

The Shutdown of the Public Regional Television in Valencia: The First Step Towards the End of Regional Public Service Broadcasting in Spain



*During these times of austerity in much of Europe, Spanish public broadcasters have been struggling to stay afloat due to their large debts and the lack of government funds. **Carmina Crusafon**, Associate Professor, at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona discusses the reasons for the recently announced shutdown of the public broadcaster in Valencia. She argues that this may be the beginning of the end for other regional public broadcasters in Spain.*

On 5 November, the president of the Valencian regional government, Alberto Fabra, announced the shutdown of the public regional broadcaster, *Radio Televisió Valenciana* (RTVV)[1]. This decision was made after the Supreme Court of Valencia decided to annul RTVV's labour force adjustment plan, which laid off 1,000 workers during the last year (from December 2012 till August 2013).

Fabra said the shutdown was non-negotiable because it would cost over €40 million to readmit RTVV workers. His main argument was that this money is required to pay for public education, health systems, and social welfare. He emphasised that he was not going to "close any school or hospital to save the public television". The government expects to shut down the RTVV at the end of November. This will leave 1,660 workers unemployed and the Valencian regional PSB (radio and TV) will no longer exist.

The road to the shutdown

There are two main elements that led to the shutdown of RTVV. First, in April 2012, the Spanish government approved the reform of the Audiovisual Law, which allows full or partial privatization of public regional television channels. This new legal framework also added an additional factor: these TV channels could not generate any deficit. In the case of RTVV, its debt had reached €1.2 billion, after the last seventeen years of mismanagement. As a solution, the Valencian government had proposed to lay off 1,000 workers (2/3 of the total staff) and called for a reduction of 60 percent of its annual budget (from €183 million to 60 million).

Furthermore, over the last seventeen years, RTVV has not acted as an independent public service broadcaster, but as the Partido Popular's broadcaster. The conservative party has been in power in the region for the last four mandates (Zaplana, Olivas, Camps and Fabra) and RTVV has been controlled by managers appointed directly by the government. Their management has implied editorial control of the news and programming, and an excessive squandering of public resources (overpriced payments of sports rights and contents). As a result, there was no control over expenses and the debt continued to grow. Since European authorities requested tight control over public expenses and debt, the Spanish government has required regional entities to adopt radical solutions, focusing more on the figures than the impact on society.

What the shutdown means

The RTVV shutdown has three main consequences. First, this is a step towards the end of other public service broadcasters in regions facing similar critical economic situations. The argument of overwhelming economic debt could be used to end public service broadcasting altogether with the excuse that these entities are not economically viable. The second and third consequences deal with social and cultural issues. Though the Valencian people realize that RTVV has mainly been a political tool, they now want to claim the right to their own public service broadcaster, as

demonstrated in some of the protests in Valencia earlier this month. Finally, as RTVV broadcasts partly in Catalan, the shutdown will mean that the Catalan media landscape will be dramatically diminished with no audiovisual public entities in the Valencia region.

The article gives the views of the author, and does not represent the position of the LSE Media Policy Project blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

[1] *Radio Televisió Valenciana* (RTVV) is a public broadcaster in the region of Valencia, in the Eastern part of Spain with a population of 5.1 million. It was founded in 1989 and it broadcasts in Spanish and Catalan language. Its business model is funded by advertising and public regional aids. RTVV has three channels: *Nou* (general audience), *Nou 24* (news), and *Nou HD*. It has a 4.3 audience share.

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