MEDIA EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY BAROMETER IN THE WALLONIA-BRUSSELS FEDERATION

THE METHODOLOGY IN A NUTSHELL

The *Equality and diversity barometer* for the Belgian French-language audiovisual media is founded on thorough quantitative analysis of the programmes on the television channels active in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (Belgium). This analysis is repeated year by year so as to gauge the current trends.

Definition of the sample

Channels

Only the channels active in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation were included in the sample. In 2013 these consisted of 12 local public service and 14 "national" television stations: 3 public service general-interest, 5 private general-interest and 6 private dedicated (cinema, sport, recreation, *people*, economy). This choice meets a concern for coherence and relevance as regards both broadcasting and the potential impact of the results yielded on possible subsequent initiatives and consultations to be carried out between players in a given political, legislative and televisual context.

Period

The yearly sample covers a week of television broadcasting taken at random (7 consecutive days). As this sample is a cross-section of the news flow, contextual peculiarities are taken into account in order to be controlled and not to adulterate the monitoring results.

Programmes

Only productions "made in Belgium", that is home grown and assimilated productions (co-productions) are analysed Two reasons account for this methodological choice. Firstly, the foreign productions present in the Belgian programme grids are already the subject of similar studies, principally in France where the barometer of the French Higher Audiovisual Council scrutinises all programmes, French and foreign, without distinction. Next, it seemed more interesting to understand what happens in the productions actually commanded by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation's television channels in order to deal with the question of diversity more effectively and at close quarters. It will be noted that advertisements have been excluded from the scope of study because of their more stereotyped structure and their multiple origins (as regards production). Daily rebroadcasts of the same programme were not taken into account.

In 2013 the sample represented over 400 hours of programmes.

Units, categories and encoding methodology

The encoding unit adopted is the participant, that is any person directly or indirectly appearing on the screen. The indexing distinguishes:

- a person appearing on the screen and speaking;
- a person who is seen but does not speak;
- a person who speaks but is not seen;
- a person not seen but spoken of.

Participants are recorded once per programme without taking account of the frequency or duration of their participation. Thus a person spoken of for two seconds and not appearing on screen is counted in the same way as a person who speaks for an hour. Only their level of participation (seen, spoken or other types) allows their on-screen activity to be distinguished. This is a methodological choice whose purpose is to define an initial quantitative framework prior to a substantive debate. This framework places all participants on the same equal footing, making it possible to register in crude data the diversity on television at a time "t" and to compare its progression over time. Note that if the participants are present in several programmes, they are indexed accordingly.

Groups of persons are indexed in the same way as isolated participants. A single presence is recorded per group. Above 3 persons (silent) in one shot, participants are taken as a whole.

"Diversity and equality" variables

Participants are described according to five variables of diversity and equality: sex, origin, age, socio-occupational situation and disability.

For all these variables, the principle of encoding is based on the commonplace perceptions, that is on criteria according to which all and sundry can implicitly categorise the world around them. The diversity criteria laid down in this study are not founded on the make-up of individual; they reproduce commonplace, informal perceptions such as may be activated by the average viewer. In other words, for each participant the question is asked: how is this individual perceived by the viewers, how will he be remembered once the television is switched off? This perception is formed for the viewer all through the programme according to numerous factors which may be visible, spoken, written or even inferred.

This commonplace perception, at the time of encoding, comes within categories of perception that are settled socially (man / woman for gender) or defined

economically (age categories of the National Statistical Institute; socio-occupational categories borrowed from the European classification of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) of the International Labour Organisation).

As to the variable of origin, note that the categories used ("blank" or "not blank") have meaning only in methodological terms, in order to lay down criteria allowing the representation of diversity on screen to be quantified. As already pointed out, a distinction of this kind is not intended to establish a substantive distinction between individuals but in fact to assess the number and the context of their appearances on television. From the moment when multiculturalism is an undeniable sociological fact of society directly perceptible to everyone, it can thus attain or not attain visibility on television. This visibility is what we seek to apprehend. It is a matter of encoding an immediately visible experience by putting oneself in the viewer's position, without attaching any connotation whatsoever to this experience. Thus the indices allowing the participant to be connected with a category are written or oral mention of origin, physical appearance or accent.

For the disability variable, the binary category (yes / no) stands for recognition (or otherwise) of a physical or mental deficiency which is a handicap in everyday life. Identification of disability visible on screen is established according to indices of perception (wheelchair, visible malformation, sight-impaired person's spectacles etc.) or indices provided by the context of the programme.

Other variables: type of identification, type of participation and context of appearance

Other variables flesh out the analysis, allowing the representation of diversity and equality on screen to be made qualitatively meaningful. Thus each participant is characterised by the type of identification (written or oral mention or both) and the type of mention he receives (name, forename, occupation).

The media role and the perception of the participant supplement this approach. Seven media roles were thus adopted: journalist/compere, game contestant, spokesperson, expert, *vox populi*, walk-on and fictional character. Three modes of perception of the participant are indexed: victim, perpetrator of reprehensible acts and exemplary value.

In addition to these there are contextual variables for fine-tuning the analysis of representations: television genre, scope of the informational topics (local, national, international), social marker and lexical fields linked with work, family and society.

Consult the full methodological paper (in French):
http://www.csa.be/diversite/ressources/2006 (from page 172)