for the assessment of programming quality - or at least for a partial qualitative analysis of a schedule -, is the concept of diversity.



It is possible to observe the way content quality corresponds to content diversity and the areas in which they coincide thanks to the research that was conducted by the Cyprus Radio Television Authority (2006). The aim of this research was to establish certain criteria for the evaluation and assessment of quality with regard to radio and television in Cyprus.

Some of the quality assessment parameters used in the research, found in the proposals and conclusions section, include factors such as the cost and level of local productions, the broadcasting scheduling, the types of foreign series that are being broadcast and the variety of the shows (Cyprus Radio television Authority, 2006).

Programming variety in particular, but also other criteria, such as the production cost and selection, which basically concern the process of production and source diversity – an issue that will be discussed in detail below – are related to the concept of diversity. In other words, the study of the diversity of specific aspects of the content, such as genre and programming type analysis, as well as the analysis of the degree of diversity, are used as parameters for determining the level of the quality of programming.

Hillve, Majanen and Rosengren (1997) approach this correlation between quality and diversity in a more direct and specific way. They argue that the quality of a channel depends on the degree of diversity of its programming. According to them, quality as a concept cannot be defined, since any definition of quality can be drawn from a multitude of dimensions. The authors (1997) claim that the solution to this conceptual dilemma is to be found within the concept of diversity. In the following subchapters and throughout this research, the notion of diversity will be analysed and its conceptual dimensions will be shown.

Therefore, due to the complexity of this concept and because of its correlation with diversity, as has already been mentioned, the most useful and appropriate mechanism for addressing the quality of television content (in this research, only the concept of content diversity, not quality is addressed empirically) is to assemble and refer to specific criteria that could be used to identify a method of programming that has the necessary traits. Such criteria have been assembled by Papathanassopoulos (1993), who offers some clear and significant parameters:

1. Freedom of expression is imperative so that the work of the creator is not used for maximising viewing ratings.
2. The producer of a schedule should not be under time pressure to complete the work.
3. A high standard of professionalism is required and the people involved in the programming's production should be fully aware of any technical developments in the field of their activities.
4. A quality production should be original and the creator should give the impression that the created work can educate viewers and promote awareness among them (Papathanassopoulos, 1993).

Furthermore, other factors may contribute to improving the quality of the content of television programming such as, for instance, if it is of an educational nature, or if pluralism and the representativeness of all social groups are present. All these factors contribute actively to the quality of programming. As far as this issue is concerned, the existing commercial logic of the media is, for the most part, not in line with these specific features.

From the aforementioned studies it is obvious that quality is not independent from related concepts, such as diversity, since it is not possible to provide a commonly accepted definition. This means that quality can be approached using various indicators, which quite frequently account for different or even contradictory issues, given that a researcher may perceive a factor as a negative or a positive parameter with respect to quality assessment. For instance, Papathanassopoulos (1993) claims that the work of the creator should not be used for raising the viewing ratings, whereas Crawford (2007) considers programming ratings as a quality criterion.

This means that the polysemy of the concept of quality undoubtedly has an impact on various studies that claim to measure quality. In this respect, it is worth noting that some studies take, as a basic standard of quality, those programmes which attract the highest numbers of viewers, thus leading to the conclusion that the highest quality programmes are news bulletins and programmes with violent content, since these are the ones that achieve the highest ratings. Crawford (2007) determines the quality of programming based on two distinct parameters. Firstly, his study refers to audience measurements, estimating that the highest quality programming will have higher ratings. Furthermore, the number and length of advertising spots are also considered as factors that determine the quality of television programming. Crawford (2007) in particular links the quality of programming to purely economic factors: “We similarly focus on economic measures of programming quality. We have two measures. First, we measure quality by the number of households who choose to watch a programme. Second, we measure quality by the number and length (in minutes and seconds) of advertisements included on that programme. This captures the idea that the more advertisements included in a programme, the less enjoyable it is to viewers to watch that programme” (p.2).

Quality is a multidimensional concept which is difficult to approach on one single level. One means of approaching quality is linked to content diversity. At this point, it is important to stress the crucial part diversity plays in parallel concepts, such as quality or pluralism, something which is discussed in the next subchapter. However, the polysemy of the concept, as well as normative discourses, can be rather useful for prospective policy design, since they can benefit the discussion and steer it in this direction. For example, a review or an enrichment of the variables that define at present the quality of programming, may lead to the development of new tendencies in media policy, in particular, with regard to policy concerning television programming. This is because the media policy agenda has no fixed or static status, since it is determined each time it is developed, based on new data. Braman (2004) locates the challenge of approaching and interpreting media policy as being primarily a result of technological development and transformation. Braman argues that: “Various strands of law dealing with information technologies and the content they carry have come together, often burying traditional media policy issues within a vast policy space. Seeing the media policy trees within this forest is difficult” (p.154). In this case as well – namely, of the effects that technological advances may have on media policy – the focus is once more on the content, since this is essentially what is created and consumed by the audience. Therefore, the degree of content diversity is greatly affected both by external factors, such as technology, as well as by factors that influence the decisions the channels make, such as the ratings of a particular programming schedule.

### **1.3. Pluralism and diversity in the media: Two parallel concepts**

A description of these two concepts – pluralism and diversity – is required before we can proceed to the main research work, which consists of an analysis of the diversity of television

content. The differentiation between these two concepts – even if quite often they are considered to be synonyms – can be found by looking at the field of media. Nonetheless, it remains a problematic distinction, since it is rather challenging to define them as two different concepts. Freedman (2005), for instance, claims with regard to the distinction between these two concepts: “...This highlights the key issues – of the democratic requirement for contrasting sources, ideas, forms, and images present in the media environment – but does little to clarify the distinction between the two terms. The confusion is not helped by the fact that U.S. media policy debates generally focus on securing diversity whereas European ones are increasingly coalescing around the objective of pluralism (which, as we shall see, is itself closer to what U.S. policymakers describe as competition)” (p.17).

According to Freedman’s statement, given above, two conclusions can be drawn: Firstly, that there are interpretive difficulties in distinguishing between diversity and pluralism and, secondly, that because the notional boundaries between these two concepts are not clear, clarifying them becomes even more problematic. As is shown above, one aspect of their differentiation is the different way the US media policy and the European agenda interpret and approach these two concepts.

### **1.3.1. The concept of pluralism in contrast to diversity**

The relationship between pluralism and diversity can be explored using the concept of freedom of opinion and ideas in the media. This perspective is rather interesting because, by using viewpoint diversity, the distinction between pluralism of voices and viewpoint (or opinion) diversity can be further highlighted. The importance that is given to ensuring the inclusion of the opinion of citizens is typical. The above-mentioned approach, used by Freedman, associates pluralism with viewpoint diversity, an issue which is dealt with in the third chapter of this research. For instance, Gillian Doyle (2007), on this matter, clarifies that pluralism and diversity are close as concepts and refers to “different and independent voices”. More specifically she argues that:

In the field of media, pluralism implies general ideas referring to the diversity of content and the diversity of ownership. By referring to pluralism we mean a number of different and independent voices in the media that express different aspects, points of view and perspectives that show all the different dimensions of culture (2007, p.136).

According to Doyle (2002), media pluralism is a concept that coexists with diversity but they act within different conceptual frameworks. The border between these two concepts is not easily discernible; rather, the difference has to do with the more general nature of the description of pluralism in contrast to the specific definitions of diversity. On the other hand, both concepts are important factors in the discussion about public policy. More specifically, Doyle (2002) argues that: “Pluralism and diversity remain the key concerns underlying public policy in this area” (p.174). In addition, Doyle’s view (2002) on ownership status and the way it affects the pluralism of ideas and consequently viewpoint diversity is quite interesting: “The main perceived danger is that excessive concentration of media ownership can lead to over presentation of certain political viewpoints or values or certain forms of cultural output...” (p.13). Even though a multiplicity of suppliers is obviously desirable in many ways, it will not necessarily result in greater content diversity. In fact, counter intuitively, in many situations diversity of ownership can diminish the diversity of content. This is the case, for example, when the former leads to market, revenue and investment fragmentation, which leads to

innovation becoming unaffordable. Policymakers know this and actively encourage some degree of market concentration (Helberger, 2011).

Pluralism, according to Doyle, also depends on the variety of media content and sources in order to avoid uniformity in programming and ensure transparency. Referring to the case of the Essex Campaign for Local Radio<sup>1</sup>, she mentions: “The Essex Campaign for Local Radio, for example, argued that consolidation of ownership encourages networking and greater uniformity of output at the expense of local diversity” (p.133). Doyle’s use of the word “networking” seems to be of particular importance for the following study on content formation. “Networking” eludes both to horizontal and vertical grouping in the business sector. Consequently, content networking can be discussed, with regard to its conventionalism towards specific models and tendencies in the market.

As will be shown below, pluralism does not refer only to the ownership status. The relationship between pluralism and diversity concerns specific issues with regard to content form and shaping. Diversity begins when the general idea of pluralism reaches its limits with regard to the interpretation of any quantitative data related to content outflow. The Independent Study on Indicators for Media Pluralism in the Member States conducted for the European Commission also refers to the limits of media pluralism: “Media pluralism is a concept that goes far beyond media ownership [...]. It embraces many aspects, ranging from, for example, merger control rules to content requirements in broadcasting licensing systems, the establishment of editorial freedoms, the independence and status of public service broadcasters...” (p.2).

Iosifidis (1997) has also dealt with the conceptual clarification of pluralism and diversity and approaches the matter as follows: “Media diversity is indeed a broad concept with many dimensions: plurality of contents, access to different points of view, offering a wide range of choice, geographical diversity, etc. It thus encompasses pluralism of many kinds: regional, linguistic, political, and cultural and in taste levels. Consequently, by concentrating on this notion, one will be able to cover a wide spectrum of social benefits that need to be preserved if the media are to support democratic life” (p.86). In a more recent study, Iosifidis (2008) associates pluralism with competition and specifically analyses the case of public service broadcasters at the European level.

Iosifidis refers to a number of cases: “...For example, in countries such as Belgium, Switzerland and Spain there are more than one public service broadcaster due to historical, cultural or linguistic reasons, but they normally serve different communities or, as in Spain, different regions (...) France Televisions, the French public broadcaster, and Arte, the Franco-German cultural channel, do not testify to a plurality of public service broadcasters, as Arte has always meant to be a niche broadcaster, and is now an artificial creation designed to serve a political purpose. France 2 and France 3 fit the bill better, but have of course been folded into the France Televisions holding. The same applies to Greek television broadcasters ET-1 (mainstream), NET (mainly news) and ET-3 (covering events from northern Greece)...” (p.185).

In seeking to adopt an overall approach to the term, we focus on certain key issues. In most approaches, especially in those developed before the middle of the 1990s, pluralism seems to be closely associated with the ownership status of television channels; for instance, what Iosifidis refers to, revolves around the ownership status of public broadcasters at a European level and, in particular, around the operational status of these public broadcasters. Asides

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<sup>1</sup>Campaigns organized by the BBC at a local level, for the promotion and survival of local radio.