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The accidental centralisation of South African TV, 1990 to 2011: policymaking confuses the regional/local question and undermines the public interest.

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2014-01-30
http://hdl.handle.net10539/13616

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the processes and content of South African television policymaking between 1990 and 2011 in relation to the regional/local (sub-national) TV question. Analysis is provided of the possible reasons for the gaps between policy intent and policy implementation on regional/local television matters, and the possible impact of these gaps on pursuit and realisation of public interest objectives.

The thesis is based on a research case study of a single case: the regional/local question in South African TV policymaking in the early democratic era. Data were extracted from primary South African TV policy documents produced in the period 1990 to 2011 and from semi-structured interviews with stakeholders directly involved in TV policymaking. The collected data were qualitatively analysed across four periods: 1990 to October 1996; November 1996 to 2001; 2002 to 2006; and 2007 to 2011. Two theoretical frameworks were deployed in the data analysis. An adapted form of Kingdon's (1995) "policy streams" framework – a framework for analysing deliberative public policymaking in democratic states – was used to organise the data collected for each of the four periods of study and to analyse the patterns, and potential causalities, in TV policymaking in each period in relation to the various South African regional/local TV policy matters. A second framework, a social responsibility-oriented, democratic citizenship-focussed public interest media policy framework derived from the work of Feintuck and Varney (2006), was used to evaluate the degree to which public interest objectives were achieved via South African TV policymaking in relation to the regional/local question.

The research found that South African television policymaking between 1990 and 2011 failed to adequately answer the regional/local TV question. Via the research project's application of the adapted Kingdon (1995) framework to the data collected, evidence was found of ruptures in deliberation in the TV policymaking space – instances which steered policymaking activity away from full, multi-stakeholder deliberation, narrowed the scope of consideration of policy options, and led to *ad hoc* policymaking, policy confusion and policy missteps. Via application to the data of the public interest framework derived from Feintuck and Varney (2006), the research found that sub-national TV delivery on the key public interest objectives of access, diversity and stewardship was not effectively pursued in TV policymaking, and that pursuit of the central public interest principle of democratic citizenship was not adhered

to. The research also found that there were apparent causal links between non-deliberative, *ad hoc* policymaking and failure to effectively pursue the public interest.

The value of the research project, and of this thesis, lies to some extent in the application of an innovative political science-oriented framework (adapted from Kingdon, 1995) to uncover the patterns and some of the potential causalities in TV policymaking in relation to a specific subset of TV policy matters (sub-national TV deliverables). Also of value is the application of a second conceptual framework to the data – a social responsibility-oriented public interest framework based on the work of Feintuck and Varney (2006) – to the outcomes of the policymaking. Third, this thesis offers a longitudinal perspective on early-democratic-era South African policymaking on a matter (television) central to the democratic transformation project, thus providing insights into several of the political, socio-cultural and economic discourses/arguments (and the tensions within and among the discourses/arguments) which were prominent in the first two decades of South Africa's democratisation.