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Making Sense of TV for Children: The Case of Portugal

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Abstract

Empowering children for a critical and judicious use and consumption of media is a main objective of media literacy. This paper aims to examine the range of television programs available for children in Portugal through a comparative analysis of the programming for children broadcast by the four Portuguese terrestrial channels (RTP1, RTP2, SIC and TVI) over the course of a year. A content analysis of 4,491 programs reveals that about one third have an explicit educational goal and that preschool children are the primary target audience for children's television. There are clear differences among Portuguese public and private channels in the content and themes of children's television programming and little children's television production comes from Portugal. Television itself could promote this aim through the programs it provides to children, as established in the Agreement for Public Service Television signed in 2008 by the Portuguese State and the public television channel, RTP, but it has yet to be enforced.

Keywords: *television, programming, children, media literacy, broadcasting, policy, content analysis, World Summit*

Several national and international studies on the relationship between young people and the media show that in spite of the changes that have occurred in the media field, television continues—and will continue for the foreseeable future—to play an important role in children's everyday lives and in the process of socialization. As many scholars and media professionals observed at the gathering of the World Summit on Children and Media in Karlstad, Sweden, television is an important learning resource and a vehicle for contact with the surrounding world. This reality has raised serious concerns because parents, educators, and policy makers do not always possess the required tools to understand and analyze this issue. Some people fear that the media will exert a harmful influence due to the characteristics of much of its content and its lack of quality. Such concerns are rarely accompanied by a thorough examination of how these problems manifest themselves, what they are conditioned by, and what their dynamics are.

Currently, all Portuguese households have at least one TV set while 97% of households in the European Union have at least one (Directorate General Communication 2007). In 2010, Portuguese people spent, on average, three and a half hours watching TV every day, while the youngest viewers (ages 4 - 14)

watched only 23 minutes less than the average adult (Marktest 2010). There were significant changes in the audiovisual sector beginning in the mid-1980s and up to the mid-1990s that increased the number of channels and the total number of hours broadcast. As a result, the number of hours spent watching TV more than doubled during this period (Marktest 2010). During the 1990s, about 50 channels aimed at young audiences were launched worldwide, some of which were extremely successful. In several countries, this situation brought about cuts in the production and broadcasting of children's programs by national television stations and raised concerns about extensive television deregulation.

Television operators have responsibilities towards children, which gives rise to decisions and obligations that are laid down in laws and deliberations. It is up to the State to ensure that these commitments are fulfilled and put into practice. When examining television content and types of broadcasts, one is able to perceive what a certain sector of society has to say about itself and, particularly in this case, what it has to say about and to children. By analyzing television programming and its quality, it is possible to identify the importance of children's content, ascertaining the importance and value assigned to children by Portuguese television. One must bear in mind that

programming schedules for children are suggestive representations of children's tastes and preferences. In Portugal, cable television is not yet a reality for all children; most of them only have access to terrestrial channels. In addition, a large number of these children have limited access to cultural events, which means that for many of them, television is their most important means of entertainment, information, and leisure.

Research Aims and Methods

The main aim of this research was to monitor the television programming for children broadcasted by the four Portuguese terrestrial channels, in consonance with the national and European audiovisual laws, to identify and analyze the trends of the Portuguese television for children in the frame of an international context. More specifically, this research has the following aims: (1) to characterize the programming for children in terms of provision by time slot, genre, format, dominant themes, countries of origin, and target audience; (2) to recognize convergences and divergences between private and public channels; and (3) to identify the programs preferred by children and their main characteristics.

To identify programming for children as a subject of study implies the definition of two variables: the type of programs broadcast and the age of children. Although the United Nations defines childhood as people under the age of under eighteen (The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989), in this research, we considered programs broadcast specifically to children less than sixteen years of age. All the programs directed towards a mass audience or at adults were excluded because they were not produced or broadcasted purposely for children. The quantitative component of this research is based on three main sources: (1) the programming schedules of each channel; (2) the record of the programming broadcasted over the year in analysis; and (3) statistics from Marktest's industry panel. The study was based on an analysis of twelve sample weeks (the first week of each month from October 1, 2007 to September 30, 2008). Each program broadcast during this period was analyzed individually for genre, format, dominant theme, country of origin, and target audience.

In the sample selection, it was taken under consideration that programming for children is oriented by a stable structure that is without significant changes during those weeks, in either the time of broadcast or the programs provided. Nevertheless, in order to safeguard possible changes, the following two verification

strategies were used. First, we noted all events that caused casual changes in children's programming. Secondly, we checked programming schedules for the weeks not included in the sample. Through these procedures, it was possible to conclude that an analysis of a week per month provides a reliable portrait of children's programming overall. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) database, we registered all of the TV programs broadcasted for children over the year by the four terrestrial channels. Overall, the database has 4,941 entries. Data from the quantitative analysis gave us a framework of the main trends of terrestrial television for children audience.

These data were complemented and deepened through a qualitative approach with a main objective of studying 'container' programs and the Top 10 series most watched by children.

These shows (also called 'omnibus programs') are hosted by one or more people, offering animation series, contests, short reports, and sometimes include children in the studio. During the 1980s, these 'container' programs achieved importance in Portuguese terrestrial television, and during the current decade, the Portuguese channels continue to invest in this type of program.

In addition, the programs most watched by children were qualitatively analyzed to understand what kind of characteristics they should present to attract children's attention and interest. Qualitative analysis provided a more descriptive and comprehensive view of the programming and combined with the quantitative findings, it was possible to reach a general overview of terrestrial television's programming for children in Portugal. These data were complemented by an analysis of children's audience ratings that was not considered in this paper.

In order to present and discuss the main findings, we will distinguish two areas: the first one is related with the quantitative analysis of children's programming and the second one is focused on the qualitative analysis of the programs, particularly the Top 10 programs watched by children.

Characteristics of Children's Television Programming in Portugal

During the current decade, there has been a rise in the amount of children's TV programming. This increase has come about mainly due to the investment made by the second channel (RTP2) of public television as well as the introduction of dedicated cable channels. Despite this growth in provision, the programs' range and the

proportion of time devoted to children's programming vary between the different terrestrial channels, mainly between the public and private channels.

In analyzing TV programming for children, we observed that there is a clear mismatch between the schedules and children's social lives. The majority of this programming (almost two thirds) is broadcast during the morning, precisely when a large number of children are attending school. In the afternoon, when children are out of school, there are very few programs for children. The exception is private channel TVI, which broadcasts a juvenile soap opera in the late afternoon—a repeat during one hour and a new episode during another hour—and the second public channel (RTP2), which curiously stops its transmission during the previously mentioned soap opera.

The frequency and regularity of the programs for children and teenagers must not be a concern for only public television. There is an implicit or explicit relationship between commercial broadcasters and their audiences. For this reason, it is difficult to understand why public television in Portugal removes almost all of its programs for the youngest viewers from the weekends. In the same sense, is also unacceptable for the private channel SIC to simply interrupt its programming for children during weekdays over four months, as happened during the period sampled. In light of the social responsibility theory, television has obligations to society that go beyond audience ratings and advertising revenues. As stated by McQuail (2003, 188), media organizations “are social institutions that meet important public tasks that go beyond their immediate purpose of achieving profit and providing jobs.” Although in recent years the media are increasingly eager to maintain or expand their profitability, they are not just any type of business and they have not necessarily ceased to be social institutions. This does not mean that they can ignore economic reality as they have to operate, in whole or in part, according to the rules of the market economy.

Although some authors recognize that television, whether or not it is designed for children, is primarily a business (Schneider 1989), operators cannot ignore its ideological dimension and social responsibility to their younger audience. Television provides not only information about the world, but also selective ways to see and understand the world. Thus, according to Frau-Meigs (2003, 7), “mainstream media can and should provide children with varied opportunities to learn, communicate and create outside the commercial

context.”

Genres and Formats

As in many countries of the world, the terrestrial broadcast channels offer fiction and animation (traditional cartoons) as the mainstay of their offerings to children. However, there is some expressive diversity inside this genre concerning the themes presented in the stories. Compared to the 1990s (Pereira 2007a, 2007b), we found an emergence of new themes that gather and inscribe current social concerns, such as ecological problems, nourishment, communication across languages, and other issues. Juvenile soap operas have taken on a significant proportion of the share of children's programming on private channels and this genre has grown significantly over the last eight years. Figure 1 shows the diversity of programming.

Factual programs (for instance, news programs) for children are completely absent from the schedules of terrestrial channels. In 2009, this situation changed in public television¹, perhaps due to the imposition of the Public Service Broadcasting Concession Agreement, which obliges public broadcasters to include “regular information spaces, properly contextualized, addressed to the juvenile public” (Public Service Broadcasting Concession Agreement 2008, 13).

Figure 1: Children's programming by genre

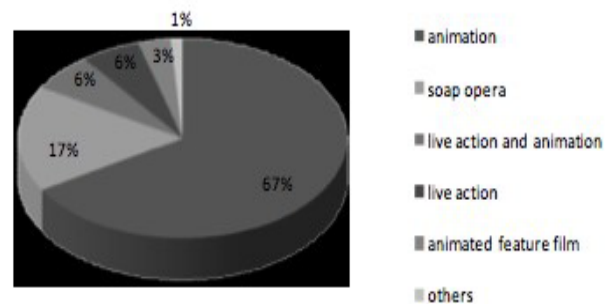


Table 1 shows that Portuguese children's television makes use of a variety of media formats, even though 2-D animation is by far the dominant format. Other formats include puppets, live-action, 3-D, and stop-motion animation.

¹ In 2009 and 2010, RTP2 broadcasted a news bulletin named ‘Diário XS’ (‘Daily XS’) that aimed to inform young people from 8 to 12 years old on national and international events in the fields of politics, science, arts, sport, school and weather in a simple way. This program returns to RTP2's programming schedules in October 2011.

Table 1: Program formats

Formats	Number of episodes
Cartoon 2-D	1836
Cartoon 3-D	411
Stop motion animation/frame by frame	355
Live-action	351
Segments	180
Live-action and cartoon 2D	67
Manipulated puppet	54
Manipulated puppets and humans	23
Cartoon 2-D and 3-D	6
Total	3283

Source: Pereira, Pinto, and Pereira 2009

Educational Programs

The issue of educational programming is complex in Portugal. For many educational programs, educational content is guided by a clear and formal curriculum. In some cases, the educational goals are implemented “through the services of one or more educational content specialists” who “define the educational goals or curriculum that guide the selection of topics to be addressed in the series, as well as the ways in which (from an educational perspective) those topics will be handled” (Fisch 2007, 97). Because there are different models of producing educational television, this leads to variability in the functions of educational specialists; as a result, some series are produced with little or no involvement by educational consultants.

The genre of educational television sometimes overlaps with the concept of instructional television. Lemish (2007, 167) distinguishes these two concepts when considering that “usually, educational television has more general, educational goals, while instructional television concentrates on specific subjects that are taught at school.”

Some believe that children can learn about the world through television programs even if the programming does not have educational goals. For example, an entertainment program with prosocial content could bring more positive experiences and effective learning than one built around teaching formal content. As Lemish (2007) points out:

Television is among the most significant of the socializing agents of our times. It teaches children and youth facts, behaviors, values, norms, how the

‘world works’, and it contributes to the formation of worldviews. All these take place even when broadcasters have no educational or instructional intentions, a clear curriculum, or a formalized set of educational goals. In many studies, children report they use the entire range of television programs as a learning environment (147). Although this is a core topic of television for children and of utmost importance for media literacy education, delving deeply into this discussion would require focusing mainly on it. In order to clarify a definition of educational programming, we focus conceptually more on the latter perspective, for in this research project we had to find an objective criterion that would allow us to unambiguously identify educational programming because it is not always identified by broadcasters.

Therefore, in this study, a program was classified as educational if it presented an explicit educational curriculum or purpose. Thus, we excluded programs with design and production that did not present an educational aim, despite the fact that they might have helped children learn about themselves and the world around them. Following the criteria established, of the 3, 283 programs analyzed, 31% were classified as educational programs and 69% as non-educational. Table 2 shows the distribution of these programs among the four channels where we see that public channels RTP1 and RTP2 broadcast far more educational programs for children than the private channels SEC and TVI.

In Portugal, the main broadcaster of educational programming curriculum for young children is the second channel of public TV (RTP2). This kind of programming falls within the traditional domain of a public service broadcaster. RTP1 has a higher percentage (43%) of educational programs in its programming, followed by RTP2 with 38%. In overall terms, educational content is significantly more prevalent on RTP 2 due to the high number of such programs that it broadcasts. In fact, it delivered 89% of the educational programs broadcasted throughout the study period. The SIC channel is the least represented channel in this distribution (1%). While broadcasting programs for children and young people only during the week, RTP1 still overrides the SIC and TVI channels in the amount of educational programs issued. Overall, the two public channels delivered 95% of the programs with an educational curriculum, while the two private channels broadcast only 5% of such programs.

Table 2: Programs with and without educational curriculum by channel

	RTP1		RTP2		SIC		TVI		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
With educational curriculum	65	43%	910	38%	10	2%	38	13%	1023	31%
Without educational curriculum	86	57%	1482	62%	440	98%	252	87%	2260	69%
Total	151	100%	2392	100%	450	100%	290	100%	3283	100%

Source: Pereira, Pinto and Pereira 2009

Table 3: Programs With and Without Educational Curriculum by Target Audience

	Ages	RTP1		RTP2		SIC		TVI		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
With educational curriculum	Up to 5 years	37	56.9%	769	84.5%	10	100%	38	100%	854	83.5%
	6-10 years	27	41.5%	120	13.2%	0	0%	0	0%	147	14.4%
	11-16 years	1	1.5%	21	2.3%	0	0%	0	0%	22	2.2%
	TOTAL	65	100%	910	100%	10	100%	38	100%	1023	100%
Without educational curriculum	Up to 5 years	51	59.3%	880	59.4%	12	2.7%	0	0%	943	41.7%
	6-10 years	31	36.0%	466	31.4%	294	66.8%	84	33.3%	875	38.7%
	11-16 years	3	3.5%	136	9.2%	132	30%	168	66.7%	439	19.4%
	all ages	1	1.2%	0	0%	2	.5%	0	0%	3	.1%
	TOTAL	86	100%	1482	100%	440	100%	252	100%	2260	100%

Source: Pereira, Pinto and Pereira 2009

When we look at the age of the target audience of programs with an educational curriculum, we find that young children have more numerous program choices while there is less educational programming available to older children. Table 3 shows that the overwhelming majority of the programs with an educational curriculum (83.5%) were aimed at children up to 5 years old. The age group of 6-10 years old had a percentage of 14.4%, while the older audience had even less (2.2%). These figures show that the number of programs with an explicit educational purpose decreases as the age group targeted increases. Programs with an explicit educational purpose are primarily aimed at pre-schoolers.

Concerning the target audience of programming aimed at children, an interesting trend was observed: each channel was targeting a single age group. Public channels give priority to the pre-school audience. One private channel – SIC – targeted children 6-10 years old while the other private channel – TVI – mainly targeted children 11-14 years old. Therefore, when considering all of the terrestrial channels, it is possible to remark that there are programs that target the different age groups.





Table 4: Programs for children: Percentage according to the target audience

Channel	Age group	Until 5 years old	6 – 10 years old	11- 16 years old
RTP1*		58%	38%	3%
RTP2		68%	25%	7%
SIC		5%	66%	29%
TVI		13%	29%	58%

*



Table 5: Dominant Themes by Channel

Public TV		"Interpersonal living" (44%) was the dominant theme, followed by "action and adventure" (26%).
		Presented the greatest diversity of themes. Incidence of "daily life experiences" and "discovery and knowledge of the world/environment" was 25%.
Private TV		Action themes ("action and adventure", "action and humor" and "action and combat") and soap operas represented the dominant themes and constituted 87% of its broadcasts.
		A unique theme - "soap opera contents" - made up 54% of the programs aimed at a young audience.

Source: Pereira, Pinto and Pereira 2009

Key Themes in Children’s Programming

A qualitative analysis of the programs allowed us to identify four main themes, which were noted in 65% of the total programs. Themes included interpersonal living (19%); action and adventure (18%); discovery and knowledge of the world/environment (14%); and daily life (14%). There seems to be a tendency for these programs to focus on those issues that are a part of the children’s daily lives. From an adult’s point of view, these topics are important for their development. However, this aspect is somewhat subverted by the longer duration of the programs associated with soap operas plots. There are few news and informational programs for children. No channel broadcast programs on current affairs, an absence that seems inexplicable given the role that television plays in the lives of children, namely as a mediator of the world.

We wondered about the depiction of the media world in children’s media in Portugal. Although many

programs are concerned with helping children understand the world around them, reference to the media world is largely absent. Of all the programs screened for analysis, we found only one episode of a preschool series that had media literacy as its principal theme. This was a series with episodes that were organized into specific topics. One of these episodes was dedicated to media and ICT and addressed issues related to the Internet, explaining how they operate, their importance, and contained some tips for using the Internet in a healthy way.

We found noteworthy differences between public and private channels in terms of the four primary content themes. Public channel RTP2 presented the greatest diversity of themes while private channel TVI was the most monothematic as it focused primarily on soap operas. The table below summarizes the dominant themes presented by each channel.

Table 6: Characterization of the 10 programs most watched

Programs	Channel	Genre	Origin/ Producer	Main characters	Target Audience	Setting	Pace
KIM POSSIBLE	SIC	Fiction-animation	USA Walt Disney	Kim – Female / 18 yo Ron – Male / 18 yo	11-16 yo	City	Fast
THE REPLACEMENTS	SIC	Fiction-animation	USA Walt Disney	Riley – Female / 12 yo Todd – Male / 12 yo	6-10 yo	City	Fast
POWER RANGERS MYSTIC FORCE	SIC	Fiction-animation	USA Walt Disney	Sorcerer 5 adolescents – 3 Male and 2 Female	11-16 yo	City	Fast
PET PALS 'CUCCIOLI'	RTP2	Fiction-animation	Italy Gruppo Alconi- Raifiction-Dq Entertainment	Six pets	6-10 yo	Forest	Calm
HARRY AND HIS BUCKET FULL OF DINOSAURS	RTP2	Fiction-animation	UK/Canada CCI Entertainment	Harry – Male / 5 yo Mother, sister and grandmother	2-5 yo	Home	Calm
AMERICAN DRAGON – JAKE LONG	SIC	Fiction-animation	USA Walt Disney	Jake Long – Male / 13yo	6-10 yo	City	Fast
MILO	RTP2	Fiction-animation	France/Italy/ Canada Tooncan Productions	Milo (rabbit) – Male / 6 yo	2-5 yo	Home	Calm
JAKERS! THE ADVENTURES OF PIGLEY WINKS	RTP2	Fiction-animation	USA/UK Mike Young Productions/ Entara Ltd.	Pigi (pig) – Male / 8 yo	2-5 yo	Field	Calm
LOLA & VIRGINIA	RTP2	Fiction-animation	Spain Imira Entertainment	Lola – Female / 12 yo Virginia – Female / 12 yo	6-10 yo	School	Fast
THE LITTLE PHILOSOPHERS	RTP2	Animation	South Korea TOY Media & Baramedia	n.a.	6-10 yo	n.a.	Calm

n.a. – not applicable

Source: Pereira, Pinto, and Pereira 2009

Most Popular Programs for Children in Portugal

In our research, we wanted to examine the programs in which young viewers expressed the greatest interest. We performed an exploratory analysis of these programs without going into their narrative structure. We sought to identify the type of stories, dominant features, protagonists, values, and representations of these programs.

In the selection of these programs, the audience ratings were very clear. The programs most watched by children were not those specifically directed at them, but rather were football games (like the Euro 2008 games or the Portugal Final Cup) and soap operas aimed at general audiences as well as adolescents. Most popular was the program entitled “Morangos com Açúcar” (Strawberries with Sugar), a youth soap opera broadcast daily about life in a high school.

Most children’s programs did not appear at the top of either the Top 10 or Top 20 programs. Nevertheless, these programs demonstrate a visibility and an alleged role in children’s lives that deserves to be taken into account. Therefore, we decided to provide a list of the ten most popular television programs among those programs that might be considered to be explicitly targeted at a younger audience². Table 6 describes these programs, which are primarily animated cartoons

² The juvenile soap operas despite appearing at the top of children’s preferences were not considered for this analysis. Given the dominance of soap operas on the private channels’ programming, it was always necessary to create specific categories to analyze this genre. Given the nature of its plot and narrative structure, which differs from fiction series aimed at children, juvenile soap operas weren’t included. The fact that these soap operas have been studied by another research project (see Pereira 2006 and Pereira 2007) also contribute to this decision.

and programs that, with the exception of “Little Philosophers,” fall in the fiction genre. These programs were broadcast by just two channels: SIC (private station) and RTP2 (public station). The lack of programs on RTP1 and the predominance of soap operas on TVI (many of which were repeats) could explain the preferences for RTP2 and SIC. As the quantitative findings showed, these are the two terrestrial channels that pay the most attention to the younger audience.

Among the Top 10 programs, there are series targeted to various ages from pre-school children to teens. For half of these programs, the United States is the country of origin. One program is made in South Korea while the others are produced in European countries. There is some kind of association between the programs’ country of origin and the channels that broadcast them. Thus, all of the programs broadcast by the private channel (SIC) were from the United States and produced by Walt Disney while the programs aired by the public channel (RTP2) were produced (with one exception) in European countries or Canada (more likely in co-production). This seems to be related to the type of programming characteristic of each channel. In this sample, the action of the programs from the United States predominantly takes place in urban contexts and the stories have fast-paced narration. This pattern best characterizes the programming of private channel SIC. For the most part, the stories presented in the programs broadcast by public channel RTP2 were narrated at a calmer pace. The countryside, the forest, the home and the school were the main contexts of action. Furthermore, these were also the typical features of the children’s programming broadcast by RTP2. In the gender of the main characters, there was a balance in female and male roles.

In spite of the difficulty identifying a pattern in the preferences of children, we can ask what specific program features seem to motivate and capture the attention and interest of children. The features and ingredients that contribute to making an attractive story for children are action, adventure, fantastic powers, the struggle between good and bad characters or the forces of good and evil, technical objects (especially when equipped with a magical power), romantic relationships and lovers’ disputes, the magic arts, actors equipped with magical powers, and humor (which is an ingredient across all programs). These ingredients appear in a prominent position in the features that captured attention and raised the interest level of children.

For the pre-school audience, anthropomorphic objects and animals continue to inhabit the programs aimed at them. The series for this target audience are mainly guided by friendship and cooperation. Many of the most popular programs feature the mobile phone, which has emerged as an essential tool and gadget when adolescent relationships are represented. This is obviously a reflection of recent times.

Finally, a note on dubbing. Some of these programs contain dubbing that is technically bad, where sometimes the language is incomprehensible or makes use of a childish register that could be offensive to children. Researchers and media professionals should pay more attention to dubbing as it would both enhance the quality of the programs and serve as a sign of consideration and respect for children.

Conclusion

During the two last decades, the context of children’s development and socialization and the consciousness of their place in society have changed significantly. The relationship between the youngest viewers and television cannot be disconnected from other platforms that complement and enrich that experience. The Internet has become a new way to access TV and video, and social networks, with their forums, chats and e-mails as well as the incorporation of mobile usage in adolescents’ everyday lives, have created a wide network of exchanges and interactions of which television constitutes a part. Recent studies have drawn attention to this diversification of the communication environment and the resulting changes in children’s media consumption habits (Carlsson 2010; Rydin and Sjöberg 2010; Livingstone 2009; OFCOM 2007). As a report produced by the British regulatory agency OFCOM points out, “Children are at the forefront of changes in technology and the increase in their use of the Internet and other media is having an impact on the way that television is used and viewed by children today (OF-COM 2007, 72).

Children’s television has been studied worldwide from different theoretical frameworks and following various types of methodology. These studies have focused mainly on analyzing programming and programs; addressing issues such as violence and advertising spaces for the youngest generation; the reflection and discussion of the criteria for quality programming; the debate on TV (de)regulation; and the advantages and disadvantages of a global television industry. De-

spite the different social, cultural and economic contexts at a national level, the trends of programming for children over the last decade are consistent across the globe.

With regards to television for children, the process of globalization has opened doors to two large international trends: the globalization of the programs' production, in particular the production of animation, and the global competition for the sale and distribution of programs directed at children. Three US companies (Cartoon Network, Disney and Nickelodeon) with their international distribution of programs, are considered global television channels for young people (Westcott 2002).

The results of the study presented demonstrate that terrestrial channels, either public or private, do not invest in the national production of programs. The percentage of Portuguese programs scheduled for children were almost exclusively the production of juvenile soap operas. Audience ratings have shown that this is the genre most favored by Portuguese children. Perfectly aware of this fact, the private channel TVI has created a show that not only attracts children, but also adult viewers. It was for this reason— to captivate audiences beyond the child— that this program is still broadcast daily in the late afternoon, which makes this slot extremely high yielding in terms of ratings, as it reaches a wide age range of child, adolescent, and adult viewers.

Although the programming schedules are full of international programs, the channels where these programs are displayed can play a decisive role in their adaptation to local contexts through dubbing (the technique most used to translate the foreign programs). Creating the dubbing is a demanding job in terms of language appropriation, interpretation, diction, and musical adaptation. Furthermore, it is important to note how this activity can contribute to improving the quality of a particular program and helps it to adapt and adjust international products to the culture and identity of a specific country. Therefore, although there are economic constraints to investing in national programs for children, is important to invest in the quality of the technical treatment programs purchased in international markets receive. While the way a product is processed and presented to the public can maintain the quality level of its production or even contribute to its improvement, it could also impoverish or distort the original version. Therefore, a program's dubbing cannot be seen as an impoverishment of the product.

If this job is done well and guided by demand patterns, it could benefit the children because it gives them access to a product that was produced in another country, but was translated locally. This allows the possibility of assigning the program characteristics of the national culture.

This discussion does not intend to defend the closing of television to international programs or argue that only national programs are good for children. On this subject, we agree with Buckingham (1999) when he states that the idea that the culture of children can and should be protected from 'contamination' of the trading system reflects a utopian and protectionist notion of childhood, which is very questionable. These notions are based on the perspective that a system dominated by the market will inevitably lead to the neglect of children's social and cultural needs. In this regard, Buckingham argues that market issues in the sphere of culture are more complex and ambiguous than the critics of this system tend to suggest and that children do not necessarily lose in this situation. Buckingham believes that the market can offer quality and diversity while promoting the social, cultural, and intellectual development of children. However, Buckingham also points out that these are not the market's main goals and that achieving them depends on how the system is regulated and the complex balance between economic and cultural forces.

Today's children in Portugal are born into a world that is both local and global. On the one hand, they are engaged in similar activities and share the same tastes and interests of children across Europe (Livingstone and Bovill 2001) and even other continents. On the other hand, they (re) produce the socialization patterns, habits and activities that are characteristic of their country and the communities in which they live. This means that in order to study the role of media in children's lives it is necessary to meet two seemingly divergent processes— 'globalization' and 'localization'— and trying to assess how children mediate them.

The digital technologies and the changes enacted in the media landscape have a great influence on the cultures of children and young people (Carlsson 2002), where television itself can play an important role in the family. However, this mediation process requires that adults who care for children gain knowledge of the programming aimed at children. In general, however, few parents monitor children's programs. This is a critical aspect with regard to the Portuguese context. Apart

from the positive or the negative scenario of television for children, the public speech on this issue is a crystallized discourse that clings to the idea that programming for young people is violent, aggressive, and low-quality. This discourse is common to parents, teachers, and even a number of academics.

This scenario shows the importance of media literacy for children, families, academics, and media professionals at a minimum of three levels: as an attempt to respond to the changes and challenges of media culture, as a key to shared social responsibility towards media performance, and as a means to ensure that quality children's programming thrives in the new media landscape. Research could play an important role in informing society, disseminating research results and mediating scientific knowledge for the general public, as well as contributing to improve its media literacy. Our research presents beneficial surprises in all channels: more diversity of themes and formats as compared to the study carried out by Pereira (2007b) and an investment in educational content aimed mainly at pre-school children. The programming for adolescents is poorly diversified and too focused on the juvenile soap operas that have become a true phenomenon of audiences for nearly a decade.

Portugal has followed the global trend in programming migration from mainstream to cable channels and this reality is even more evident today. Programs for children are seen as less profitable than programs for adults or the family, which is leading to an exit for open aired channels.

This has led to an emergence of more cable channels dedicated to the child audience. The majority of these channels are international channels, but one channel launched in 2009 is owned by the Portuguese company that also owns the terrestrial channel SIC and other cable channels. This extends the spectrum of cable channels dedicated specifically to children, but closes the provision of the terrestrial channels. This situation leaves children who have no access to cable or satellite television at a clear disadvantage. This access could be seen as a privilege that could lead to an inequality of opportunities among children in their socialization and the information, learning, and entertainment available to them. Therefore, it is important to appeal to the social responsibility of broadcasters and defend and strengthen the idea of public service broadcasting in order to preserve the children's needs and interests by offering them television that respects and promotes the right to difference.

Governmental regulatory bodies should pay special attention to this matter. The authors of this study produced the data reported here (the first conducted specifically in Portugal) at the request of a regulator, the Council of the Portuguese Media Regulatory Authority, which has fulfilled its mission to support such research. In addition, support and grounds for the regulatory action were sought in this research, an aspect that the research team praised, taking into account its meaning and importance for the regulation of children's television in Portugal.

Nevertheless, it is our understanding that the issue of regulation cannot stay only with those in charge at the Regulatory Authority. It is also important that civil society itself creates and activates discussion forums about the programming practices and standards that guide television stations, which gives more responsibility to the operators and the audience. In this sense, in relation to children's television, it is important that Portuguese society—represented by parents, educators and teachers, viewers and consumer associations, organizations for the protection and promotion of children's rights, lobbyists, and other interested parties—has a more informed, active, and critical voice with respect to television for children, the legislation that regulates it and its (non)compliance. In fact, at a time that society demands television in particular, and the media in general, to guide its activities based on the principle of social responsibility (McQuail 2003) and promote public interests over private interests, society itself does not resign from sharing the responsibility of monitoring the television aimed at children.

As mentioned previously, the commercial market currently plays an increasingly important role in the construction of childhood, as it is impossible to deny or condone the status of children as consumers. We again agree with Buckingham (2000, 166-167) when he states, "attempting to create a 'safe space' for children, in which they will remain uncontaminated by commercial influences—as is the case in current moves to ban advertising from children's television—is to retreat into an unreal fantasy world. Rather than seeking to protect children from the marketplace, we need to find ways of preparing them to deal with it."

Empowering children for a critical and judicious use and consumption of media is a main objective of media literacy. Television itself could promote this aim through the programs it provides to children. This purpose is established in the "Agreement for Public Service Television" signed in 2008 by the Portu-

guese State and RTP (the company that currently holds the concession for broadcasting public radio and television), but is yet to be enforced by the public service channels. Educators, scholars, and media professionals with interests in children's media and media literacy await what will happen next.

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