

Anatomy of the Italian Web TV ecosystem.

Current issues and future challenges.

Emiliano Treré¹²; Valentina Bazzarin¹³;

The aim of this article is to provide an overview of the emergent Italian Web TV ecosystem. We begin by sketching a summary of the Italian media scenario, focusing on three related aspects: the Rai-Mediaset duopoly, the Berlusconi anomaly and digital evolution of the TV system. We then switch to the Italian digital resistance scenario and describe some of the most interesting experiences developed in the Italian context. In the third part, we dissect and analyze the phenomenon of Italian Web TVs, exploring its roots, legal status, producers and audiences. We conclude by providing a reflection on Italian Web TVs as an ecosystem, both by pointing out some future challenges it will face within the Italian media scenario and by focusing on the role of active citizens and unprofessional producers in changing the scenario and in advocating pluralism and creativeness.

1. The Italian media scenario¹⁴

Before we introduce and investigate the Web TV ecosystem, we first begin this article by providing an overview of the Italian television scenario. As highlighted by Ferrari & Ardizzoni (2010) and by Padovani (2007, 2010) the Italian landscape is defined by the following characteristics: close control of the State over Italian media,

¹² etrere@gmail.com; Associate Professor, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Autonomous University of Querétaro, México.

¹³ Researcher, Department of Communication Studies, University of Bologna, Italy; Visiting researcher, Brooklyn College, City University of New York, U.S.

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the Rai-Mediaset duopoly, the anomaly of a (three times and recently former) Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, who owns also three of the seven television channels that broadcast at a national level, the difficulties related to the adoption of digital technologies, and the uncomfortable role that Italy plays in the European Union for its lack of clear laws against media monopoly. In this chapter, we focus in particular on the following aspects of the Italian television system: the Rai-Mediaset duopoly, the Berlusconi anomaly and finally the digital evolution of Italian television. We place particular attention on the last topic, the digital evolution of Italian TV system, because our aim is to explain the rise of Italian Web TVs and to help situating this phenomenon inside a broader perspective.

As highlighted by some authors, the television panorama is quickly changing in several contexts, thanks to technological innovation and a general displacement of content from radio frequencies to digital platforms. As Kackman et al. sum up, "If flow challenges the idea of the discrete television text, then convergence destabilizes the notion of television as a discrete object. Television texts overflow onto interactive websites, television content is available on multiple platforms, and television networks are part of multi-media conglomerates" (2011).

In order to analyze the Italian media scenario and then provide a research on the emerging Italian micro Web TV ecosystem, we have relied on different approaches: 1) a review of Italian regulation codes and legislative efforts, debates and results; 2) a series of qualitative interviews carried out with Web TVs producers; 3) observation of actors involved in the production of Web TVs contents and in lobbying activities at national and international level; 4) the available bibliography on Italian Web TVs. This chapter is part of an ongoing investigation where, on one side, we study this new phenomenon, while on the other one we engage and work together with different actors involved in Web TVs production, aiming to offer more pluralism within the Italian media scenario.

1.1 The Rai/Mediaset duopoly

RAI, the public service broadcaster, and Mediaset, the private broadcaster controlled by Silvio Berlusconi, who served three terms (1994–1995, 2001–2006, and 2008–2011) as Italian Prime Minister, dominate the Italian media scenario.

RAI and Mediaset achieve average nationwide audiences of approximately 41 percent and 37 percent, respectively, while the other broadcasters on digital and analogue channels manage no more than approximately 10 percent (Mazzoleni et. al., 2011). This situation is named as the Italian broadcasting duopoly. The Italian national public service broadcasting company, Radiotelevisione Italia (RAI), operates many services, including three national terrestrial television channels: Rai Uno, Rai Due, and Rai Tre. RAI continues to attract a very high percentage of the national television audience along with its main commercial competitor, Mediaset. According to Auditel, during 2010, RAI attracted 41.4 percent of the television audience on average, while Mediaset attracted a 39.4 percent of the total share¹⁵

The RAI–Mediaset duopoly (or Raiset as some journalists have originally named it) is the most fundamental feature of the Italian television market, and scholars and commentators have written countless pages on this subject. This anomalous situation is, above all, the result of the lack of adequate legislation regulating the competitive media ecosystem. The duopoly existed *de facto* since broadcasting was opened to the private sector in 1975, but it was legitimised in 1990 by a law which allowed a single entity to hold three national licenses at the same time. In July 2009, AgCom (the Italian Communications' Authority) announced that a third private operator, News Corporation's satellite pay-TV broadcaster Sky Italia, had exceeded Mediaset in total revenues for 2008. The Italian government thus announced the collapse of the traditional RAI–Mediaset duopoly, and the consequent opening of the television market; but, as some authors have noted (Mazzoleni et al., 2011) if we consider other key competitive indicators such as audience and advertising shares, RAI and Mediaset continue to control together around 80 percent of the audience ratings against some 10 percent for Sky Italia.

¹⁵ Auditel is a research company that measures television audience in Italy, on a panel of about 12,000 individuals in more than 5,100 households

In addition, it has to be underlined that Sky Italia's high revenues derive mainly from the annual subscription fees paid by a limited number of people, whereas the other two broadcasters derive mostly from their revenue related to advertising.

1.2 The Berlusconi anomaly

It is almost impossible to discuss Italian media without mentioning Silvio Berlusconi and his media empire, as well as his political key-role, so often used in addressing communication, information and ICT infrastructure policies. A symbiotic relation between the media and politics characterizes the whole history of Italian television. Since the foundation of the public broadcaster RAI in 1944, television in Italy has been shaped by close governmental control. In the two decades following the end of the First World War, the main forces in the Italian political system widely used national broadcasting for propaganda, establishing RAI as an official vehicle for ideological and political commentary. The Italian Constitutional Court officially approved state monopoly for broadcasting in 1960, but at the same time expressed a desire for diversity that resulted in the creation of the RAI 2 channel in 1961. Nonetheless, Italians had to wait until the general deregulation of the European broadcasting system to experience some openness in the media system, through private cable Television and radio. About thirty-five private television stations and about 150 private radio stations began to broadcast without a license in 1976. As Ferrari & Ardizzoni (2010) have highlighted, this dynamics created confusion as well as a decrease in the quality of programming, while suggesting at the same time that diversity had always been lacking in the Italian broadcasting arena. The strong ties that the Italian political parties had developed with RAI were somehow "loosened" and RAI could pass under parliamentary control, as opposed to governmental control.

In this environment, Silvio Berlusconi officially entered the communication arena in 1980, by setting up his channel Canale 5 and by creating the Mediaset Group, which was officially founded in 1993 and offered publicly on the board of trade in 1996. Between 1983 and 1984, Berlusconi added to his main channel, Canale 5, two other channels (Italia 1, and Rete 4) thus acquiring a *de facto* monopoly in the private broadcasting sector.

Using a stream of local stations and a system of synchronised broadcasting, Berlusconi's network was able to broadcast nationwide. This was a direct infringement of the Italian law, which granted the right to broadcast nationwide only to RAI. In 1984, Berlusconi was accused of illegal national broadcast and ordered to close some of his local stations, but Prime Minister Craxi and his government approved a law by decree in order to protect Berlusconi's interests. The decree lifted the restrictions on national broadcasting and concentration of ownership, consolidating the foundations of Berlusconi's media empire (Ginsborg, 2005).

Since the 1990s, Berlusconi's influence in both the Italian media scenario and politics has increased exponentially. Berlusconi owns Mondadori, the biggest Italian publishing house, and the film distribution company Medusa. Moreover, Berlusconi was first elected Prime Minister of Italy in 1994, but his mandate only lasted nine months and he resigned at the end of the same year. In 2001, Berlusconi was re-elected until 2006, when Romano Prodi, leader of the democratic opposition, became the new Prime Minister. After two years of Prodi's leadership, Berlusconi was re-elected, in April 2008, following a governmental crisis. His third mandate ended on November 12th, 2011, when Berlusconi resigned after a new budget law was approved in parliament, making way for a transitional government that will try to steer Italy out of a potential economic crisis.

The Italian media scenario reached, under Berlusconi's governments, an unprecedented level of political control over the media and this was pointed out several times by the international press (for example, several covers and articles were dedicated to Berlusconi on *The Economist* during the last 15 years). If we consider the strong duopolistic nature of the Italian media scenario which we highlighted before, and if we take into account the direct influence of the State over the RAI administration, including the fact that Berlusconi owns the Mediaset Group, we reach a 90% level of control over the available information to the Italian population. That is why this situation, where media concentration supposes serious threats to the Italian democratic system, was brought to the attention of the European Union. The EU has been incessantly asking for the Italian government to line up Italian laws with the European roadmap, to empower pluralism. For instance, after the second Berlusconi government, Hibberd wrote:

“A recent Council of Europe-funded report (Venice Commission 2005) heavily criticised the Berlusconi government (2001–06), arguing that two pieces of legislation (the Gasparri Law, which relaxed media ownership rules, and the Frattini Law, that sets out rules relating to conflicts of interest in public life) did little to solve issues relating to Berlusconi’s dominance of Italy’s broadcasting media. This follows other international parliamentary debates and reports that have been equally condemning the Italian media system (Freedom House 2004–06). Although Berlusconi was swept from power in April 2006, he remains leader of the opposition and could reassume power in some future election. Furthermore, the new centre-left government in Italy faces major hurdles while implementing the current proposed reforms of Italian media law, given its slim majority in the Senate.” (Hibberd, 2007: 882).

The last two decades of Italian history have been characterized by the strong presence of Berlusconi, both in the political scene and in the media scene and -above all- in their not so clear intersections. Critical journalists Gomez and Travaglio (2004) have convincingly showed that, since 1984 – whether Berlusconi was inside the Parliament or not –, most of the media laws that have been approved, helped safeguard his personal interests. Gomez and Travaglio (2004) have listed four main characteristics of what they have called the Berlusconi’s media regime, explaining in details the effectiveness and the strength of Berlusconi’s grip on both media and politics. First of all, Berlusconi’s media monopoly is the perfect tool to distribute wealth, grant favours, and help securing the career of many of those working in the media sector. Berlusconi rewards those who support him and are condescending towards him, offering them important positions within his media empire, while he punishes those who oppose and counter him, by excluding them from the media arena (various cases can be cited, like comedian Daniele Luttazzi and journalists Enzo Biagi and Michele Santoro). Secondly, Berlusconi’s media control allows him to manipulate information and broadcast only the news that he and his partners approve and allow. Media manipulation in the case of the post-earthquake situation of the city of L’Aquila,

with the construction of a supposed 'miracle' by the Berlusconi government, is just one of many examples (Farinosi & Treré, 2010).

Third, Berlusconi is able to dictate the agenda to the electors/audience that watch national television. In a country like Italy, where the diffusion of TV sets reaches 97,4% of the population and 80,9% of people still use TV news as their main source of information, this is a source of an immense power. Fourth, this media regime is able to "demonize" those who speak of "inconvenient truths" and generally all of those who criticize and oppose Berlusconi and his followers, including judges, comedians, politicians, intellectuals and so on.

In their brilliant analysis of the Fininvest/Mediaset's media strategy in the last 30 years, Balbi & Prario (2010) have pointed out a series of fundamental issues that are of interest to our analysis. The two scholars show that Fininvest/Mediaset has always adopted an effective strategy which has continued to evolve. In particular, they highlight the ability of Berlusconi "to forge deep-rooted relationships with the political system and, second, to acquire the legislative power with which he could decide the make-up of the Italian radio and television system" (Balbi & Prario, 2010). In addition, they underline the dual approach of the group towards broadcasting technology: on one side, Mediaset has always been able to anticipate and follow new trends that emerged in Italian society in the last three decades, such as the demand for entertainment and the centrality of advertising; while on the other side, the company has defended the duopoly and the *status quo* formed over the years and always enjoyed political support translated into favourable legislation, as well as the support of the general public, which, at several moments of its history, has contributed to "rescue" it.

1.3 The more things change, the more they stay the same: Italy goes digital

Digital terrestrial television was first introduced in Italy with the adoption of the Digital Broadcasting Law in 2001. The initial 2006 deadline for the definitive switch-over from analogue to digital broadcasting was repeatedly postponed and switch-over is now set for December 31st, 2012. The switch-off of analogue broadcasting started in 2009, based on the progressive "digitization" of regional areas. Viewers of digital

terrestrial television and web TV increased considerably between 2007 and 2010, whereas viewers of satellite television, after increasing between 2007 and 2009, have since remained stable. On the other hand, analogue television viewers decreased significantly between 2009 and 2010. Some channels that used to be only available by satellite or pay-TV (such as RAI News and Sky Tg24) are now penetrating an increasing number of households, thanks to the digital terrestrial platform. This does not represent an increase of diversity in terms of content, but rather in terms of audience reach. The television set remains the most common media device in Italian households, and national television news (previously available only in analogue) and traditional newspapers are the media sources that are most used by Italians to obtain news about politics and daily news. However, a longitudinal analysis estimates that the percentage of Italians whose sole source of information was television decreased from 46.6 to 26.4 percent between 2006 and 2009. There are two main points that, in our opinion, are worth underlining, regarding the Italian media system and its move to digitization, especially if we are to understand the Web TV ecosystem: first of all, the digital evolution has not helped to overcome the Italian television duopoly; second, the move to digital grounds brought about a crisis of local television channels, because the multiplication of national channels has benefited the traditional duopoly, causing an important decrease in terms of audience and advertising incomes for local broadcasters.

Regarding the first point, it is worth noting that, even if at first the introduction of digital terrestrial television was regarded by many as a fruitful opportunity to break the RAI–Mediaset duopoly, it seems that there have been no substantial changes in the Italian media scenario as a result of the digitization process: the license fee and advertising sources for RAI remain unchanged, commercial digital media continue to be funded primarily by advertising, the market is still characterized by the traditional RAI-Mediaset duopoly, and the entry of Sky Italia into the market has not significantly altered a situation where RAI and Mediaset share around 80 per cent of audience ratings (Mazzoleni et al., 2011). Many commentators and media scholars have pointed out that spectrum allocation policy has favoured incumbents in both broadcasting and telecommunications, and that legislative intervention has repeatedly obstructed the entry of new operators. In 2006, the European Commission opened an infringement

procedure against Italy for violation of the European rules on electronic communications. In January 2008, in a case involving the new operator Centro Europa 7 against the Ministry of Communications and the AGCOM Authority, the European Court of Justice officially acknowledged that the Italian norms, regulating the transition from analogue to digital broadcasting technology, restricted the entry of new operators in the digital market, in favour of the incumbent operators. As Alessandro D'Arma concludes in his analysis of digital television policies in Italy:

“The center-right successfully used DTT as a means to protect vested economic interests that long since have opposed any real democratization of access to the broadcasting infrastructure in the country, subordinating general industrial and socio-cultural policy goals, associated with the transition to digital television, to personal economic interests” (D'Arma, 2010: 18).

Concerning the second point, the process of digitization is not only undermining Italian duopoly, but at the same time is weakening local broadcasters, who have many times played a pivotal role in Italian history, safeguarding and fighting for freedom of expression (Grasso, 2006). The multiplication of national channels has in fact caused an important decrease in terms of audience and advertising income of local and regional broadcasters. The problem is that, on one side, AgCom's authority has developed a national plan for Italy's digitization, but in the meantime analogue switch-over has continued on a regional basis, without waiting for the approval of the national plan, so 10 regions are already receiving digital broadcasts. Thus, there is a risk that the implementation of the new national plan will subvert the allocation of certain frequencies. That has already taken place at regional level, as many of them are local broadcasting stations (at least 200 local TV stations). Moreover, local television stations are banned from challenging the government's expropriations to the competent administrative courts. It seems that proliferation of free-to-air television channels (through the multiplication of RAI and Mediaset channels) and a controversial allocation of digital multiplexes are contributing not to foster pluralism, but to reinforce the old duopoly and replicate it at a digital level. Furthermore, digital evolution is resulting in a loss of quality of RAI's programmes: the quality of contents is

moving to digital platforms, following a process the media scholar Cinzia Padovani describes as the move “from duopoly to duality” (2007).

The most updated and complete report on the Italian media system (Mazzoleni et al., 2011) concludes with a series of recommendations. In particular, the report calls on civil society the urge to change the Italian anomalous situation and reform current legislation, to monitor the last stage of digital switch-over and the resulting state of media pluralism, and to check to what extent do the actions of both the Parliament and the Government privilege the existing duopoly or help creating new opportunities. In the next section we will see how, in the last decade, an alternative television ecosystem has emerged online, to challenge the television duopoly and tell stories usually neglected by mainstream media.

2. Fissures in the Italian media landscape

2.1 Media resistance below the Alps

The anomalous situation of the Italian media scenario, which we outlined above, is of pivotal importance, but does not tell the whole story. As media scholar Buonanno (2010) has pointed out, Berlusconi and his trash television represent a sort of obsession for those who speak of the Italian media. But this obsession has often obscured the richness of oppositional voices who have been able to create media alternatives and to “resist the tide”¹⁶ within this anomalous scenario. The curiosity mentioned by Buonanno does not concern just the economic and the infrastructural sides of the system, but the overlapping of personal and public interests of a single person affects the content of programmes too. Mediaset has a specific linguistic code that shaped both the imagery and the main cultural values of part of the Italian population, and conditioned the content style of some of the public television programmes. This was particularly true in the last period of Berlusconi's governance, where the lack of debate, both at the Parliament and in the media arena, was impressive but slightly detected by public opinion and academics analyzing the phenomenon. As Navarra points out (2008), while Italy has produced various

¹⁶ See Albertazzi et al. (2009) *Resisting the Tide: Cultures of Opposition under Berlusconi* (2001– 2006), New York London: Continuum.

dangerous anomalies, it has also been the ground for testing “experimental antibodies” to contrast such anomalies. In recent years, Italy has witnessed a flourishing of web-based forms of resistance, which include the counter-information blog of comedian Beppe Grillo (Navarria, 2008; Pepe e di Gennaro, 2009), the use of Internet technologies (especially Facebook) by the so-called anti-Berlusconi movement “Popolo Viola” (Purple People), the reaction to the so-called gagging law (a law to limit Internet’s freedom which the government aimed to introduce in 2010) through the use of web platforms, several social media groups, and online civil society blogs or the anti-mafia launched in 2005¹⁷.

Moreover, we should also highlight a recent signal of what can be considered as an awoken interest, by traditional television, for the visibility opportunities offered by the Internet. In 2010-2011, the communicative strategy to manipulate the media arena - as well as the Italian public opinion - made another step forward. Some supporters of private and political interests from Berlusconi’s crew, enterprises and party, had been allocated in many management key roles of public television. After the summer of 2011 (the Italian palimpsest traditionally offers new and successful programmes since the end of September until the end of spring; summertime is usually a period for a jukebox of old programmes, serials, replicas, documentaries and so on), many contracts of troublesome journalists and showmen/show-women were not renewed, and their programmes were not scheduled. One of them was Michele Santoro, who anchored a famous political debate arena in the public television. He used to be critical against the Government and in his programme he hosted a journalist, Marco Travaglio, and a comic strips artist, Vauro, that weekly informed, charged and represented with irony the President of the Council, his Ministers, and politicians in general. The programme, despite Auditel success, was suspended several times, and finally closed in 2011. However, Santoro and his group decided not to surrender and kept in touch with their audience: during the summertime, using social media (in particular Facebook), they organized a show called “Raiperunanotte” in a series of major cities, in order to maintain high attention on the destiny of the programme. As Vaccari (2011) pointed out:

17 www.ammazzatecittutti.org (last accessed April 2012)

"Raiperunanotte showed that digital media convergence can be effectively employed to bypass politically motivated limitations on broadcast television. Santoro realized that the audience of his television programme would be eager to watch it online and through various other narrowcast channels. He also understood that outrage for the cancellation of the show would galvanize his followers to spread the word about the rally. By assembling a convergent network of various small- and medium-scale outlets, Santoro harnessed digital media to garner an audience whose size was comparable to that of his television programme" (Vaccari 2011: 991).

RAI board decided not to reschedule the programme in September 2011, and Santoro counterattacked by organizing the show and using a platform composed of Web TVs, IP TVs, social media, satellite channels and local television on digital frequencies. The show was called "Public Service" ["Servizio Pubblico"] and obtained a great success in terms of audience, showing the power and the capillarity of a network of alternative and independent media in replacing the traditional system. However, this phenomenon is not considered by us the most interesting and significant in anticipating future scenarios for television, because as Giovanna Cosenza also highlighted in her blog¹⁸, the 'Santoro effect' might represent a risk rather than an opportunity for the Italian independent media network. Indeed, Santoro is a symbol of the traditional way of doing television, and he uses both a classic linguistic code and the style of the mainstream media. The creative impulse of independent media in general, and of Web TVs in particular, risks to be affected by the old way of planning and directing a programme or organizing a palimpsest.

2.2 Anatomy of the Italian Micro Web TVs emerging ecosystem

The Italian anomaly is hiding another interesting phenomenon that is growing fast and consistent, far away from the public and academic debate. Opinion leaders,

¹⁸ <http://giovannacosenza.wordpress.com/2011/11/04/%C2%ABservizio-pubblico%C2%BB-il-medium-e-il-messaggio-ma-il-vecchio-si-rinnovera-o-schiaccera-il-nuovo> (last accessed April 2012)

politicians and academics are focusing mainly on digital television and the future developments of television, while regions, for instance, are investing resources to migrate all frequencies to digital platforms; in the meanwhile, politicians are discussing how to manage the opportunity to watch television channels and programmes on mobile phones, and television groups are fighting to obtain new broad and central frequencies.

However, at the same time a silent 'movement' is working backstage. This movement is based on a new idea, a revolutionary idea, according to some observers, of a sort of television that is growing on neighbourhoods and streets. Even if we briefly mentioned a recent attempt of traditional old-fashioned television to use the Internet as a new platform for the dissemination of mainstream programmes, purged of public or private Italian televisions' palimpsest (the Santoro experiment), the actual resistance scenario is mainly composed by a network of garage TVs, personal TVs, family TVs, community TVs, citizens-journalists and video-bloggers. This network is growing fast and if in 2004 there were just 36 Independent media, 3 years later (also thanks to wider opportunities to access broadband Internet) there were 152 hot spots of resistance, and 463 in 2010 (data collected by AltraTV¹⁹). This television is described as 'autarchic' and does not need frequencies or big investment because it uses the Internet as a platform for transmission and programmes are created by users, and organized in groups like editorial boards. We already highlighted that digitization is progressively weakening local broadcasters and TV stations whose role as 'bastions of media freedom' has been pivotal within the Italian context: Micro Web TVs are thus increasingly playing the role that traditionally was played by local TVs and radios in the Italian media scenario. Moreover, this new media practices the user engagement line, betting in involvement rather than in engagement. During a Web TV talk show, as well as in all the palimpsest plan, authors are aware that they do not need a simple interaction with the audience, but they have to converse and to share with the users, to generate the content together. Why did WebTVs (or independent media) rise up so quickly, in such a huge growing quantity and with this strong creative power in Italy? Why isn't this happening in other countries? We can find a partial answer to both

19 <http://www.altratv.tv/ricerche> [in Italian] (last accessed April 2012)

questions in a private conversation that the general secretary of the FEMI, Simona Salvi, reported us. Simona was in Marseille witnessing the Italian experience and in her speech, she formulated a rhetorical question: “Why in Italy?”. Someone from the audience answered: “Because you have Berlusconi!”.

2.3 A definition and a brief history of micro Web TVs

What are we referring to when we talk of Web TVs in the Italian media scenario? Giampaolo Colletti, the founder of the FEMI (Federation of Independent Digital Media) defines these micro Web TVs as the multitude of online channels created by different kinds of citizens with a passion for video-making, and therefore those who, while not specifically working in the audiovisual sector, have decided to spend their time and money in creating their own webcasting channel. These micro TVs emerge in specific local contexts, but thanks to the possibilities offered by Internet technologies, they are able to engage and to connect at a more global level. In 2004, a team coordinated by Giampaolo Colletti started the AltraTV observatory, in order to monitor a series of online experiences which were taking place in Italy and that were linked to the audiovisual world. Thanks to the possibilities provided by the process of digitization, in particular the opportunity of lowering television production costs, and pushed by the spread of broadband connection, many Italian citizens and local communities had started building their own Web TVs, in different contexts and for different reasons. These online experiences differed from the so-called telestreets, a particular form of Italian local TVs that flourished in Italy from 2002 to 2005. But while producers of telestreets broadcasted their signal on radio waves, using the free ‘holes’ in the spectrum that other television stations were not occupying (Barca, 2007), these new micro Web TVs are using all the possibilities offered by the Internet to broadcast for free their contents, without any third party mediation. These local Web TV experiences are based on a more structured type of user generated content; i.e., they do not originate from individuals using the Internet to upload and share their videos, but from local organized communities, cultural associations, civic movements, non-profit organizations, universities, etc. In addition, they are uploaded on a regular basis (not necessarily every day but with a certain regularity) and they are all focused on

topics related to local realities, addressing specific themes neglected by mainstream television.

2.3.1 Characteristics and typologies

These micro Web TVs are evenly distributed on the Italian territory, and are usually located in small cities and centres. Their focus is extremely local; for instance, Mosaico TV, from Milan, documents and broadcasts what is going on in the area surrounding the famous Monza street, while Monti TV describes the life in the historical Monti district, close to the Colosseum in Rome. TeleTorre19 is the first condominium TV, talking about the life in a specific building, while Tele-Osservanza is the micro Web TV of a local parish in the city of Cesena, located in one of the Italian regions with the highest number of Web TVs, Emilia-Romagna. Therefore, these micro channels address specific communities, while at the same time they communicate nationally and even globally. Messina Web TV, for example, narrates facts and events related with the Sicilian city, to Sicilian emigrants living in the United States. The Web TVs phenomenon is turning away from an hobby for video makers and professionals' spare time to a structured activity managed by groups of citizens to offer a new content (information, entertainment, education and so on), or a space in which it is possible to learn and debate about all the issues (especially local) that usually are not able to reach the top of the information agenda, or are simply not gripping for the economic interests of mainstream media. For instance, there is a Web TV in Sardinia-born from a shepherd's idea, Emilio Concas, to face economic problems on his farm. He involved his family in filming and taking pictures of the daily routine in the farm and uploaded this content on a website²⁰. Concas daily overcomes infrastructural difficulties in order to have enough bandwidth to upload the content, and the website's design is quite elementary. However, he obtained some success and soon the audience started asking how to buy the farm's handmade products. So they had another good idea, they suggest people to adopt a sheep, in order to receive cheese and wool products in exchange.

²⁰ <http://www.sardiniafarm.com/> (last accessed April 2012)

2.3.2 Legal status

To better understand the difficulties that micro Web TVs are faced with, both to affirm themselves as a real alternative to the duopolistic system and to enhance public interest, a brief overview about the legal framework is necessary. The title of this paragraph suggests something of which we are not completely conscious about, but it is something we can be specific about every time someone is talking about legal aspects of Television system: most of the laws are “called” by the names of Ministers and politicians linked with Berlusconi’s first, second or third government. There is another aspect to be taken into account: while talking about Web TVs, we have to bear in mind current laws protecting/ruling the internet and, at the same time, traditional television discipline. This fact could be considered anachronistic, but it is also a symptom of political distraction and a lack of interest for this emerging opportunity. Web TVs’ influence has probably been underestimated until now, and this fact has left enough room for networks and the links among different communities to consolidate, as well as to learn the specific skills required to effectively operate in a professional new social media, and to invent styles and languages. Web TVs’ freedom in producing and disseminating content without any control or role evokes another important issue that actors operating in this scenario could and should advocate in the future: the present lack of rules and laws implies that fundamental rights sometimes are not properly defended. There has been a long history of efforts to undermine freedom of expression on the Internet in Italy, and much more energy was spent in these efforts than in developing infrastructures to foster broadband access. Below, we list the most important laws and decrees regarding the Internet:

- The Pisanu’s decree (2005) limited online communications because every connection has to be identifiable and traceable. The most significant impact of this law is to limit the diffusion of wi-fi connections in Italy. This law has been cancelled in January 2011, however for six years it conditioned the opportunity of immigrants to access the internet and traced the movements of everyone who used the Internet in Italy;

- Levi-Prodi's law (2007) compared blogs to any other editorial product and required bloggers to register the name in the list of communication operators. This law was widely criticized and later on cancelled;
- Pecorella's new paragraph (2009), which was proposed to be added to the press law of 1948, suggested applying to Internet's content the entire discipline regarding traditional press. The proposition never reached the parliamentary debate.
- Maroni's (2009) code's goal – in what concerned the Internet - was to give to the government the power to shut down websites containing "threats" or arousing hate.
- Alfano's law (2010) included an Interception Act and some anti-blog measures that only professional organizations could fulfil. Thus, the rule did not take into account the amateur nature of almost all Internet sites.

We could also mention the propositions made by Barbareschi (2009) – who is a deputy, an actor and a producer - for a strict protection against online peer sharing on contents protected by copyright; d'Alia's amendment (2009) for the repression of activities instigating crimes through the Internet; Carlucci's law (2009) - she used to be a showgirl in Mediaset shows before becoming a deputy - to make the Internet a area of freedom of rights and duties through abolishing anonymity; Lauro's proposal (2010) - after a violent physical attack to Berlusconi - to prevent hate speeches and to review the penal code, increasing punishments for crimes committed using the internet.

Internet television (live streaming and webcasting) is only mentioned in the so called Romani Law (2007), which prescribes that rules valid for radio and television are extended to all the television-like services, and in a AgCom (the Italian Agency for Communication) verdict. Nowadays, the universe of Web TVs is ruled mainly by following two laws, the Romani's decree (2010) and the AgCom resolution. Romani's law, which should incorporate a European Directive in the Italian law, was transformed in a radical reform of Italian media legislation. Unfortunately, the same European Commission recently commented on the way in which its directive had been interpreted. The decree, in fact, in its first version, compared websites with

audiovisual content to television stations. Several communities of bloggers protested against this interpretation, especially considering that traditional websites like blogs, search engines, electronic versions of newspapers and magazines, online games and all the services that "are not in competition with television broadcasting", were excluded by the decree. The new Italian government, lead by Mario Monti, is working to modify another point of the decree, the article 34/4, that imposes a sort of authorization for television to start up and to be on air. Moreover, the AgCom resolution (AgCom, the Italian Agency for Communications, should be a control authority, however often it imposes rules) imposes the rule of 'notice and take down' (in 48 hours) in any case of violation of copyright rules.

2.3.3 Actors and producers: the high-tech bricoleurs

To understand why these laws and codes are slowing down and obstructing the creativeness of small and micro Web TV's entrepreneurs, we highlight that in this ecosystem most of the actors are not professionals (Tréré & Bazzarin, 2011). They fit more with the distinction given by Lévi-Strauss, who developed the concept of the *bricoleur* in opposition to the one of *ingénieur*.

'Le bricoleur est apte à exécuter un grand nombre de tâches diversifiées; mais, à la différence de l'ingénieur, il ne subordonne pas chacune d'elles à l'obtention de matières premières et d'outils conçus et procurés à la mesure de son projet: son univers instrumental est clos, et la règle de son jeu est de toujours s'arranger avec les "moyens du bord", c'est-à-dire un ensemble à chaque instant fini d'outils et de matériaux, hétéroclites au surplus, parce que la composition de l'ensemble n'est pas en rapport avec le projet du moment, ni d'ailleurs avec aucun projet particulier, mais est le résultat contingent de toutes les occasions qui se sont présentées de renouveler ou d'enrichir le stock, ou de l'entretenir avec les résidus de constructions et de destructions antérieures. L'ensemble des moyens du bricoleur n'est donc pas définissable par un projet (ce qui supposerait d'ailleurs, comme chez l'ingénieur, l'existence d'autant d'ensembles instrumentaux que de genres de projets, au moins en théorie); il se définit seulement par son instrumentalité, autrement dit, et pour employer le

langage même du bricoleur, parce que les éléments son recueillis ou conservés en vertu du principe que "ça peut toujours servir" (Lévi-Strauss, 1962).

The *bricoleur* is able to use any available tools stocked from previous experiences, in order to complete a project, even if these tools were not intended for the specific goal. When something is lacking in the bricoleur's toolbox, or the work needs more people to be done, they achieve their goal by joining communities in which complementary tools and skills are available.

2.4 Micro Web TVs as networked ecosystem

The absence of a powerful Web TV network has also been regarded as one of the causes for their weakness against traditional media (Treré, 2008). FEMI was also launched to join together local experiences and to build a strong network that could leave a deeper mark on the media scenario. De Biase (2010) has rightly pointed out that the strength of these TVs lies in their network, not in each of them at an individual level. These Web TVs, if taken separately, can only count on a few hundreds of daily contacts, but if they broadcast as a network, they can count on almost one million of contacts per month. FEMI organizes online events that are simultaneously broadcasted on most of Italian MicroWeb TVs, in order to overcome the problem of fragmentation. For instance, in July 2010, Italian Micro Web TVs joined forces and created the LiberaRete (FreeWeb) event to affirm their importance and to communicate their mission to Italian and international audiences. FEMI has also launched the Rita101 TV, in honour of Italian Nobel Prize Doctor Rita Levi Montalcini, a Web project whose topics are related to research, and in which it is organized a live broadcast every year, connecting with other Web TVs. These kind of webcasting events are made possible by the cutting down of costs of digitization: with cheap HD cameras, laptops, and using the Skype software to make video-interviews and receive calls from audiences, different teams of FEMI are able to coordinate and broadcast, creating an 'alternative' online TV network.

3. Challenges and future perspectives: the social network

According to Castells' (2009) distinction between networking power, network power, networked power and network-making power, after our observation of network of independent media (FEMI) we detected that:

- For the *networking power* ²¹, the cost of exclusion from network increases faster than the benefits of inclusion on the network, because "the value of being in the network increases exponentially with the size of the network" (Castells, 2009: 42). For a single alternative media being part of FEMI has not a prompt impact in its budget or in its ability to engage audiences. On the contrary, outliers are not involved in information sharing, recalls and in programme bouncing, and this implies a quick senescence and loss of weight in the public debate;
- the *network power* implies that participants have to share standards or protocols and have to accept the same rules. This commitment is clear during simultaneous broadcasting and FEMI gives its associates the opportunity to negotiate these rules. "Power is the power of network standards over its components" (Castells 2009: 43) and supports the specific interests of a specific community of social actors;
- the *networked power* implies that "each network defines its own power relationship, depending on its programmed goals" (Castells, 2009: 44). One of FEMI's efforts lies in negotiating. with an increasing number of partners, common aims and a shared perspective of future scenario's developments;
- The *network-making power* could be detected in FEMI's ability to connect several micro realities with policy makers and proper business companies.

According to Vaccari (2011) "Italian parties, however, have generally been slow and cautious in harnessing the participatory potential of the internet (Vaccari 2008), particularly because party bureaucracies have been reluctant to concede control over

21 "Networking power refers to the power of the actors and organisations included in the networks that constitute the core of the global network society over human collectives or individuals who are not included in these global networks" (Castells, 2009: 42)

message production and distribution". However, in 2011 something changed, and from the Arab spring to the Spanish citizens' movement (indignados), we are witnessing a wider number of people rising up against inequalities, an occupation of debating spaces (i.e. Web and Yes We Camp! movements, which imply that people are occupying both virtual and actual arenas) and a new form of bottom up civic engagement, directed by social networks moved by a common goal. Bazzarin & Lalli (in press), for instance, while observing the community of promoters of a referendum, suggested that "the action itself - of sharing and promoting user-generated-content - is powerful in shaping even a fluid community, as well as in fostering new forms of collaboration. Furthermore, students and citizens involved in these processes become more and more skilled in using these channels, fostering literacy, learning a lot about the possibility to find information and to propose similar actions of sharing meanings."

Despite the strong Italian technological and legislative gap in promoting media pluralism and solving the digital divide, the opportunity to access the Internet enhance the networking power for a growing part of the Italian society. High tech "bricoleurs" are acquiring skills and organizing their activities in an alternative media ecosystem that is quickly filling the gap between the traditional one, in grasping audiences' cultural interests as well as in conquering a key-space in the Italian public debate. These high tech "bricoleurs" are supported by a national network of professionals, innovators that sustain an attitude of rejection or opposition to the mainstream media system (for instance lawyers, researchers, technicians, journalists, etc.). This network is triggering an opportunity to safeguard pluralism and freedom of expression in this multi-media environment.

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