

# The Crisis of Public Local Digital Terrestrial Television in Spain: The case of Catalonia

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**Abstract:** The article describes and analyses the state of public local digital terrestrial television (L-DTT) in Catalonia just after the analogue switch-off in April 2010. The results show that only 12 of the 37 anticipated public television channels were broadcasting, and only five more were expected to do so in the medium term. These data indicate that public local television was experiencing a crisis in the context of the digital switchover process: while some digital programmes were finding it hard to get off the ground due to severe limitations, other historical analogue stations were disappearing.

The article is grounded on qualitative research based on in-depth interviews with representatives of the 37 aforementioned channels. The objectives of the paper are: to describe the L-DTT model and its roll-out status in Catalonia as at May 2010; to provide interpretative elements to explain the crisis identified; and to provide insights for the formulation of hypotheses about the state of the sector in the rest of Spain. The results suggest that the problems of public L-DTT stem from the digital roll-out policies of the Government of Spain and the Government of Catalonia, neither of which – especially the first – seems to have taken into account the pre-existing analogue reality. In this respect, the Catalan case offers signs and evidence that can be extrapolated to the situation in Spain as a whole.

**Keywords:** communication policy; mass media; DTT; local television; public television; Catalonia.

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without television: complex causes. 6.2.1. The financial factor: the main cause. 6.2.2. A lack of clear leadership: bringing a consortium to a standstill. 6.2.3. A lack of interest in television. 6.2.4. The recession as an aggravating factor. 6.2.5. Too many programmes set aside for the public initiative. 7. Conclusions. 8. References. 9. Notes.

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## 1. Introduction

In mid 2010, Catalan public local television was experiencing a considerable crisis. In April of that year, just after the analogue switch-off, only 12 public local digital terrestrial television (L-DTT) stations were broadcasting, less than one third of the 37 stations – or programmes – anticipated by the Government of Catalonia. In the medium term, only five more public digital programmes were expected to begin broadcasting.

These figures contrast sharply with the 54 municipal analogue stations in operation in 2006, the year when the Government of Catalonia awarded L-DTT licences (Guimerà et al., 2009). Consequently, the strength of the public initiative in relation to Catalan local television (LTV) as a whole has fallen sharply since the introduction of DTT. In 2006, the 54 municipal analogue stations accounted for 43% of the 128 LTV stations in operation, whereas in 2010, the 12 public digital stations only accounted for 23.5% of the 51 L-DTT stations broadcasting as at May 2010. These figures suggest an end to the hegemony of public television in Catalonia, which, in the early 2000s, accounted for over half of the sector (OCL, 2005).

The situation described above shows that L-DTT rollout-out in Spain has entailed a major restructuring of local television. Indeed, several pieces of research have shown that, as a phenomenon, L-DTT is substantially different from analogue LTV (Guimerà, 2006; Fernández et al., 2007; Corominas, 2009; Ortega, 2009; Marzal & Casero, 2008). This is due to the fact that the local television digital switchover process took little or no account of the pre-existing reality of analogue television: L-DTT, which results in full regulation of local television in Spain, introduces a digital model that has little to do with the model prevailing in the analogue era (Fernández et al., 2007; Ortega, 2009).

This restructuring is mainly due to a decision taken by the Government of Spain to reorganise L-DTT on the basis of demarcations, formed mostly by two or more municipalities (and as many as 30 in some instances). This organisation puts an end to the close ties that analogue LTV stations had with municipalities, a basic unit of organisation for the sector until the advent of L-DTT (Corominas, 2009: 7).

Publicly-owned media have borne the brunt of this change (Guimerà, 2006; Guimerà, Sanmartín & Alborch, 2008; CAC, 2009). The reason for this is that public policies set aside,

for public ownership, a maximum of two digital programmes (equivalent to the former analogue channels) of the four available in each of the 275 demarcations into which L-DTT in Spain has been organised. Of these demarcations, only 10 are formed by just one municipality (Fernández et al., 2007). The combination of both elements has led to a situation where, in most cases, local councils wishing to manage the service must reach an agreement to jointly exploit one of these programmes.

The outcome is the advent of a completely new public local television management model unlike the situation in the analogue era, when each local council was able to have its own channel (Guimerà, 2006; Corominas, 2009). These new, jointly managed channels are precisely the ones that have caused problems for L-DTT roll-out in Catalonia: of the 25 channels that were not broadcasting as at May 2010, 24 belonged to groups of municipalities that had not managed to reach an agreement. Moreover, these channels constitute one of the most novel – and unknown – phenomena that DTT has introduced into the local realm (Marzal & Casero, 2008: 90).

There is no question whatsoever that, as a result of the analogue switch-off in April 2010, a new public L-DTT sector came into existence in Spain, which was experiencing considerable problems and limitations in the early months of its development. This article describes and analyses this process, focusing on the case of Catalonia. This autonomous community's experience is especially significant because it was, along with Andalusia, the region with the highest number of municipal analogue stations prior to the digital switchover process (Badillo, 2005; Guimerà, 2006). In addition, the Government of Catalonia banked considerably on the public sector's role in L-DTT by setting aside 37 of the 96 programmes available in Catalonia for it. In relative terms, Catalonia is the autonomous community that has set aside the largest proportion of programmes for the public service (38.5%), followed, at a considerable distance, by the Canary Islands (30.5%) (Ortega, 2009).

In this context, it is relevant to ask why it is proving so difficult to put L-DTT into operation in Spain by considering, as a case study, a territory with a broad, dynamic sector with almost 30 years' experience – the first Spanish municipal television station came into existence in Catalonia in 1983 (Guimerà, 2006). Thus, the purpose of this article is to describe the (critical) state of Catalan public L-DTT in the period following the analogue switch-off, and to provide some interpretative elements that help to understand that situation. To that end, the article analyses what exactly is making it hard for L-DTT to get off the ground in some cases, and why it has been possible in others.

## **2. Methodology**

The article is based on the results obtained from research on the state of DTT roll-out commissioned to the first author of this article by the Catalan Audiovisual Council (CAC). The field work, carried out between June 2008 and May 2009, involved visits to the facilities

of the 83 L-DTT licence-holders existing at that time (46 private and 37 public) and interviews with the people in charge of them.

In the case of public providers, the interviewees were television station directors (where such positions existed) or the mayor of the municipality that should lead a consortium for joint management of a channel (when a channel had yet to get off the ground). In some cases, the responsibility for answering questions was delegated to the councillor responsible for such matters (generally the councillor holding the portfolio for culture) (CAC, 2009). These interviews were the key source of data on which this article is based.

Given the complexity of the phenomenon being studied, semi-structured open interviews were conducted. The interviewees were asked about the state of L-DTT roll-out in their demarcations; the state of development of their projects and the factors impacting on the process. The results obtained from earlier exploratory research (Guimerà, Sanmartín & Alborch, 2008) showed that the process of creating new public channels was not at all straightforward, and that the factors impacting on it were both numerous and interrelated.

A hypothetico-deductive research method was found to be inappropriate for use in this instance because there was a risk of excluding a key element when formulating the hypothesis (Soriano, 2007). A qualitative method was therefore chosen for this research, since it potentially allows the full complexity to be captured of a new, minimally researched object of study (public L-DTT) being rolled out (digital switchover process) at the time of data collection (Marzal & Casero, 2008). The results obtained from the interviews conducted between 2008 and 2009 were complemented with documentation provided by the local authorities (budgets, programming, investment plants) during the field work.

These data were updated to May 2010 by one-off consultations with CAC and public local bodies. In addition, numerous journal and newspaper articles were consulted, thus allowing the sector's evolution to May 2010 to be followed. All the documentation was interpreted and contextualised in the light of pioneering studies on the local television digital switchover process in Spain (Fernández et al., 2007; Guimerà, 2006; Ortega, 2009; Guimerà et al., 2009; Corominas, 2009).

The value of this article goes beyond anything strictly referring to Catalonia. It is based on the first piece of research to perform an in-depth analysis of the public L-DTT sector in an autonomous community. Likewise, as far as the authors are aware, it is the first piece of research on a mass communication structure in Spain to consider the object of study as a whole, to which, moreover, a qualitative approach has been taken.

Thus, the article provides information that may help to study the phenomenon in other areas of Spain, since it allows hypotheses to be formulated in that regard. From this perspective, the wealth of the Catalan experience makes it a scenario of prime interest for studying public L-DTT in Spain in the context of the digital switchover process.

### **3. Basic structure of public L-DTT in Catalonia (2010)**

In May 2010, just one month after the digital switch-off, Catalonia had 37 L-DTT programmes set aside for local authorities (see Table 1). This figure was reached as a consequence of political decisions taken by the Government of Spain and the Government of Catalonia in 2004 and 2005.

State-wide policies determined that L-DTT should be rolled out on the basis of a new territorial unit termed ‘demarcation’ (Corominas, 2009). 7). The National Technical Plan for Local Digital Terrestrial Television, approved in 2004, divided Catalonia into 21 demarcations. Each one has a coverage area formed by groups of municipalities, which go from three for Vielha and Mijaran to 28 for Cornellà (see Table 1).

None of them, then, corresponds to an individual municipality, and the planned total of municipalities is 240. In turn, three Catalan demarcations (Barcelona, Cornellà de Llobregat and Sabadell) have two multiplex (MUX) channels, while the rest have one. Therefore, Catalonia has 24 MUX. Each one has four digital programmes (equivalent to the former analogue channels), meaning that up to 96 L-DTT programmes can be created.

It was on the basis of this organisation into demarcations that the Government of Spain established how the radio spectrum should be shared out. Act 41/1995, of 22 December, regulating local terrestrial television (Official Gazette of the Government of Spain 309, 27 December 1995) amended in 2005 sets out that at least one of the programmes of each multiplex must be set aside for public management, though autonomous communities can set aside up to two depending on their needs. In demarcations with two MUX, an entire one can be set aside for councils, and another for private operators. The rest of the available spectrum is set aside for private management.

In line with this, and after consulting with local councils, the Government of Catalonia decided to set aside 37 programmes for direct management by municipalities and 59 for private management. Of the 37 public ones, four were for individual local councils (Badalona, Barcelona, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat and Reus), while the remaining 33 had to be managed by various groups of municipalities (see Table 1).

As shown by academic research, one of the characteristics of all the Catalan demarcations is that they comprise sets of municipalities that do not constitute recognised administrative or political units. Consequently, they become a new phenomenon that is exclusive to L-DTT (Corominas, 2009: 16). Thus, the process for managing a programme had to start with very basic negotiations.

In fact, it should be taken into account that the Government of Catalonia, in certain cases, decided to set aside more than one programme for public management in the light of an avalanche of requests from councils: of the 200 planned municipalities, only one said that it was not interested in offering a television service. By way of its decision, the Government of Spain wanted to facilitate agreements between the councils involved (Guimerà, 2006).

**Table 1. Distribution of public L-DTT programmes (2010)**

Demarcation	MUX reference	Public programmes	Licence-holding municipalities
Barcelona	TL01B	4	1. Barcelona
			2. L'Hospitalet de Llobregat
			3. Badalona
			4. Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Sant Adrià de Besòs
Cornellà de Llobregat	TL11B	4	1. Cornellà de Ll., Esplugues de Ll., S. Joan Despí and S. Just Desvern
			2. S. Vicenç dels Horts, Molins de Rei, Vallirana, S. Feliu de Llobregat, Pallejà, Cervelló, Sta.Coloma de Cervelló, el Papiol, la Palma de Cervelló
			3. Martorell, S. Andreu de la Barca, Olesa de Montserrat, Esparreguera, Abrera, S. Esteve Sesrovires, Collbató, Castellví de Rosanes
			4. S. Boi de Llobregat, el Prat de Ll., Viladecans, Castelldefels, Gavà, Begues
Sabadell	TL12B	3	1. Sabadell, Barberà del Vallès, Castellar del Vallès, Palau-solità i Plegamans, Sentmenat i Polinyà
			2. Terrassa, Matadepera and Viladecavalls
			3. Rubí, S. Cugat del Vallès, Cerdanyola del Vallès, Ripollet, Montcada i Reixac, Sta. Perpètua de Mogoda, S. Quirze del Vallès, Castellbisbal.
Granollers	TL02B	2	1. Granollers, Franquès del V., Cardedeu, Caldes de Montbui, S. Celoni, Canovelles, la Garriga, Lliçà d'Amunt, la Roca del V., Llinars del V., Sta.Maria de Palautordera, l'Ametlla del Vallès, Bigues i Riells, Lliçà de Vall, S. Feliu de Codines, Sta.Eulàlia de Ronçana, S. Antoni de Vilamajor, S. Pere de Vilamajor
			2. Mollet del Vallès, Parets del Vallès, Montornès del V., la Llagosta, Montmeló, S. Fost de Campsentelles, Martorelles, Vallromanes
Mataró	TL06B	2	1. Mataró, Premià de Mar, el Masnou, Vilassar de Mar, Argentona, Premià de Dalt, Alella, Montgat, Sant Andreu de Llavaneres, Vilassar de Dalt, Tiana, Teià, Cabriels, Sant Vicenç de Montalt, Cabrera de Mar.
			2. Pineda de Mar, Malgrat de Mar, Calella, Arenys de Mar, Canet de Mar, Tordera, Arenys de Munt, Palafròls, Sant Pol de Mar
Vilanova i la Geltrú	TL09B	2	1. Vilanova i la Geltrú, S. Pere de Ribes, Sitges, Cubelles, Canyelles, Olivella 2. Vilafranca del Penedès, Sant Sadurní d'Anoia, Santa Margarida i els Monjos, Gelida, la Granada, el Vendrell, Calafell.
Manresa	TL05B	1	Manresa, Berga, Sant Joan de Vilatorrada, Solsona, Sant Vicenç de Castellet, Sallent, Sant Fruitós de Bages, Súria, Navàs, Santpedor, Navarcles, Cardona, Gironella, Artés, Puig-reig, Balsareny, Moià.
Vic	TL08B	1	Vic, Manlleu, Torelló, Sant Pere de Torelló, Tona, Taradell, Roda de Ter, Sant Hipòlit de Voltregà, Les Masies de Voltregà, Centelles, Lluçà.
Igualada	TL04B	1	Igualada, Piera, Vilanova del Camí, Santa Margarida de Montbui, Masquefa, Capellades, Òdena.
Girona	TL03GI	2	1. Girona, Salt, Cassà de la Selva, Llagostera, Sarrià de Ter, Bescanó, Canet d'Adri.
			2. Banyoles, Porqueres
Blanes	TL01GI	2	1. Blanes, Lloret de Mar, Tossa de Mar.
			2. S. Coloma de Farners, Arbúcies, S. Hilari Sacalm, Anglès, Maçanet de la Selva, Breda
Palafrugell	TL05GI	1	Palafrugell, S. Feliu de Guíxols, Palamós, Torroella de Montgrí, La Bisbal d'E., Calonge, Castell-Platja d'Aro, Begur, Sta. Cristina d'Aro
Figueres	TL02GI	1	Figueres, Roses, Castelló d'Empúries, L'Escala, Vilafant.
Olot	TL04GI	2	1. Olot, Sant Joan les Fonts
Tarragona	TL02T	1	2. Ripoll, Sant Joan de les Abadesses, Campdevànol
Reus	TL01T	2	Tarragona, Valls, Salou, Vila-seca, Torredembarra, Montblanc, Constantí, Rodonyà
			1. Reus
Tortosa	TL03T	1	2. Cambrils, Riudoms, Mont-roig del Camp, Vandellòs i l'Hospitalet de l'Infant, la Selva del Camp, Falset.
			Tortosa, Amposta, Sant Carles de la Ràpita, Deltebre, Alcanar, Roquetes, Ulldesona, Godall, Móra d'Ebre, Móra la Nova, Ascó, L'Ametlla de Mar, Gandesa, Horta de Sant Joan, La Sénia
Lleida	TL02L	1	Lleida, Almacelles, Alcarràs, Alpicat, Almenar, Alfarràs.
Balaguer	TL01L	2	1. Balaguer, Mollerussa, les Borges Blanques
			2. Tàrraga, Agramunt, Bellpuig, Cervera
Seu d'Urgell	TL03L	1	La Seu d'Urgell, Puigcerdà, Tremp, La Pobla de Segur, El Pont de Suert, Sort.
Vielha e Mijaran	TL04L	1	Vielha e Mijaran, Naut Aran, Bossòst.

Source: Resolution PRE/1446/2006, of 9 May, announcing the agreements of the Government Institutional Policy Committee, through which licences for the provision of the L-DTT service are awarded to the municipalities of Catalonia included in the territorial demarcations (Official Gazette of the Government of Catalonia 4637, 16 May 2006).

**4. State of public L-DTT programmes in Catalonia (May 2010)**

Just one month after the analogue switch-off process had been completed, only 12 of the 37 public programmes anticipated by the Government of Catalonia were broadcasting. Three corresponded to programmes managed by individual councils (called ‘unimunicipal’ programmes) and nine to supramunicipal consortiums (see Table 2).

The 25 public programmes that had not been put into operation can be divided into two major groups (see Table 3). The first is formed by a set of six licence-holders that were at different stages of development. Reus Town Council, the licence-holder of the only unimunicipal programme pending the start of operations, had planned to begin broadcasting in September 2010. Reus was the only one that had not previously had its own analogue television station, meaning that it had to invest in infrastructure and staff. This delayed the start of operations (initially planned for September 2009). The other three unimunicipal licence-holders simply switched their analogue stations over to digital, meaning that the process was much more straightforward (Guimerà et al., 2009).

For its part, the consortium comprising the Delta del Llobregat municipalities had planned to begin broadcasting, though without specifying a date. The two consortiums of the Blanes demarcation were making headway in terms of negotiations and paperwork. The consortiums

**Table 2. Public L-DTT programmes broadcasting (May 2010)**

L-DTT public licence-holding body	Commercial name
Barcelona City Council	Barcelona TV
L’Hospitalet de Llobregat City Council	Televisió de l’Hospitalet
Badalona City Council	Televisió de Badalona
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Granollers demarcation (Consorti Teledigital Granollers)	Vallès Oriental TV
Consorti Teledigital Mollet	Vallès Visió
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Igualada demarcation	Conca TV
Consorti Digital Mataró-Maresme	Maresme Digital TV
Consorti Teledigital Maresme Nord	Maresme Digital TV 2
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Terrassa-Vallès Oest demarcation	Canal Terrassa Vallès
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of Camp de Tarragona (TACOALT)	TAC 12
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of Garraf (Consorti Teledigital Garraf)	Canal Blau TV
Consortium for the management of L-DTT of Penedès	Penedès TV

Source: Own compilation based on data gathered in the course of field work and data provided by CAC.

of the Reus and Figueres demarcations were in an irregular situation: as the local councils involved could not agree, the demarcation’s councils that had analogue television stations occupied the programme. This situation should be regularised because all the licence-holders are local councils forming part of a consortium, meaning that an individual council cannot exploit it alone (CAC, 2009).

**Table 3. Public L-DTT programmes not broadcasting (May 2010)**

L-DTT public licence-holding body	Consortium formed	State of the project
Reus Town Council	--	Broadcasts planned for September 2010
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Baix Llobregat Delta demarcation	Yes	Being developed
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the La Selva Marítima-Canal Blanes demarcation	Yes	Looking at options
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Blanes demarcation	No	Looking at options
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Alt Empordà demarcation	No	Programme occupied by a municipal television station
Consortium for L-DTT of Camp (TDCamp)	Yes	Programme occupied by a municipal television station
Consortium for the management of the L-DTT service of the Lleida	Yes	Stopped
Consortium for L-DTT of Sant Adrià de Besòs and Santa Coloma de Gramenet	Yes	Stopped (broadcasts a test card)
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Segarra/Urgell demarcation	No	Stopped
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of Baix Llobregat Nord demarcation	Yes	Stopped
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Girona demarcation	Yes	Stopped
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Bages, Berguedà and Solsonès demarcation	Yes	Stopped
Programme 2 Olot demarcation (a body without an official name)	No	Stopped
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of Baix Empordà	No	Stopped
Consortium for local television of the Terres de l'Ebre	Yes	Stopped
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of Aran	Yes	Stopped
Programme 2 Balaguer demarcation (a body without an official name)	No	Has decided not to offer a television service
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Baix Llobregat Est demarcation	No	Has decided not to offer a television service
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT service of Baix Llobregat Centre	No	Has decided not to offer a television service
Consorti Teledigital Banyoles-Porqueres	Yes	Has decided not to offer a television service
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Olot demarcation	No	Has decided not to offer a television service
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Sabadell demarcation	Yes	Has decided not to offer a television service
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Vallès Occidental Sud demarcation	Yes	Has decided not to offer a television service
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Seu d'Urgell demarcation	No	Has decided not to offer a television service
Osona consortium for the management of public multi-channel L-DTT of the Vic	Yes	Has decided not to offer a television service

Source: Own compilation based on data gathered in the course of field work and data provided by CAC in May 2010.



The second group comprises 19 groups of municipalities that were doing nothing to develop their television stations as at May 2010 (see Table 3). Nine of them openly acknowledged that they had no plans to put the station into operation. While they had not publicly announced that they had decided not to manage their programmes, the other 10 were not developing the project. Worthy of note is that eight of these groups of municipalities had not even formally constituted a management body, which was the first administrative step that all consortiums needed to take before September 2006, in accordance with Catalan legislation (Guimerà, 2006). In fact, of the 33 potential consortiums, only 23 had been formed by May 2010.

The data provided show that the low rate of public channel implementation could be put down to the consortiums, which were responsible for 24 of the 25 programmes pending the start of broadcasts (see Table 3).

Only nine of the 33 anticipated consortiums were broadcasting and just five more were working towards becoming operational one month after the analogue switch-off. In other words, in the medium term, less than half of them could be expected to become operational. The following pages focus on the analysis of these consortiums.

## **5. Demarcation and the public L-DTT model: two key elements**

In order to understand the problems associated with public L-DTT roll-out in Catalonia in general, and with consortiums comprising several municipalities in particular, it is essential to take account of the public broadcasting model that has been designed by Spanish and Catalan public policies.

On the one hand, the obligation placed on the vast majority of local councils to jointly manage a channel is the first interpretative element that needs to be taken into account and which, furthermore, is key. On the other hand, the public broadcasting model demanded by Catalan legislation also hinders the roll-out process because it is administratively complex and financially onerous (Guimerà, 2006).

On the basis of the Government Agreement defining the procedure for granting DTT licences to local councils, the Government designed a professional kind of television, with the obligation to provide a continuous service and to have 'suitable' human and professional resources. In December 2005, the approval of Catalan Broadcasting Act 22/2005 (Official Gazette of the Government of Catalonia 4543, 3 January 2006) ratified the model and placed additional obligations on licence-holders (public and private) to contribute to the development of the Catalan audiovisual industry (Article 21).

In accordance with Local Television Act 41/1995, public and private providers alike were under the obligation to broadcast original television programmes for four hours a day and 32 hours a week. Moreover, these programmes had to focus on the territory in which they were

being broadcast. The Government of Catalonia took matters a stage further and replaced these 32 hours of original programmes with self-produced content, given that neither co-productions with other television stations nor content broadcast on a network could count towards that number of hours. In this sense, then, television with a high broadcasting and production capacity was considered (Guimerà, 2006).

Regarding the organisation of the service provision, Article 33 of Act 22/2005 gives a fairly detailed and precise description of how it should be done. First, Article 33.1 stipulates that bodies managing local television stations should have organisation and operating rules (OOR) defining the public service mission. On this point, the Act also stipulates that direct management of public service broadcasting requires the management body to assume responsibility for defining, elaborating and distributing audiovisual content, without prejudice to the possibility of counting on the support of the private sector. Likewise, it stipulates that the appointment of managers and directors should be done in accordance with provisions set out in the OOR. Such appointments should also be approved by a board of an advisory and consultative nature, which should assess the ability, merit and suitability of the candidates.

Finally, Article 33.3 stipulates that the independence of direct, day-to-day management of the service from the governing bodies should be assured signing up to a programme contract, which should provide the necessary funds for the provision of an appropriate service. Thus, Catalan legislation designs a system that attempts to separate political management of a channel (corresponding to a consortium in the case of groups of municipalities) from its day-to-day operation, which would correspond to the body stipulated in the OOR. At the same time, it also aims to ensure that funding cannot be used as a tool for applying pressure.

Indeed, the model requires extensive legal and administrative development that many groups of local councils have not been able to cope with due its inherent complexity and a lack of human resources and officers to carry it out. In this respect, in the interviews, some mayors considered the need for the Government of Catalonia to offer public grants simply for the creation of the whole administrative apparatus.

In addition, since it was formulated, this television model has been associated not only with high initial investments, but also with high operating budgets. Thus, throughout the field work, it was found that all the representatives of public licence-holders, whether broadcasting or not, felt that L-DTT was ‘expensive’.

With regard to the minimum sum required to create a good public programme, there was some consensus among interviewees that the figure would be around €1 million. This was the figure invested by Consorci Digital Mataró-Maresme and Consorci Teledigital Garraf, the first two consortiums to start operations in Catalonia (in 2008 and 2009, respectively). Since then, this sum has been taken as reference figure in the sector (CAC, 2009).

In contrast, Conca TV, one of the latest consortiums to begin broadcasting (May 2010), had invested €600,000. For its part, the TD Camp consortium was considering investments varying between €125,000 and €600,000. There are a number of explanations for these differences in figures; the consortiums investing the most had created new production units and acquired new hardware (especially the Mataró-Maresme consortium, which started from scratch), while those investing the least tried to make the most of facilities that they had *inherited* from the former analogue television stations of municipalities forming part of a consortium (such as Igualada and TD Camp).

The differences are also apparent in the annual operating budgets (see Table 4). Excluding the extraordinary case of Barcelona TV, the figures evidence considerable differences. For example, Badalona’s budget is nearly 20 times higher than Maresme Nord’s.

**Table 4. Operating budgets of public L-DTT providers (in millions of Euros)**

Licence-holder	2008	2009
Barcelona City Council	21.4	16.5
L’Hospitalet de Llobregat City Council	2.54	NK
Badalona City Council	2.1	3.4*
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Terrassa-Vallès Oest demarcation	--	1.5*
Consortium for the management of L-DTT of Penedès	--	1.06
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Granollers demarcation (Consorti Teledigital Granollers)	--	0.9**
Consorti Teledigital Garraf	0.7	1.01
Consorti Digital Mataró-Maresme	0.8	0.8
TACOALT	--	0.67
Consorti Teledigital Mollet	--	0.48**
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Igualada demarcation	--	0.35
Consorti Teledigital Maresme Nord	--	0.18

\* The budgets correspond to management companies of local media that, besides television, include other media, such as newsletters, radio and news websites. Therefore, they do not correspond to television alone.

\*\* Estimated budget for 2010 (it was not broadcasting in 2009).

Source: Own compilation based on data gathered from the Official Gazettes of the Provinces of Barcelona and Tarragona, and data supplied by the television stations’ directors.

The budget differences can be explained, in part, by different programming aspirations and by resource sharing (premises, staff, general expenses, etc.) with other public companies or other public media of municipalities forming part of a consortium. In any case, the differences clearly show that the operators had found ways of scaling the necessary financial resources and had put public channels into operation with budgets adapted to their realities (CAC, 2009).

## 6. Development of the L-DTT service: interpretative elements

There is no question whatsoever that the combination of broadcaster model complexity and the obligation placed on 33 groups of municipalities to jointly manage a channel were the root cause of the low level of public L-DTT roll-out as at May 2010. However, these two reasons alone do not explain why some stations got off the ground while others did not. It is necessary to look at a wide range of factors, combined in multiple ways, to be able to explain what happened with the consortiums that did not progress and to understand what the keys to success were for those that managed to do so prior to the analogue switch-off.

### 6.1. Consortiums in operation: characteristic traits

The analysis of the basic characteristics of the nine consortium in operation at the time of the study indicates that a combination of at least two of the following four elements is required in order to put a television station into operation: leadership, within a consortium, of a municipality with a minimum number of inhabitants; the existence of at least one local council with experience in analogue television; linking DTT to a broader economic project; or an explicit political desire to create a television station in order to contribute to the territorial and social cohesion of the municipalities involved (see Table 5).

#### 6.1.1. Medium and large municipalities with leadership potential

Eight of the nine consortiums in operation as at May 2010 were led by a municipality with more than 35,000 inhabitants, which had managed to get all or most of the smaller

**Table 5. Characteristics of consortiums broadcasting (May 2010)**

Consortium	Lead municipality	Analogue TV	Economic project	Territorial project
Consorti Teledigital Granollers	Granollers (60,122)	Yes	Yes	No
Consorti Teledigital Mollet	Mollet del V. (51,912)	Yes	No	No
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Igualada demarcation	Igualada (38,164)	Yes	No	Yes
Consorti Digital Mataró-Maresme	Mataró (119,780)	No	Yes	No
Consorti Teledigital Maresme Nord	Calella (18,615)	Yes	Yes	No
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of the Terrassa-Vallès Oest demarcation	Terrassa (206,245)	Yes	Yes	No
Consortium for the management of public L-DTT of Camp de Tarragona (TACOALT)	Tarragona (137,536)	No	No	Yes
Consorti Teledigital Garraf	Vilanova i la G. (64,905)	Yes	Yes	No
Consortium for the management of L-DTT of Penedès	Vilafranca del P. (37,364)	Yes	No	No

Source: Own compilation based on data gathered from the 2009 Municipal Register of Inhabitants supplied by the Government of Catalonia [online]: <<http://www.municat.cat>> [Accessed: June 2010]

municipalities within their respective demarcations involved in the project. The only exception was the consortium led by the Calella, a municipality with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants. In any event, it was the largest of the municipalities that had to form that consortium, and it led it from the outset.

These municipalities have enough financial strength to lead the necessary investments in both material and human resources. They also have the capacity to form a group of officers to guide the early stages of the process, until such time as the consortium has enough of its own resources to operate independently. In addition, they have enough political power to exercise leadership without too many arguments: according to Spanish legislation, it is the most highly populated municipality that should lead a consortium (Guimerà, Sanmartín & Alborch, 2008).

### **6.1.2. Professionalised analogue television stations at the base of the project**

Of the nine consortiums broadcasting, seven were led by municipalities that had analogue television stations in operation. In the cases of Penedès TV (Vendrell TV and Vilafranca TV), Consorci Teledigital Garraf (Maricel TV and Canal Blau TV) and Vallès Oest (Terrassa TV and Matadepera TV), they also had a second, medium-sized station. Only the consortiums led by Mataró and Tarragona came into existence with no experience in television whatsoever, although they were two of the most highly populated leading cities (see Table 4).

To a lesser or greater extent, the television stations of leading municipalities were professionalised, and they had a relatively high production capacity. Therefore, the vast majority of consortiums broadcasting as at May 2010 had a professional and infrastructure base that facilitated the start of their operations.

### **6.1.3. The link with strategic projects**

In seven of the nine consortiums in operation, L-DTT is linked with a broader project, which is considered to be strategic for the development of the town or city leading the consortium, for either economic reasons (in five cases) or for territorial cohesion (in the rest) (CAC, 2009).

Vilanova i la Geltrú's *Neapolis* project wants to integrate, into one building, the public local television station, an information society promotion centre, the headquarters of the Technical University of Catalonia (UPC) in the town; and audiovisual production facilities for hire. The *Tecnocampus Mataró Audiovisual*, in the county town of Maresme, also intends to create synergies between the demarcation's two consortiums and UPC centres in the town, which specialise in audiovisual technology (CAC, 2009).

Granollers has decided on *Roca Umbert-Fàbrica de les Arts*, a project that brings together a number of the town's cultural promotion and production bodies, the headquarters of the public television station and the *Mercat Audiovisual de Catalunya*, the biggest television fair in Catalonia and one of the most important in Spain. In Terrassa, the television station was set up in the *Parc Audiovisual de Catalunya*, a cluster of large studios and production services. In addition, it hopes to create synergies with the *Escola Superior de Cinema i Audiovisuals de Catalunya* (ESCAC, with headquarters in Terrassa since 2003) and with the UPC, which offers audiovisual and multimedia studios in the town (CAC, 2009).

Finally, in Igualada and Tarragona, there is an explicit political desire to stimulate territorial and social cohesion, since the public authorities promoting television stations in those cities perceive certain shortcomings in that area. Tarragona wanted to make the most of DTT creation to establish a previously non-existent public offering in that part of Catalonia, the second largest metropolitan area after Barcelona. Igualada put an analogue television station into operation in 2003, as a step prior to creating a digital television station. One of the objectives, as expressed by Igualada Town Council, was to contribute to the cohesion of a county that has suffered considerably from the effects of deindustrialisation since the 1990s (CAC, 2009).

## **6.2. Consortiums without television: complex causes**

There are a number of very diverse causes combining very different factors that may explain why certain consortiums had not put a television station into operation prior to the analogue switch-off.

### **6.2.1. The financial factor: the main cause**

The financial factor is the most common cause: groups of municipalities that either doubted or were not convinced that they could afford the investment required to create and manage a new television station. In the majority of cases, they were councils that did not have analogue television stations. In addition, the collegiate nature of a consortium brought some projects to a standstill because not all the municipalities involved could guarantee that they would provide the necessary funds.

Girona City Council pointed to this when it decided to stop the project, in the light of the risk of having to assume the part corresponding to some councils that were unsure about getting involved. The Delta del Llobregat consortium was also on hold for over a year while all the municipalities clarified the project's financial sustainability. And this was despite the fact that two municipalities within the consortium (Viladecans and Gavà) had very strong analogue television stations.

### **6.2.2. A lack of clear leadership: bringing a consortium to a standstill**

A second factor that slowed down and stopped the creation of some management bodies was a lack of clear leadership in the project and/or a lack of agreement on basic aspects among the municipalities involved. These situations were very varied, though four basic types could be identified:

- a) The biggest municipality in the demarcation was absent from the consortium's leadership. The causes here were diverse: a lack of interest in providing a television service, a lack of knowledge of the broadcasting sector (instilling fear), limitations on available financial and human resources, or simply other priorities. This factor was key in the Vic demarcation, in the two consortiums that had not been formed for Cornellà and also in the consortium that Sabadell should have led.
- b) Given the large municipality's or municipalities' refusal to develop a television station, the process was led by small municipalities with analogue television stations but not enough political power and/or financial strength either to convince the largest ones or to lead the process alone. The Baix Nord consortium, where only Sant Esteve Sesrovires was interested, and the Figueres consortium, with L'Escala leading it alone, are but two examples. Both have fewer than 10,000 inhabitants.
- c) The leading municipality's inability to get the others involved. Whatever the causes, the large municipality was on its own and did not manage to promote a supramunicipal body, which was blocked due to a lack of consensus on basic aspects. There are also many causes: the little interest expressed by the others, a lack of agreement on key aspects (such as the political control of the body or the financial contributions that each municipality had to make), arguments about where the television station's headquarters should be located, and what to do with the facilities of local analogue television stations in operation.
- d) The existence of municipalities similar in size and potentially capable of leading the project brought negotiations to a standstill. Here, the lack of clear leadership gave rise to internal conflict that stopped the project. This situation contributed to blocking consortiums like the Vielha and Mijaran ones.

### **6.2.3. A lack of interest in television**

The third and final aspect is a lack of interest among the municipalities involved to put a local television station into operation. This cause, which clearly intersected with the second one, in many cases resulted in a lack of leadership or internal conflicts. There are three types of causes, either on their own or combined, that help to understand why the municipalities were not interested in public L-DTT.

The most usual one, given the number of cases, was the lack of public local television experience, which meant that the municipalities could not see what type of benefit it might

bring. This appeared to be connected with the financial issue and the return on investment, which was the second cause. Finally, it was found that the least interested large municipalities in public consortiums were those that had a private television station in their demarcations. These considered that the private station already provided a kind of public service function. In addition, these local councils usually had agreements or contracts with those private television stations. In this context, the councils preferred to maintain that relationship with the private station and avoid creating a public one, which they felt might negatively affect the sustainability of the commercial one.

#### **6.2.4. The recession as an aggravating factor**

As an element explaining the situation of public operators, the financial factor became more important as the economic recession, which began in 2008, deepened.

From that year, the taxes collected by local councils began to fall noticeably – especially those connected with the construction – while their need to provide social services grew. In 2010, public spending cutbacks approved by the Government of Spain and the Government of Catalonia consolidated the difficulties faced by local councils to invest in public television stations, especially by those that had no prior broadcasting experience.

However, it would be a mistake to attribute the state of Catalan public local television as at May 2010 to the recession. First, because the economic recession did not hit until a long time after consortiums had to be created (in the second half of 2006). Thus, everything would suggest that many groups of municipalities had already decided not offer a public television service because they were not interested in doing so, irrespective of whether they could meet the cost. And second, because in mid 2010, some groups of municipalities once again tried to put a television station into operation, right at one of the toughest times of the recession.

Nevertheless, it must be said that the recession gave many local councils that had decided not to offer a television service the justification they needed. In this respect, one of the most commonly voiced arguments during the interviews was that if, before the recession, local councils were already unsure about offering a television service, then the economic problems they were now facing made them even more hesitant.

#### **6.2.5. Too many programmes set aside for the public initiative**

From the 2010 perspective, everything suggests that the number of programmes set aside by the Government of Catalonia in 2005 for the public initiative is also a key factor in order to understand the low percentage of municipal channels in operation. Five years down the line, and given the conduct of local councils during that period, it seems clear that the 37 programmes set aside for the public initiative were not necessary.



Of the 11 demarcations for which the Government of Catalonia set aside more than the minimum proportion stipulated by law, only five have occupied that extra proportion. Moreover, five of them have not put any public programme into operation. In any event, this divergence cannot be attributed to the Government of Catalonia alone, since local councils are also partially responsible for it. In short, when, in 2005, the Government of Catalonia asked whether those councils wanted to manage a channel, of the 240 planned, only one said no. In May 2010, nine consortiums explicitly acknowledged that they were not interested in the medium.

## 7. Conclusions

In May 2010, just one month after analogue switch-off, Catalan public local television was in a very delicate situation, which could be described as a crisis within the sector: of the 37 digital programmes anticipated by the Government of Catalonia, only 12 were broadcasting at the time of the switch-off – just 33% of the expected total.

All the signs identified and evidence gathered in the course of the research clearly suggest that this situation was due to the way in which the public policies of the Government of Spain and the Government of Catalonia had managed the local television switchover process. Two decisions taken by the Government of Spain are at the root of the problem. First, the design of L-DTT on the basis of demarcations that, in Catalonia, brought together two or more municipalities in every instance. And second, the fact that only half of the radio spectrum can be allocated to the public initiative. The combination of both factors meant that 33 of the 37 anticipated public channels had to be put into operation by groups of municipalities that, in the majority of cases, had not previously constituted a political or administrative unit.

The consortiums resulting from these political decisions were the main cause of the low level of public channel formalisation in Catalonia at the time of the analogue switch-off. One of the first signs is that three of the four unimunicipal television stations were broadcasting, while the fourth began to do so in the short term. This indicates that, for these actors, it was easy to put a television station into operation, because there were no negotiations or compromises.

The fact that only nine of the 33 groups that had to manage a public channel had actually put one into operation by May 2010 provides a second sign along this line. In this respect, the low public body formalisation rate (12 of 37) could be put down to the consortiums: of the 25 not broadcasting as at May 2010, 24 belonged to supramunicipal bodies and only one to an individual local council.

The explanation lies not only in having to share the radio spectrum. A more in-depth analysis shows that most of the problems came from difficulties connected with the formation of consortiums and with the public programme model designed by Catalan legislation: complex

from an organisational viewpoint and demanding in terms of production and broadcasting capacity, thus requiring significant investment.

Consequently, some consortiums suffered from financial or structural shortcomings, which prevented them from putting a television station into operation, even if that was what they wanted to do. Furthermore, some local councils said that they were not interested in offering a local television service and, therefore, would not be putting a station into operation. Finally, and more importantly, there were conflicts and discrepancies of various kinds arising among the municipalities, whose needs, interests and financial resources were very different.

A key idea emerges when these data are combined: public policies have designed a public local broadcasting service so complex that it is hard to implement. From this perspective, the main public television model in Catalonia, the consortium, has clearly put the brakes on L-DTT roll-out in that autonomous community.

The experience of nine consortiums that have managed to get off the ground points in the same direction. Thus, at least two of the four factors, which emerge as the keys to success, are required. First, the existence of a leading municipality with enough financial and demographic strength to be able to bear the bulk of the project. Second, that the leading local council had previously had a municipal analogue television station, facilitating the start of digital broadcasts. Third, linking DTT to a broader, more strategic project for a town or city. And finally, a political desire to create a television station in order to contribute to territorial and social cohesion, especially of the areas with limitations in this regard.

Of the four elements that help to explain the situation of consortiums in operation, the most influential one is having experience of managing public analogue television: only two of the nine consortiums broadcasting as at May 2010 did not have experience in this field. That said, associating L-DTT with other projects considered important by the authorities involved seems to have helped them overcome the apparent handicap of not having an analogue station on which to base a digital one. In any event, a fact that cannot be overlooked is that towns or cities leading the consortiums are mostly big, and have a certain degree of specific weight in the territory; this is something that allowed them to lead the project at the time.

Indeed, the public L-DTT situation in Catalonia as at May 2010 is a wake-up call for the state of public local broadcasting in the rest of Spain. In short, the demarcation, the root cause of low public L-DTT roll-out, is common to all autonomous communities throughout Spain. In this respect, territories with a great deal of experience of municipal analogue television, such as Andalusia, or others with high percentages of the digital programmes set aside for local councils, such as the Canary Islands, can take note of the problems identified in Catalonia. This autonomous community, with a great deal of wide-ranging experience in the analogue sector, as well as policies decidedly in favour of public L-DTT, has reached a situation that can only be described as critical.

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## 9. Notes

[1] Although the Spanish legislature had passed Act 41/1995, of 22 December, regulating local terrestrial television (Official Gazette of the Government of Spain 309, 27 December 1995), it did not come into effect until a decade later, by that time already in the context of DTT roll-out. The Government of Spain published the Technical Plan for Local Television, which was required in order to issue a call to tender in 2004. This was the time when the first autonomous communities issued calls to tender to grant licences, therefore fully regulating the broadcasters (Guimerà, 2006).

[2] In the case of demarcations with two multiplexes, autonomous communities can set aside an entire multiplex for each type of ownership (public and private). In any event, the maximum ratio is still 1:1 (Guimerà, 2006).

[3] In 2008, given the considerable problems and delays experienced by L-DTT roll-out in Catalonia just a few months after the analogue switch-off, CAC decided to carry out research in order to have at its disposal a specific diagnosis of the local television digital switchover process. CAC commissioned the author of this article to design the research, the coordination and implementation of the field work, and to produce the final report. The study was coordinated by Maria Corominas, CAC Head of Studies, who took part in writing the final report. CAC (2009) has published an executive version of the study.

[4] Two days before the Spanish general elections in 2004, Spain's conservative Government (Partido Popular) passed Royal Decree 439/2004, of 12 March, approving the National Technical Plan for Local Digital Terrestrial Television (Official Gazette of the Government of Spain 85, 4 April 2004). At the end of the same year, and just after being elected to form the new Government, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) executive passed Royal Decree 2268/2004, of 3 December, amending Royal Decree 439/2004, approving the National Technical Plan for Local Digital Terrestrial Television (Official Gazette of the Government of Spain 292, 4 December 2004).

[5] Act 10/2005, of 14 de June, on urgent measures to promote digital terrestrial television, to liberalise cable television and to foster pluralism (Official Gazette of the Government of Spain 142, 15 June 2005), established the division between public and private ownership, amending Article 3 of Act 41/1995.

[6] From 1996 to 2009, Reus Town Council had an indirectly managed municipal station (Canal Reus TV), exploited by the producer Iniciatives de Televisió SL. The station was funded by the town council by means of a three-yearly programme contract. All the station's equipment and facilities belonged to the private company. In the call to tender to grant private L-DTT licences, completed in 2006, this producer was awarded a licence to exploit a channel. In September 2009, the producer started broadcasting as a private channel, and the public one disappeared. Consequently, Reus Town Council had to start from scratch on DTT (Guimerà, 2006; CAC, 2009).

[7] Resolution PRE/2804/2005, of 27 September, announcing the Government Agreement of 20 September 2005, establishing the procedure for granting local digital terrestrial television programme licences to the municipalities of Catalonia included in the demarcations set out in the National Technical Plan for Local Digital Terrestrial Television in force, and the legal regime for these (Official Gazette of the Government of Catalonia 4482, 4 October 2005).

[8] The television station managed by Barcelona City Council is a totally exceptional phenomenon in the context of Catalan L-DTT. In the interview, those in charge of it were keen to explain that they felt that it was something more than a local television station, and defined it as a generalist station for greater Barcelona, which includes four million inhabitants. Historically, it has had more resources than any other Catalan local television station (Guimerà, 2006).

[9] This is also a very particular case because the Maresme Nord consortium delegated the management of its programme to the Mataró-Maresme consortium. Thus, Mataró-Maresme exploits Maresme Digital TV and Maresme Digital TV 2, the demarcation's two public stations. The sum of €180,000 per annum for Maresme Nord is to produce specific content for Maresme Digital TV 2, while the bulk of the programming is shared.

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