

# **Local TV stations, work in progress**

*By Carme Mayugo, CLOT RTV (Barcelona/Spain)*

Historically, the local TV station priority function has been to approach the immediate events to the citizens. The main purposes of these media are to establish a contact and to familiarise the people with their social setting, their cultural scene and their natural environment. These goals have been faced from a democracy engagement and a very strong community work. All this has made the local TV stations so strong, in spite of governmental laws and political decisions have tried to hold up their progress or even to close them. Then, these media will not become a strange element for the citizens' communication framework.

In this day and age, the local TV stations face the important challenge to become, more and more, the citizenship educators and informers. They should to continue giving the people the necessary tools and methods to understand the world, to know about their social setting and to make them critical and constructive in view of the big media contents. This objective rises from the idea that nobody discusses concepts as those that qualify our society: information and knowledge society, technocracy, and digital and global communications...

In the last decades, the television and new technologies introduction have been spectacular. In spite of this, the equipment and media consumption increase hasn't been parallel to a qualitative improvement of the offer and it hasn't made possible a bigger and better access to information and culture.

## **Educational role of the local TV stations**

Nowadays, the local mass media, due to their proximity to citizen condition, are in a privileged situation to promote a better use of media education and media literacy. It is the suitable moment to obtain a critical society towards the messages mass media send us continuously, and, on the other hand, to obtain a constructive society, not passively influenced by the media and their contents. We cannot forget that TV and audiovisual media are still the most influential on people, particularly for youth and children. We should provide the different social groups with the necessary tools to fight against the mass media influence and to obtain, with these, an emancipated and not so manipulated education and information.

The proximity condition of the local media to the citizenship has to push them to open, more and more, their doors through media literacy workshops. The main idea is to make it possible for different collectives: to access the basic knowledge of the communication world, its functioning forms, management and production in order to obtain a basic education in media, forms and contents, for the whole society.

Why is this education necessary? We live in a society where the citizens are used to believe all messages created and explained by mass media, without realising that these presentations and explanations made by media could be conceived in a different way. For instance, mass media could show us our environment and our world with different eyes and a different look compared to the view they offer us now.

This is why we see the need of a well management in the field of social communication. We want obtain a plurality of ideas and conceptions about different themes. To obtain that, each person who integrates our society should be able to think independently. Now, mass media launch an idea or a view, and the citizens turn this idea into their own. There is not such thing as independence or criticism, and this is the situation local media contribute to prevent.

A second function of the media literacy workshops is to spread the use of the audiovisual language. We pretend, through the workshops, to let the citizens understand, write and read the audiovisual language, a language largely underestimated in its importance for regulated formal education.

With this objective, many local TV stations and media centres in all Europe (also in Catalonia and the rest of Spain, in an emergent way) are promoting and developing media literacy workshops. In these, the participants will become agents making the journalistic and technical work, but always together the professionals of the local TV stations. Due to the journalistic and technical work diversity existing in the media, we propose to promote different kind of activities which will let the citizens know about the local media possibilities and which will, also, approach these media to the citizenship. This will be a way to give them the possibility to learn about the audiovisual language.

In this context we inscribe the work of a lot of local TV stations as Clot RTV (Barcelona/Spain). Clot RTV is a non-lucrative association that it works as a local and proximity TV station in the Sant Martí district, Barcelona (a population of 250,000). Aside from coordinating and creating the strict production for BTV (the Barcelona public TV station): 15 pieces of news, 10 short films (*capsules*) and 4 twelve minutes films every month, it works in other alternative directions. One of them is education and media literacy. Our work in this field has focused many collectives: young people and children (mainly those are social excluded), women, immigrants, artists, adults, members of associations, etc.

In doing so, the local TV stations obtain a benefit in two ways: the production increases and so does the complicity between the citizens and local media professionals. The idea is to approach the media and their production systems to the people, giving them more critical tools; but it is also to promote another conception about the audiovisual products. That means it is possible to elaborate such products, learning with and about the audiovisual media and their possibilities. Then, the local TV stations do not only become open and proximity media, but also dynamic and alive media too.

This kind of proposal will carry on a big change in the relationship between educational centres and local TV stations (and other media), and will help, also, to promote clearer and more accessible media. Working together with the citizens, the professionals will become more responsible about their work and the consequences of it. They will know, and at the same time show, how media are tools to express, to inform, to educate, to provide services and to entertain.

### **Local TV stations, present situation in Catalonia and Spain**

The history of the local TV stations in Spain has to be explained in relation of the transition from the Franco's dictatorship to the democracy. In this sense, the phenomenon of the local TV in the autonomous regions as Catalonia has running beside the recuperation of their political, social and cultural identity, promoting the knowledge and the social use of their specific languages within the citizenship.

The present of the local TV stations in Spain could be defined as: "a television service partially regulated, developed during the last 20 years, on a lower ambit than the autonomous region-wide scale and sparse in the territory, which broadcasts in the margin of the conventional system of signals transmission, through self-conferred frequencies and cable demarcations" (Francisco Pérez, 2000). Under this generic definition, in Catalonia there are coexisting municipal public projects, business projects, political projects, some religious projects and non-lucrative community projects.

The first TV station in Catalonia was also the first in Spain: TV Cardedeu, which started to broadcast in 1981. During the 80's years, this initiative sets off a very vigorous stage for the development and the consolidation of this new communication phenomenon. It was very bound to the recuperation of the democratic liberties and to the bloom of the free radio stations. In the beginning of the 80's, in Catalonia there were about 40 local TV stations by hertzian waves (Prado and Moragas, 1991). In this initial phase, they were only community initiatives, linked to the associative movement and based on *amateur* staffs. The 90's have mean the progressive passage to models more and more linked at business and municipal criteria, with an increasing tendency towards professional structures. So, at the moment, the sector of the Catalan local TV makes up by the coexistence of very heterogeneous models, with very different and even disparate goals (Josep Àngel Guimerà, 2000).

The history and the present scene of the local TV stations in Spain are shaped by the non-regulation of this sector and, so, the *sine die* situation of outside legality. All this has provoked that, in spite of this is a phenomenon very dynamic, it has always been marked by the instability, mortgaged by the juridical lack of definition and two decades outside legality.

The local TV in Spain is hanging the approval of a definitive law for its regulation and it is still subject to the transitory law (Law 41/1995 of the House of Commons about "Regulation of the local TV stations by hertzian waves").

Then, the Spanish local TV hopes it has arrived the moment for the development of their communication and business possibilities. But the National Technical Plan of Frequencies for local TV stations is not already elaborated. This one has to establish the available frequencies for the local TV stations in every city and to summon the grant contests, which will regulate definitively this sector. The absence of a technical plan is having a very negative impact in the local TV Spanish stations, particularly in Catalonia because there are a lot. In 1996, the regional government (Generalitat de Catalunya) approved the Decree 320/1996 of "Regulation of the juridical system of the local TV stations by terrestrial waves", which developed by law the general criteria of the Law Llei 41/1995. This decree summoned also the grant contest, now stopped. Then everybody foresaw that in 1997 it will be concluded the legalisation of the local TV stations and it will be defined their map in Catalonia (Josep Àngel Guimerà, 2000).

The Spanish government justifies that all this regulation process is stopped because it's better to wait the transfer from the analogical to the digital technology (TDT or terrestrial digital TV and cable). But everybody glimpses also a political background because the government has to apply a law which gives priority to the city councils role, and also the interests of the big media companies to take a privilege position into the TV marked. It's important too to remark that in 1997 the Spanish House of Commons debated a Popular Party law project to try to deregulate this sector, but they have to retire it because they hadn't parliamentary support. In the last general election in March 2000, the Popular Party has obtained the absolute majority (Josep Àngel Guimerà, 2000). So, we have to wait what will happen.

In spite of this outside legality framework, which has made difficult the investments and the full development of this sector; the number of local TV stations in Catalonia has always increased. At the end of 1999, the InCom (Communication Institute) of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona counted 97 local TV stations working at the moment -49 of private initiative and 48 of the municipalities- and 4 in project, which two are functioning now. That means 97 local TV stations distributed between 89 Catalan towns or cities.

The digital technology brings to the sector a big opportunity for its development. But it's necessary that the local TV stations face a professional restructuring and they are capable to articulate a convincing programme planning. At the same time, they should become small producer companies specialised in their setting, to sell them to the bigger channels and television platforms which are interested to obtain a quality production at lower costs. But these local TV stations have never to forget that they should continue promoting the access and the involvement of their reference citizenship in their programme planning. That means the local TV stations should continue articulating their possibilities to socialise and to invigorate their social setting. But this is not enough. These TV stations will have also to give a local broadcasting (worked and planned adequately) of global contents.

In the last 3 years, different proposals of production and distribution networking specialised in local media have appeared in Catalonia and now their role and their power are increasing. There are projects thought from top to bottom, and others from below. Now it is too early to know which networking system will dominate.

“The local TV stations in Catalonia are coming from a model based on the spontaneity, the citizenship participation and the media democracy, and they are going to a model based on business” (Josep Àngel Guimerà, 2000). This transformation process carries them to decide which role wants to play on behalf their social setting. So, these local TV stations will have to see how they can integrate its social and cultural functions inside their structures, more and more professional and fixed by the economic efficiency.

### **Audiovisual European Association CIRCUIT!**

The organisations: *Fedekas* (Madrid/Spain), *Sudnord Multimedia* (Rome/Italy), *TV.TV.* (Savoie/France), *EMA-RTV* (Andalucía/Spain), *Fundación Ttipi Ttapa* (Bera de Bidasoa/Euskal Herria/Spain), *Clot RTV* (Barcelona/Catalonia/Spain), *Aldurrak Bideo* (Aldude/Euskal Herria/France), *Northern Visions Media Centre* (Belfast/North Ireland/United Kingdom), *La Factoria Sinòptica* (Girona/Catalonia/Spain) met in Barcelona on 13th and 14th November of 1999 and they decided to establish together an European association. All of them come from different European regions, operating in the audiovisual sector and the communication sector for the development and cross-border cooperation. Their main goals are:

1. To share experiences
2. To establish joint action plans

This new association believe in the potentialities of audiovisual contents and new technologies to erase borders and to establish a new framework of European life. While living the construction of the information society and the united Europe, the Audiovisual European Association CIRCUIT! thinks that the local media and audiovisual production, with the support of new technologies, offer an instrument always more and more effective and necessary which can:

- Stimulate the participation of whom benefits from different initiatives.
- Facilitate the knowledge among them.
- Unify different geographical areas and social sectors.
- Strengthen development possibilities.
- Facilitate cooperation and coproduction.
- Create job opportunities.

The nine members of the Audiovisual European Association CIRCUIT! are aimed:

1. To strengthen cross-border cohesion through the cooperation in the communication and information sectors.
2. To stimulate local development articulating urban and rural areas through information and communication.
3. To produce, distribute and exhibit contents to be used for social, economic and cultural development of the areas involved. To produce and exhibit contents aimed to promote interregional cooperation and local development of multimedia programming.
4. To plan actions for the creation and consolidation of employment opportunities in the information society.
5. To promote exchanges of know-how and experiences among members.
6. To support the cooperation with non-European geographical areas.
7. To deepen social aspects and not only the more commercial ones of the audiovisual communication.

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