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Digitization, economic crisis and public local television in Spain. The cases of Andalusia and Catalonia (2010-2015)

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Abstracts

Introduction: The digitization in a context of economic and financial crisis gravely affected local public television in Spain. This article examines the dimension of its impact and the reasons that explain it. **Methodology:** The comparative analysis of the Andalusian and the Catalan cases allows us to show in detail the evolution of the two regions with a wider local public sector. **Results:** We contribute with abundant and original data that measure, for the first time, the impact of the crisis in the funding, human resources and contents in the public DTT-L sector. **Discussion and conclusions:** Conclusions show the weakening of the sector, the lack of strategies from autonomous governments and the heterogeneity of local solutions to a State-wide problem. Moreover, we point out the necessity of a research about the impact in the contents and the situation of these companies and workers.

Keywords

DTT, local television; economic crisis; digitization; Andalusia; Catalonia; Spain.

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1. Introduction

The local public television is a communicative phenomenon that is part of the Spanish mediatic system since the birth of democratic municipalities, since the first broadcast stations appeared in 1980. The scarce data available show that in 1995 they already surpassed the hundred and in 2002 they became 125 (AIMC; 1999 and 2002). As Zimmermann says (1990, p.140), these media have turned into a "close observer" of the life of audiences which is expressed through a proximity programming that legitimizes this communicative offer.

Despite its high number and its long tradition, municipal television has not been a study object analysed that much in a country with an intense research activity about the public sector, which has been mainly focused in the autonomic and State television. Only in the two communities with greater tradition of local public television, Andalusia and Catalonia, it has been studied with a certain frequency and deepness (Badillo, 2010; Guimerà, 2007; Guimerà and Alborch, 2011; Martori, 2014; Monedero, 2012 and 2014, Navarro, 1999). Not even in the recent research effervescence that emerged from the concern about the delicate situation of the so-called proximity television, it has occupied a central place, being always set aside by autonomic channels (Cfr. Marzal, 2015; Marzal, Izquierdo and Casero, 2015; Nerekan *et al*., 2015).

This article is aimed to contribute with knowledge about public DTT-L in one of the most delicate moments of its history: the result of the combination between the digital transition and the economic and financial crisis. There are enough traces and evidences pointing at an intense crisis, even though no research has delved therein up until now. Based on the experience of the authors, the general objective is to analyse the evolution of public DTT-L in Spain since 2010 –the year of the analogic blackout, which entailed the re-foundation of the sector– and 2015, last complete natural year in the moment of fieldwork. Specifically, we want to study the changes on the structure of the sector and the economic and productive situation of companies belonging thereto.

2. Methodology

To achieve these objectives, we preferred using the compared cases analysis. Specifically, of local public televisions of Andalusia and Catalonia. The reasons that justify this research strategy are both methodological and practical. From the methodological perspective, case analysis study contemporary phenomena, especially those where it is difficult to distinguish the study object from its context (Yin, 2009). Della Porta (2013, p. 216) champions the comparative method to study complex institutional processes with different variables interacting among themselves. For us, the digital transition and the economic crisis and its impact over local stakeholders constitute a complex and multifactorial situation in a context where it is difficult to separate causes and effects from changes observed.

From the practical perspective, cases selection is based on the difficulty to gather information from a numerous sector and, as we will see later, also reluctant to offer data. We chose Andalusia and Catalonia because these are two significant cases. They were pioneer communities in the birth of public televisions and accumulated the greatest number of public broadcast stations in the analogic era. With the arrival of DTT, they are the two communities reserving more radioelectric space for the public sector and which have the greatest number of municipal televisions still working (AIMC, 1996 and 2002; Badillo, 2010; Guimerà and Alborch, 2011; Monedero, 2014).

When it comes to stablishing the object of study, we preferred to limit to broadcasting stations that issue in DTT legally, after obtaining a license of use of the radio electric space by the autonomic administration. This is not a minor decision, since the difficult migration to DTT has caused - as will be demonstrated onwards- the presence of a complex casuistic which includes illegal municipal broadcast stations in DTT, others which still broadcast in analogically (illegally) or local governments renting frequencies to private companies so to broadcast their public channel – a possibility expressly forbidden by the current State regulations in effect. Even though these cases are public managed media, the purpose of this article is to delve into the DTT reality foreseen by regulations as they tried to comply with legal provisions that steered digital transition.

To study this evolution, we have chosen five indicators. The first one is the number of legal DTT-L public broadcast stations existing in 2010 and 2015. This will profile the sector and the evolution of its structure. Then, we selected four indicators measuring the evolution since the analogic blackout of existing televisions in 2015: number of municipalities involved in channel management, economic and financial situation of managing companies, number of full time employees and reduction or not of hours belonging to production of their own contents. All indicators measure 2010 and 2015, except the financial situation. In this case, we consider the 2007 period (last year before the start of crisis) and 2014 (last year of available data). The intention is to analyse the evolution since 2007 and its possible impact on digital migration of 2010.

The initial desire in the moment of gathering information, was to obtain it from the complete universe, which was comprised by 19 Andalusian televisions and 11 Catalan in 2015. Nevertheless, the reluctance of the staff responsible in some companies to hand some data – mostly in Andalusia- forced us to waive said aspiration. We have data from all broadcast stations for the two first indicators and from all Catalan companies regarding the number of employees and self-production – but not from all Andalusian ones. Most companies in both communities showed reluctance when it came to provide economic information, therefore we have looked for these data in the data base of Iberian Balance Sheet Analysis System (SABI), which includes accounts presented before the Mercantile Registry. We weren't successful in using the complete universe either, because balance sheets were not always presented before the registry. As a result, in these three indicators we needed to elaborate a sample by convenience (Soriano, 2007), characteristic from objects of study with difficulty to gather information. The data obtained directly from companies have been collected through phone calls or personal visits to all televisions considered in the research.

Undoubtedly, the limitations mentioned impact results obtained. However, this article offers a detailed portrait of the sector in the two communities that concentrate the majority of local television in Spain for the first time and shows how it has been weakened by the combined impact of

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digitization and economic crisis. Firstly, this article shows the technological and legal changes introduced by DTT policies. Based on this, the second section arguments the deep transformation that digital change introduced in 2010. In the third section, we gather the original contribution of this research, which profiles in a detailed manner a sector that has suffered crisis economically and labourally, but which has been able to produce contents. Then, analytical conclusions wrap up this article, stating need for awareness on a significant but not so studied sector.

3. DTT implementation and redefinition of local public television

The implementing of local DTT-L in Spain entailed a transformation in the deepness of the sector which has special consequences for public broadcast stations. The digitization was not done considering the analogic reality existing at the time, but on the contrary: DTT-L, which entailed full regulation of the local television after 30 years of juridical precariousness, introduced a broadcasting model which was barely or not related at all with the analogic model. The change was so strong that some authors say that the sector born after the incorporation of DTT is very different from the previous one (Guimerà and Alborch, 2011; Monedero, 2012 and 2014; Badillo, 2010; Marzal and Casero, 2008).

The cause is focused in a series of decisions from different Spanish governments when the DTT-L was designed. The organization through a new territorial unit called demarcation outstands due to its impact. In its majority, they grouped different municipalities, whereas the largest ones could include more than 30. The measure was introduced by the Law 53/2002, which modified the Law 41/1995 of Local Television Broadcast by Terrestrial Waves. This law identified local television with municipal coverage and prioritized public operators, because all municipalities could have a public channel and there would only be a private one if the scope was available. The demarcation breaks this link between municipality and broadcast station.

Secondly, the Technical National Plan of the Local Digital Television (PTNTDTL) [1], reserved a multiple channel (MUX) with capacity for four channels for each one of the 285 demarcations in which Spain was divided. The ones of Madrid, Malaga, Seville, Barcelona, Cornella and Sabadell had two MUX and eight channels. Andalusia and Catalonia played a remarkable role in the definition of this map, because the first version comprised 265 demarcations and only Madrid had two MUX. The two autonomic governments put some pressure to extend both the number of demarcations and channels. Likewise, Canary Islands and Balearic Islands requested and achieved the creation of 10 island demarcations, which the government created in 2005. Finally, the Law 10/2005 established that in every demarcation with a MUX a minimum of one channel and a maximum of two could be reserved for public management, leaving the rest for private management. Whereas there were two MUX, one could be reserved for public offer. Considering this proportion, the public sector was losing the leading role in relation to what was set forth in the law of 1995.

Since only 10 demarcations are comprised by a single municipality, the result was that most local governments interested in having a television, needed to agree among themselves to jointly exploit one of the channels of their demarcation. Hence, a new model of television based in co-management appeared. In some demarcations, it led to the reduction of public broadcasting stations, because there were more analogical ones than DTT channels (Corominas et al, 2007; Corominas, 2009; Monedero, 2012).

Complying with the Spanish laws, the Andalusian and Catalan communities managed the configuration of the new DTT-L map. In Catalonia, the Generalitat government started in Autumn 2005, the process to grant licenses to public and private operators. Out of the 96 channels available in 21 demarcations, 37 were reserved for public channels. In 11 of those demarcations, more than one channel was reserved for public management: in eight two were reserved while in Sabadell there were three and in Cornella and Barcelona, four. The guideline that regulated the process was the Law 22/2005, of audiovisual communication, which defines the public service as the audiovisual communication services rendered by the Generalitat, local entities or by the consortiums. So, the consortium was introduced as the juridical form to manage channels jointly promoted by different consistories.

On Spring 2006 [2], the Government granted the frequencies. Out of the 37 channels, only four would be managed by a local government (Barcelona, Badalona, Hospitalet del Llobregat and Reus). The 33 remaining channels should be managed by consortiums. As can be seen on table 1, in the practice many channels were still not active, some of them already constituted the consortium and others without even starting paperwork to create it. In practice, barely a third of channels were active before the analogic breakout (April 2010), a number that still reduced a little bit more in 2015.

Table 1. Number of foreseen public DTT-L and broadcasting channels (2010-2015)

	Foreseen channels	Broadcasting channels (April 2010)	Broadcasting channels (December 2015)
Andalusia	72	24	19
Catalonia	37	12	11

Source: author’s own creation.

In the case of Andalusia, the Government of Andalusia approved the Decree 1/2006 [3], which regulated the juridical regime of the local television by terrestrial waves and opened the processes for the license of DTT-L channels. The map was encompassed by 60 demarcations and 62 multiple channels, which entailed a total of 258 programs. In 10 multiplex two channels were reserved for public management, which led to the reservation of 72 channels. On April 11, 2006 [4] the licensing process opened, which established that when several municipalities already had an analogical television, these would have to fusion or disappear. On the other hand, when only a single channel existed in the demarcation, it could keep its infrastructure for the new supra-municipal entity, but would have to program and broadcast for the whole demarcation. To make the creation of the supra-municipal entities easier, the Decree established that, given the case there is no consensus, it would need them to be constituted by municipalities that gathered at least three fifths of the population. Therefore, the purpose was to avoid that a local government could ban and block the constitution of consortiums.

Only 65 requests were presented and the Government of Andalusia granted 32 licenses. Most of them, declined due to noncompliance. From these, 13 were destined to local governments [5] which would manage them alone and the rest for municipalities groups. In the moment of the analogical blackout, only a third of the planned 72 were broadcasting –the same percent as in Catalonia (see table 1). On December 2015, the number was reduced to 19, a little bit higher than 25%. Therefore, the real existing sector is much less than that foreseen by the Andalusian and Catalan governments.

4. A diminished sector: the causes of low implementation of public DTT-L.

On April 2010, the analogical blackout process and the digital activation by phases which started in 2009 was completed. For the local sector, this entailed the confirmation of a suspected fact: that not all DTT-L operators will be ready for the transition. In the case of public channels, it also worked to confirm that the change would be much deeper than the PNTDTL expected. In Catalan and Andalusian cases, it was more than evident: only a third of the total of planned channels could activate (see table 1). The reasons that explain the low implantation of public DTT-L in the moment of its foundation were many, but they can be grouped in three large categories: political, economic and of media (Guimerà and Alborch, 2011; Monedero, 2014; Martori, 2014).

From the political perspective, it is worth mentioning that there was an excess of reservations for the public management. Both in Andalusia and Catalonia most part of municipalities located on the map of demarcations expressed their will to manage television channels. Regarding these requests, the Government of Andalusia and The Generalitat reserved 72 and 37 channels respectively. This planning turned out to be excessive considering that many local governments desisted in their intent of even creating the consortium needed to manage a DTT license after requesting the frequency. In Andalusia, even though initially 65 groups of local governments presented some documents, 33 were stranded due to noncompliance in the request form, without showing further interest for amendment.

There are some structural and political reasons that help explain this lack of will. On one hand, a real lack of interest for creating a local television, is often associated to a lack of (analogical) proximity broadcasting station in the municipality. In this situation, it was more difficult to fully value the waived service. Moreover, the supra-municipality obliged to share the broadcasting times, a problematic factor in territories without historical bonds. On the other hand, there was lack of agreement between local governments in basic aspects of the creation of the entity to manage the channel. Often, this was associated to the lack of a clear leadership within the project. Finally, sometimes the disagreement was due to political parties: the resistance of consistories governed by different political forces (when not antagonistic) to share a media.

This difficulty for consensus caused different cases in Andalusia. Some consistories that didn't want to integrate into a supra-municipal entity still maintain in 2016, televisions that broadcast without license granted by the Government and there are even analogical municipality broadcasting stations existing up until today. Likewise, there is the case of broadcasting stations such as Torrevisión, managed by the municipalities of Torremolinos and Alahurín de la Torre or Estepona TV -Manilva TV (both broadcasting stations of the Province of Malaga) which do not offer a common programming, but instead they keep their respective local traditional broadcasting stations, they distribute two program time slots, one for each broadcasting station targeted to its population. In Catalonia, the distribution by time slots occurred in some cases, such as Penedès TV, but it was not rewarding. In this autonomous community, there are some local governments that broadcast in DTT through their own booster, without license and with a local coverage. This is the case of Agutzil Telemàtic, La Palma TV or Canal Camp.

The economic reasons are linked to two circumstances that initially seem independent, but which mutually reinforced in the key moment of the analogical blackout. Therefore, numerous Andalusian and Catalan governments were not sure about the investment they needed to disburse to create new televisions or to digitalize old analogical channels. In this sense, municipalities without analogical public television showed more reluctant than those who did have it, because these were interested in the continuity of their historical media. To this fact, there was an added circumstance related to the problematic consortiums: when the time came for large investments, the lack of trust that all involved parties really participated stopped many projects. Some of the most determined were afraid the final cost per municipality increased or, even, that they needed to take care of expenses on their own. These doubts raised again when the exploitation budgets were handled: the high cost of functioning from some media made that the retrieval of any municipality, noticeably increased expenses the remaining ones needed to assume – mostly in the consortiums with fewer members. This was how the doubts about the involvement of some, ended up generating uncertainty in all consistories (Guimerà and Alborch, 2011; Monedero, 2012).

All this happened in an unfavourable context: the outbreak of the economic crisis of 2008 and its conversion into financial crisis of public administrations in 2010, which stressed municipal budgets. A recurrent argument of local governments is that it was not logical to invest in a television – especially if started from the very beginning- when there was trouble to manage common expenses. In some local governments, there was also the argument that they were not willing to invest in communications, when there were increasing social needs to attend to. Even though crisis is a reason that appears in both autonomies, available studies show it was an element more present in Andalusia (Guimerà and Alborch, 2011; Monedero, 2012 and 2013).

Finally, there are elements related to the media system which help to understand the scarce implantation. Therefore, some local governments created television channels through Internet instead of integrating into consortiums. The existence of other media, either public or private (press, radio, private television, webs), which covered the local reality were also arguments to avoid rendering service through public DTT-L. In this sense, in Catalonia there is a long tradition of cooperation between local governments and private local televisions which translate into contracts for rendering services for local news coverage or the coverage of relevant events (municipal plenary meetings, fairs, cultural events). Both in Catalonia and Andalusia there were cases of local governments that broadcast contents through the license granted to a private operator as a strategy to exploit a channel in solitary (Monedero, 2012 and 2013; Martori, 2014).

From a different perspective, it seems that those Catalan municipalities that set their digital channels met at least one of these three conditions: either they had a very professional analogical municipal television and were willing to keep enjoying this service in the digital era; or they have turned the television into part of a strategic project (cultural, economic) of the city or among the municipalities involved in the creation of the consortium, there was one that had a clear leadership in the creation of the supra-municipal entity and the channel responsible for management (Guimerà and Alborch, 2011). The latter is also the case of the Andalusian broadcasting station Costa Noroeste TV (Province of Cadiz), the only channel managed by a consortium that was born after the approval of the Technical Plan, and that is led by the Local Government of Sanlúcar de Barrameda.

5. A weaker sector: the impact of economic crisis

Beyond the disappearance of a third of licensees of public DTT-L between 2010 and 2015 as seen on table 1, there are four more indicators about the economic and productive status of the televisions that show how the sector existing in 2015 has worsened since the analogical blackout of 2010.

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A first variable for analysing changes is the number of municipalities involved in the management of public channels. As seen on table 2, there are noticeable differences between Andalusia and Catalonia. While in the former, this variable keeps stable, in Catalonia, the involvement of municipalities has been declining with the evolution of crisis. In total, in 2015 there are 18 municipalities less involved in the DTT-L channels – 30.5% less compared to the year of the analogical blackout. Hence, it seems that crisis has generated more instability in a territory with greater weight of consortiums, a complex modality that seems quite problematic in adverse economic situations. With these data, we can state that Catalonia has many more municipalities interested in the management of public television but that its engagement is less steady compared to Andalusians. Therefore, despite of being the two autonomies with a greater tradition of local public television, the implantation of DTT has created two very differentiated models.

Table 2. Evolution of the number of municipalities involved in the management of public DTT-L in Andalusia and Catalonia (2010-2015)

Community	**2010**		**2015**	
Andalusia	Total municipalities	Municipality groups*	Total municipalities	Municipality groups *
	24	8	24	8
Catalonia	Total municipalities	Municipality groups	Total municipalities	Municipality groups
	59	55	41	37
Total	83	63	65	45

*In this category channels managed by legally constituted consortiums are included as well as those exploited jointly by some Andalusian municipalities without legally constituting any management entity.

The instability of Catalan consortiums can be seen clearly when analysing thoroughly. While the four municipalities which manage a single channel by themselves (Badalona, Barcelona, Hospitalet de Llobregat and L'Escala) keep using it, six out of seven consortiums have lost members. Maresme Digital experienced the deepest drop when it turned from 13 to 3. The only consortium that hasn't lost municipalities is Penedès TV, although in practice it is a "single-municipality" channel, because only Vilafranca del Penedès contributes financially and takes care of its management.

The reasons that boosted municipalities to abandon consortiums are diverse and very much like the ones observed when studying the reasons exposed by municipalities that didn't involve from the beginning. The impact of crisis and the possibility of creating self-owned and cheaper channels in Internet was the reason many local governments mentioned. To this reason, the broadcasting time is added. The smaller consistories notice that their municipalities appear a shorter time than larger ones, because the journalistic criteria tend to prioritize cities before towns that are part of the consortiums.

The economic and financial evolution of companies that manage local televisions is an inexcusable variable when studying the behaviour of these channels during crisis. One of the first results that can be easily identified is that it is a sector comprised by companies of very different magnitudes and with a general situation of economic scarcity that has worsened during crisis. This was rendered into uneven behaviours between 2010 and 2015.

In Andalusia, the information available indicates that there hasn't been a common pattern in the economic management of these companies. There are huge economic expenses as well as moderate reductions and great income increase. Now, the combination of data about income with the annual results show a wide scope of singularities (see table 3). In Jaen, Jerez de la Frontera and Granada companies ended up closing in 2015 after accumulating numerous losses. In Onda Jerez this is attributable to economic cuts, but Onda Jaén was liquidated after years of budget increase and in TG7 (Granada) the problem was chronical. Together with these cases, there coexist the ones of Cádiz and Torremolinos, with acquitted accounts despite the budget fluctuations of the former and continued economic cuts in the latter. In-between, there is Interalmeria, which needed injection of capital to balance its accounts or Huelva Digital, which did not fall into huge deficit despite losing 50% of income.

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Table 3. Income exploitation and annual results (in italics) of the Andalusian municipal communication companies (2007-2014) (in Euros)

	2.007	2.008	2.009	2.010	2.011	2.012	2.013	2.014
Sociedad Municipal de Comunicación e Imagen (Jaén)*	No data	No data	1.813.468	2.311.152	2.315.249	2.224.406	No data	No data
	No data	*No data*	*581*	*-329.154*	*-574.208*	*-128.358*	*No data*	*No data*
Interalmeria	No data	253.595	247.106	257.161	1.300.701	No data	810.391	844.483
	No data	*-159.138*	*-149.200*	*-62.373*	*316.058*	*No data*	*5.461*	*8.651*
Información y Comunicación de Cádiz	No data	572.374	584.037	1.275.016	1.009.240	723.305	729.269	No data
	No data	*237.474*	*4.426*	*8.836*	*5.872*	*3.653*	*5.964*	*No data*
Jerez Comunicación Municipal*	3.702.945	4.558.032	3.611.244	2.057.488	1.955.077	1.619.961	No data	No data
	-691.552	*-613.735*	*-1.565.494*	*-2.838.752*	*-2.884.029*	*-2.339.896*	*No data*	*No data*
Empresa Municipal de Comunicación Audiovisual (Granada)*	-	-	No data	426.843	684.135	442.060	No data	No data
	-	-	*No data*	*-571.401*	*-730.842*	*-1.144.876*	*-141.758*	*No data*
Empresa Municipal Huelva Digital TDTL	544.135	469.067	356.389	374.720	316.497	234.767	271.301	224.991
	4.715	*10.064*	*-33.263*	*2.137*	*-22.289*	*-6.669*	*7.009*	*-29.895*
Doñana Comunicación	No data	247.422	268.457	279.598	No data	No data	No data	No data
	No data	*-8.070*	*-49.063*	*-36.414*	*No data*	*No data*	*No data*	*No data*
Empresa Municipal de Gestión de Medios de Comunicación de Málaga	-	101.737	205.042	279.111	327.132	1.883.684	1.668.621	1.719.785
	-	*-992.947*	*-2.146.975*	*-1.814.298*	*-1.694.711*	*8.628*	*14.166*	*35.417*
Torremolinos TV	No data	No data	No data	No data	977.902	932.387	859.264	872.281
	No data	*No data*	*No data*	*No data*	*3.246*	*4.007*	*1.132*	*398*

*The company started a liquidation process in 2012 which ended in 2015. Since then, the local government manages this service directly

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Source: author's own elaboration from data of the Mercantile Registry gathered in SABI <https://sabi.bvdinfo.com>

Data available about Catalan municipal companies also show the absence of a common behaviour (see table 4). A case of strong relative increase of income (Vallés Oriental TV) and huge drops (in the case of Vilafranca close to 80%, the highest one seen in this study) is detected. There are also moderate reductions and relevant fluctuations, such as Informació y Comunicació de Barcelona. In Terrassa and Vilanova y la Geltrú there are income drops without severe effects over exploitations results. It is not Vilafranca's case, which has huge deficits after starting a series of noticeable economic cuts. Vallès Oriental TV is a canonical case of bad financing and in Mataró accounts were balanced after restructuring the company in 2011 and drastically reducing the payroll. Badalona Comunicació had financial problems after economic cuts, a fact that was translated in 2012 into a reduction in the number of employees.

Table 4. Income exploitation and annual results (in italics) of the Catalan municipal communication companies (2007-2014) (in Euros)

	2.007	2.008	2.009	2.010	2.011	2.012	2.013	2.014
Vallès Oriental TV	-	-	No data	96.536	138.131	165.520	No data	No data
	-	-	*No data*	*-663.420*	*-806.162*	*-927.750*	*No data*	*No data*
Serveis Municipals de Comunicació de Terrassa	2.281.663	2.280.370	2.379.434	2.310.261	2.311.966	2.055.232	1.990.133	No data
	1.529	*36*	*294*	*637*	*546*	*551*	*-15.544*	*No data*
Mataró-Maresme Digital	-	-	No data	No data	No data	344.339	353.684	392.415
	-	-	*No data*	*No data*	*No data*	*2.841*	*603*	*1.183*
Informació i Comunicació de Vilanova	1.602.066	1.801.377	1.734.173	No data	No data	1.665.016	1.388.644	1.179.939
	2.508	*15.909*	*1.088*	*No data*	*No data*	*513*	*2.100*	*533*
Serveis de Comunicació (Vilafranca del Penedès)	836.163	908.757	333.210	274.404	236.831	244.794	220.348	229.278
	-2.489	*34.351*	*-564.737*	*-662.594*	*-640.606*	*-597.080*	*-629.811*	*-644.595*
Informació i Comunicació de Barcelona	19.769.922	21.629.253	19.502.831	18.014.469	16.245.300	15.601.282	17.671.130	17.681.129
	62.045	*-412.821*	*-130.517*	*47.944*	*13.928*	*4.677*	*-1.634.622*	*7.120*
Badalona Comunicació	3.386.663	3.327.708	3.443.231	3.371.336	3.185.214	2.705.861	2.301.060	2.314.832
	135.367	*-40.148*	*-25.710*	*-31.869*	*-32.774*	*-213.613*	*151.869*	*112.370*

Source: author's own creation from data of the Mercantile Registry gathered in SABI <https://sabi.bvdinfo.com>

The economic problems have translated, in many cases, into the reduction of payroll, which meant a fall in the total of employees in the companies studied (see table 5). This indicator shows that the global impact seems to have been stronger in Andalusia and both in absolute and relative terms, according to available data. On the other hand, at the level of every company, affectation was quite diverse, a fact that is correlated with the different financial aforementioned situations.

Table 5.- Evolution of full time employees of municipal communication companies of Andalusia and Catalonia (2010-2015)

	2010	**2015**	**Evolution 2010-2015**
Andalusia*	464	381	-18,05%
Catalonia	510	449	-11,96%

*The data of Andalusia did not correspond to the totality of channels, but they were elaborated with the information provided by the 16 companies answering to this question.

The evolution of full time employees in Andalusian companies show a global reduction trend. In 2010, the 16 companies with data available had a total of 464 employees, an average of 29, now the problem was that there were very different numbers like the 7 employees of Écija Comarca TV and Osuna TV; and the 85 employees that Onda Jerez had. This number was reduced in the year 2015 to 380 employees, which entails the disappearance of 83 workplaces and an average of 23.8 by broadcast station, although once more, we find differences between the 7 employees of Osuna TV and Écija Comarca TV and the 52 of Onda Jerez and Onda Jaén (it is noticeable that in these two broadcast stations employees worked for the radio and municipal television).

Making a balance of the evolution we confirm that nine broadcasting stations have reduced their payroll, being the most eye-catching cases Onda Jerez –one of the companies that was liquidated in 2015– which moved from 85 employees to 52, and RTV Estepona which reduced from 42 to 24. In these cases, we find ourselves before Redundancy Dismissal Procedures (aka ERE) or bankruptcy proceedings. On the other hand, five broadcasting stations kept their payroll and three have increased between one and three employees.

If we analyse the number of employees in the Catalan televisions (table 4) we observe they have reduced in 11.96%. If in 2010 the 11 televisions studied employed 510 workers (an average of 46.36), in 2015 the number reduced to 447 (40.36). Like in Andalusia, although more extreme, the dimension of companies was rather uneven, because in Catalonia there coexist 218 employees of BTV in 2015 with the 4 employees of Canal 10 Empordà.

In Catalonia, the most significant reduction in payroll, associated to restructuration, occurred mainly between 2011 and 2013. Some resignations were not replaced, there were contracts with companies with which the production was outsourced and that did not renew, therefore the staff hired by them was not employed either (this is the case of Maresme Digital), and there were also wide scope Redundancy Dismissal Procedures (in Vallès Visió and Televisió de Badalona). In l'Hospitalet de Llobregat the project was reformulated completely and it created a minimum structure with less than half employees. Lastly, the Canal Blau case is worth mentioning, where the loss of 20% of employees was due to the exit of Sitges from the consortium, which initially contributed with their own personnel. Only Canal Terrassa Vallès has kept a steady payroll. All the other experienced reduction and in some of them (Maresme Digital and Televisió de l'Hospitalet) said shift meant that the whole payroll in 2015 became less than half compared to 2010.

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To value the payroll data correctly, we shouldn't forget the complex nature of this sector, with very diverse companies. The organizational structure (departments, function distribution) as well as tasks (one or diverse) carried out by the same person, depend on the budget of every company. We also find cases of radio televisions where employees work for both media, while in others they have exclusive dedication to television. Likewise, there is a long tradition of volunteers and interns collaborating in local televisions. Despite professionalization of channels, mainly due to the digitization, collaborators are a relevant and necessary human resource. These are individuals who live in the community and that, without any kind of economic compensation, they decide to dedicate part of their time to the media, assuming the production of contents. On the other hand, interns find in said media a space for professional development and labour training. These resources, considered strategical by different broadcasting stations, are key to understand the sustenance of some televisions.

Table 6. Reduction of self-produced contents between 2010 and 2015

Community	Have reduced	Have not reduced
Andalusia*	4	12
Catalonia	3	8

*Andalusia data do not correspond to the totality of channels, but instead they have been elaborated with the information provided by 16 companies which have answered to this question.

Despite the noticeable economic and labour problems, there are few broadcasting stations that have been affected in their capacity of producing their own contents. As Table 6 shows, the broadcasting stations reducing proximity programs are a minority; about 40% in both cases. In this context, the case of the five Andalusian broadcasting stations that state to have increased the hours of their own weekly programs is outstanding. In Catalonia the situation is equivalent, even though the increase in production is not detected. Therefore, this indicator shows that all impacts of crisis seen up until now haven't been necessarily translated into a reduction of the proximity that characterizes -and legitimates- these public service broadcasting stations.

A significant data detected in Catalonia and Andalusia is that there is no correlation between the payroll variation and changes in production capacity. The cases whereas a payroll reduction has been compatible with a maintenance in production, and even, an increase in some isolated case are abundant. One explanation to this situation is that, in Catalonia, there is an increase of live broadcastings and the search of low cost formulas, such as broadcasting of radiophonic programs through a webcam. This generates doubts about the labour conditions that have been created during crisis and the role that volunteers and interns are playing in a moment of scarcity of human resources.

6. Discussion and conclusions

After completing the transition to DTT in 2010, local public television has experienced a five-year period influenced by financial instability and the problems inherited from digitization policies that didn't consider the pre-existing reality and which configured a practically new and very complex sector. The result in 2015 was a weaker and more fragile sector than it was already in the analogic era. All indicators considered in this research demonstrate so.

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On one hand, the sector of existing public DTT-L is not -not even the least- the one initially foreseen by public policies: barely one third of planned ones activated and even fewer are broadcasting five years later. Moreover, since the analogical blackout, the sector reduced even more with 6 channel closures (5 in Andalusia and 1 in Catalonia). Additionally, the number of municipalities involved in the management of channels has decreased, due to the fall of members from the problematic consortiums in Catalonia – a community which strongly bet for this management model compared to Andalusia-. In general, the financial situation of management companies of existing televisions is worse in 2015 compared to 2010 and some have been liquidated. This meant a reduction of full time employees overall, with cases of reduction that reached up to half of payroll.

Only the production of self-generated contents shows a less negative situation, which let us say that, in general, crisis has not always affected the proximity function these public television broadcasting stations have been entrusted with. Now, this fact set forth issues such as the potential labour precariousness of employees or the quality of programming. At this point, it is worth mentioning there is a need to carry out further research that delve in this apparent contradiction and the risks of not adjusting the production to human resources available.

Considering the global situation, the consequences of crisis seem harder in Andalusia: more closures of channels, liquidation of companies and more losses of workplaces although a greater capacity to keep producing proximity. But within this general scenario, each company has demonstrated a different capacity to sustain income, balance their accounts and keep their payroll. Even though most have suffered the impact of crisis with reduction in all fields, others have kept stable during the whole period and some Andalusian ones have even been successful in increasing their human resources. Data gathered in fieldwork let us state there is not a single factor explaining the different specific cases nor, the general situation either. Therefore, both in Andalusia and Catalonia, the evolution observed seems to address more to specific situations of each local government or consortium than a common reaction to crisis, although it is worth mentioning that the trend is to try to reduce expenses and acquit the situation of companies which are generally in debts. Hence, there is not a single autonomic response but multiple local reactions instead.

In this sense, the financial situation of every company before crisis and the analogic blackout helps understanding what happened. Both in Andalusia and Catalonia, there are cases of strong indebtment observed as well as instable financing, a fact that complicates not only the daily management but also the digitization of channels, a process with elevated investment and functioning costs. At this point, a stable financing for a middle and long term management that does not promote indebtment, mostly seen in Andalusia, seems advisable. In Catalonia, the strong presence of consortiums and their intrinsic weaknesses seem a key factor to study the period: the exit of municipalities in almost all consortiums have affected their financing. Therefore, different municipalities exploit their own channels through (illegal) DTT-L or through Internet. Both things link again the economic crisis with the management model chosen for public DTT-L when it comes to explaining what happened. Now, the worst relative situation in Andalusia makes us nuance the relevance of consortiums, because there is only one and some large local governments with a long tradition of local television have restructured their companies.

Everything mentioned up until now sustains that the digitization of the local television, and the so expected legalization associated thereto, haven't brought the stability demanded by a sector unprotected by public policies from its birth in the early eighties. Therefore, the digital migration in a context of economic crisis have brought more a re-foundation rather than a stabilization of the public Spanish DTT-L. The origin of this confirmation lies in the design of an unrealistic map with a huge number of channels managed, in their majority, by consortiums and which worsened when praxis of local governments made the limitations of the model evident.

Given this situation, it seems necessary to introduce a redefinition of the model of public local Hertzian television. The large number of municipal channels that already disappeared with the analogical blackout, the huge casuistic of illegal broadcasting from the local administrations – tolerated at the same time by autonomous communities- and the fragility of operators that broadcast in compliance with legal provisions demonstrate it. Otherwise, the duration of crisis and the rigidity of the model seem to address a progressive weakening of broadcasting stations that may lead to a deeper degradation of its social role or even worst, the disappearance of even more channels. In the end, a greater weakening and an increasing fragmentation of local audiovisual public service.

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7. Notes

[1] The Technical Plan was elaborated in three steps. PP government, led by José María Aznar approved the Royal Decree 439/2004 which, due to the requests of different autonomies, was modified by Royal Decree 2268/2004 elaborated by the new socialist Government. The Royal Decree 944/2005 introduced amendments once more when 10 island demarcations were included.

[2] DOGC nº 4634, dated May 16, 2006.

[3] BOJA nº50, dated March 15, 2006.

[4] BOJA nº 73, dated April 19, 2006.

[5] These are the councils of eight province capitals (Seville, Malaga, Granada, Huelva, Granada, Almeria, Jaen and Cadiz) and Algeciras, Dos Hermanas, El Ejido, Fuengirola and Jerez de la Frontera.

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