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EUROPEANS AND THE MEDIA

BETWEEN GLOBAL AND LOCAL

Andrea Miconi

Europeans and the Media

This book investigates the relationship between the process of Europeanization – the expected rise of a common culture – and the role played by the media in the different regions.

Drawing on a comparative model, the analysis is structured around frameworks related to the action of the media in shaping national identities; to the world-system theory, based on the hierarchization of geographical spaces; and to the regional patterns identified in scientific literature. The analysis draws on data collected from numerous markets and across a variety of media formats, to detect the geographical pattern that results from the diffusion of different technologies and cultural contents: the national, the regional, the European, and the global.

This nuanced and insightful volume will interest students and scholars in the field of communication studies, European studies, and comparative media studies.

Andrea Miconi is Professor of Media Sociology at IULM University, Milan, Italy.

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Introduction

The media and the *nomos*

1

We can equally think of Europe as being *united*, Franco Moretti wrote thirty years ago, or as being *divided*. The first image pictures the land dreamt of by Novalis and Curtius, centered in Rome and identified as "a single space" with a "fixed geography" – that of Christianity and Latin language (Moretti, 1994/2013, pp. 4–5). The second one is the polycentric Europe of modern times, segmented by the Reformation and by the rise of national states, built on the ashes of the ancient civilization and enriched by its continuous metamorphoses (ibidem, pp. 6–7). Whether Europe is united or divided as a media market is actually the main research question behind this book.

In this sense, a first-glance overview of the European media would confirm a familiar image: that of a continent sculpted by endless differences, whose richness goes hand in hand with its variety. As we will see, this principle lies at the heart of many interpretations of European identity, from Edgar Morin to Tzvetan Todorov, to Gerard Delanty, and it has become somehow difficult to escape for media scholars as well. The more I collected evidence, though, and the less this explanation proved to be satisfactory – as Massimo Cacciari would put it, there is no sense in analyzing the differences in Europe "without the search for [their] origins", without addressing their common root and even the *split* by which they have been separated and originated (1994/2009, p. 198). Hence the need to frame all nuances and variants within the media landscape as resulting from conflicting forces in action, rather than as a constitutive feature of being Europeans, which is far from a mere terminological adjustment. In this perspective, I will argue, economic *imbalances* are as important as the allegedly peculiar cultural *diversities*; and if taken as a whole, Europe itself will end up showing some characteristics of a semi-periphery in the world-system.

Centralization and decentralization processes, local and large-scale forces, alternative and incompatible spatial orders: those are the lenses through which I tried to look at the European media landscape. In this book, to be more precise, I made the methodological choice of organizing such forces into four spatial patterns: the national; the regional; the European; and the

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global. I reckon that the idea of a scaled series of media regimes is not new, per se: Thomass and Kleinsteuber proposed six different variants (2011, p. 33), for instance; while Tunstall listed out the national, the regional, the local, and the foreign (2008, p. 10); and a similar spatial dimension is implied by the comparative media approach, which will be discussed in the second chapter. As I will try to argument in the following pages, the reason behind my choice is nothing but practical, as it allows for the framing and the understanding of the available scientific literature, that will be used along with the first-hand data retrieved in our research.

2

All in all, the book relies on the findings of the project EUMEPLAT – European Media Platforms: Assessing Positive and Negative Externalities for European Culture – funded by the European Commission in the Horizon 2020 framework. The consortium, coordinated by IULM University, comprises 12 partners in ten different countries: Hans-Bredow-Institut of Hamburg, New Bulgarian University of Sofia, Open University of Catalunya, UNIMED-Union of Mediterranean Universities, University of Ghent, Bilkent University in Ankara, ISCTE-IUL Lisbon, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, IKED Malmö, and Charles University in Prague.

The first chapter touches on the national embedding of digital communication by focusing on the cultural continuity between different technological regimes. First-hand data will be proposed for what concerns the top-followed YouTube and TikTok channels in the ten countries, which reveal a dominance of national influencers. The role of national movies in VOD repertoires will be addressed as well. The thesis that I will put forward, in a long duration perspective, is that the *stability* of the structure – framed in terms of imagined community and banal nationalism – would explain this contemporary media pattern way better than the much talked-about strains of balkanization, polarization, and de-globalization. Not only do those claims lack empirical backup, at the observation level: theory-wise, they would also imply a stronger form of nationalism, which is not commonly associated to the sharing of national contents.

Chapter 2 elaborates on the macro- and meso-regional configurations in which the European media universe can be organized, by working on three major hypotheses. Firstly, we will refer to a well-established paradigm, Hallin and Mancini's comparative media systems, with attention placed to its advanced operationalizations. A second model, also insisting on a regional pattern, will be drawn on the basis of the major economic parameters, which, as surprising as it may seem, are usually overlooked by media scholars. Finally, by means of the first-hand data we have collected, I will zoom into the VOD market, by analyzing the geo-blocking strategies and the way the European movies and TV-series circulate – when *they do* circulate – across Europe, which will betray a regional bias as well.

The very existence of properly *European* media will be inquired into in Chapter 3. Firstly, I will discuss the notion of European culture itself, and its implication in relation to the so-called banal Europeanism hypothesis. Based on literature review, subsequently, the prevalence of the vertical over the horizonal Europeanization will be called to action for explaining the latency of a common media culture. On this basis, I will move to a related aspect, the proportion between the top-down and the bottom-up ways to Europeanization: in the first case, by tracing back the history, and the *failure*, of pan-European media in the last decades; and in the second, by showcasing the results of our analysis of social media debate in ten countries, proving in its turn the weakness and vagueness of a properly European discursive dimension (or, so to speak, of a European public sphere).

Finally, the place of Europe in the context of global communication will be the core argument of the last chapter. Grounded on our approach, inspired by a *relationist* more than an *essentialist* view (see Carpentier, Hroch, Cannizzaro, Miconi, & Doudaki, 2023), the historical connections of Europe with its constitutive others will be analyzed. It is the case of the moving border between Eastern and Western European media systems; and in a different vein, of the confrontation between European and American media industries, about which I will provide first-hand data related to movies offer and consumption in VOD platforms. The world-system theory, rooted in Fernand Braudel's and Immanuel Wallerstein's economic history, will be eventually proposed for framing the evolution of the European media landscape.

3

For all the arguments cited earlier, I will showcase evidence and put forward explanatory hypotheses in the four chapters of the book; and in all cases, the limitations of our study will be laid out as well. Here a final consideration can be advanced, more abstractly speaking, about an aspect which might require a theoretical leap forward. What the platformization process made definitely evident, in fact, is that the social action of the media is not only in the contents they deliver, but in the geo-cultural patterns that they draw: and in our specific case, in the role played in the course of civilization, going back to Harold Innis' forgotten lesson, by "the media that emphasize space" (Innis, 1950, p. 5). What was somehow implicit in Innis' historical excursus, while coming to the forefront in our days, is that the media are not simply an instrument of constituted power, either administrative or religious: rather, they are to be considered for the pure, intrinsic nature of their own *constituent* power. To put it in Carl Schmitt's words, the very delimitation of a physical order is one with the imposing of a sovereign authority over it – what he famously referred to as the *nomos* (Schmitt, 1943/2016, p. 310). In this respect, the spatial connotation of the categories we are used to – from media systems to media platforms – would trigger the most radical question, as to whether the discrepancies between the administrative and the cultural perimeter, between Europe and Europeanization, result from historical

accidents or from the misalignment of the two structural patterns. After talking for so long about convergence, harmonization, and synthesis between the parts, we might end up telling this same story – Europe and the media – as the story of an enmity.

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1 The national embedding of digital media

1 The boundaries of visual culture

1.1 Visualizing Europe

In the last decade, the visual turn in online communication has given peculiar relevance to images, videos, maps, photographs, and data displaying of any sort (see, for instance, Adami & Jewitt, 2016), leading some authors to explicitly talk about the rise of "visual social media cultures" (Leaver, Highfield, & Abidin, 2021). For the purposes of this book, this paradigm shift offers the occasion of reflecting on a specific aspect, and namely on the boundaries between the national and the European online imagery. As it is not always clear where to draw the line – and well, "the borders of European and national media are not made by an iron curtain" (Hegedűs, 2011, p. 83) – in each cultural market we will address the prevalence of the first or the second dimension. On a more general stance, the role of the images in building collective identities is a much-discussed argument in its turn, and so is the visual representation of Europe shared by its inhabitants, or the lack thereof – ultimately based on the claim that, for its political goals to be fulfilled, the "EU must become a visual and compelling identity" (Andrén, 2023, p. 289).

There is little doubt that "European-ness is made not in policies", or *not only* in policies, also requiring a whole set of symbols, artifacts, and pictures made available to its citizens (Foster, 2016, p. 170). Not accidentally, in this perspective the role of institutional visual communication has been largely investigated (Greiner Pichler & Vermeiren, 2022, pp. 9–10), which ranges from maps, to flags, to EU branding materials (Foster, 2015, p. 119; Nelsen & Guth, 2016, pp. 82–83); to stamps and postcards (Trautsch, 2020); to the effigies on coins, banknotes and medals (Fornäs, 2012); to the iconography of the European capitals of culture (Aiello & Thurlow, 2006); and the like. In the fields of history and humanities, and understandably so, the essence of European visual culture has become the Holy Grail of scientific research, leading to a meticulous scrutiny of its precious artistic heritage (Greinier, 2022, p. 72). While policy-oriented scholars agree on the need of a standardized visual communication – as an "identity marker" for the

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citizenship (Risse, 2010, p. 58) – art historians have come to sketch a different scenario, in which "Europe itself" dramatically appears "as polycentric and dispersed" (Rampley, 2012, p. 12). That something would be missed in the middle – between the top-down communication of the institutions, and the magnificence of monuments and ancient reliquaries – is made evident by how little we know about the sharing of images on the part of the Europeans, in their daily experience: or, to put it in Florian Greiner's words (2022, pp. 77–78), by how little we know about the "vécueral Europeanization", perceived by the citizens in their actual life (or *vie vécue*).

Donald Sassoon and Thomas Smits have possibly to be credited with the most to-the-point, albeit different, attempts to analyze the transnational visual culture in Europe. Both authors, for sure, do that in a way that gives justice to the importance of mass formats. Sassoon's monumental book on two centuries of European cultural industries also takes into exam the spread of visual contents: in particular, pictures, illustrated press, cinema, and television (2006). Ever since the consolidation of the American hegemony, cultural flows reveal to be heavily unbalanced, with European countries ultimately importing movies and TV programs from the United States (2006, pp. 1190–1191). As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3, Sassoon is skeptical about the very existence of a properly *European* culture, as all data reveal a limited circulation of works among the countries, with each national audience either interested in local or American contents.

Smits takes a different stand, in delineating the rise of a "transnational" press back in the Victorian age, fueled by the increasing recourse to illustrations, to the extent – he states – that historians should eventually go "beyond" the national horizon of their investigation (2019, p. 3). We may notice that such call for internationalizing media studies has been constantly advocated by scholars in the last decades, often for the purposes of "de-westernizing" the academic perspective, or give some space to the history of the Global South.[1] It is a fact that such statement is usually phrased by Western researchers, while an international perspective had been already adopted in other contexts: for instance, in Eastern Europe, due to the traditional "transnational entanglement" of Socialist and post-Socialist media systems (Mihelj & Huxtable, 2018, pp. 60, 177–204 in particular). In his detailed investigation of the network of illustrated newspapers, on his part, Smits focuses in particular on the exchanges among media outlets, with Italian, Russian, Portuguese and Danish newspapers buying and publishing the same images (2019, p. 97). The hierarchization of commercial spaces, which has a special role in Sassoon's reading, is only touched on by Smits, when he reckons that many magazines basically "copied British press formulas" (2019, p. 96), which "enjoy(ed) worldwide influence" (2019, p. 51). Similarly, Dutch publications owed their popularity to the "quality (. . .) of foreign illustrations" (2019, p. 107); whereas the "lack of un urban base" of cultivated readers would explain the "relatively modest success" of illustrated press in Leipzig (2019, p. 29). The clearest visualization of this network of exchanges is offered by the images concerning the 1867 Universal Exhibition simultaneously

published by 31 newspapers in 12 European cities (2019, pp. 176–177): London, Copenhagen, Paris, Pest, Stuttgart, Leipzig, Milan, Warsaw, Lisbon, Madrid, Stockholm, and Amsterdam (and New York as well).

As anticipated, Smits is more interested in tracing the cultural flows, than he is in framing them in terms of world-system spatialization. That the main example of cross-European circulation regards the 1867 Expo is an argument that cuts both ways, in this sense, as the Universal Exhibitions were vested with the function of exalting the centrality of the two capitals of the 19th century, Paris and London. It is even more significant, in a different vein, that Smits mostly works on the side of *offer*, either in terms of proliferation of newspapers, or trade among them in visual materials. This for a good reason, we may accept, as on the side of *consumption*, "it is widely held that the historical readership of a publication (is) almost impossible to trace" (2019, p. 22). As a consequence, Smits infers the state of the readership from its implicit representation in the press itself (2019, pp. 23–29); and group it into ideal-typical rather than empirical categories, including "national readership", "colonial readers", and "international readers" (2019, pp. 30–54).

Setting aside their differences, both authors provide a fundamental overview on the dawn of a cross-border visual culture. It can even be stated, additionally, that they are both right: Smits, in piecing together in detail the take-off of global interchanges in the 19th century; and Sassoon, in remarking upon the difference between transnational and pan-European tendencies. To clarify our perspective, the core-periphery model will be adopted as a theoretical framework, as the hierarchical organization of international spaces has been already detected at different levels: ranging from the book market (Moretti, 1997; Casanova, 1997/2004); to the articulation of the electric telegraph network (Hugill, 1999; Standage, 1998); to the influence of hegemonic powers on the development of the communication infrastructures at large (Mattelart, 1991). As we will see in Chapter 4, and despite some frequent over-simplifications, the core-periphery explanation only superficially resembles to the thesis of cultural imperialism,[2] with which it actually shares a few theoretical contents, and even less methodological instances.

1.2 What people follow on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok

It has been noticed that the iconic dimension gets small interest in the academic discourse about Europe, as the attention of scholars "has always focused on words and not images" (Dühr, 2007, p. 24). With this in mind, we have collected the data about the three major digital platforms with a characteristic, by-default affordance for visual communication – YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram – in the ten nations involved in our research: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Türkiye.[3] As stated, the purpose is that of interrogating the sample, in order to individuate the borders between the national and the European culture. For sure, what people watch online is but a fraction of the archive of images we are surrounded by; but due to the importance of social media in people's

life, it may shade some light on the constants and variants of contemporary visual logic. Practically speaking, we started off with the idea of considering the 100 top-followed channels in each country, for each platform; due to the material availability of the data, the number of entries differs from nation to nation, with the final sample being composed of 3,451 cases – between YouTube channels, TikTok accounts, and Instagram pages – as synthetized in Table 1.1.[4] As to the limitations of our investigation, it has to be clarified that the research is devoted to the *most influential* accounts, thus leaving out all the endless cases distributed in the long tail of digital networks. On

Table 1.1 Top channels by nationality on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram

Country	*Platform*	*National*	*Non-national EU_27*	*USA*	*Other*	*Total*	*National (%)*
Belgium	TikTok	97	0	0	0	97	100
Belgium	Instagram	87	1	0	1	89	97.7
Belgium	YouTube	76	0	1	3	80	95
Bulgaria	TikTok	94	0	0	0	94	100
Bulgaria	Instagram	75	4	3	7	89	84
Bulgaria	YouTube	89	2	1	4	96	92.7
Czech Republic	TikTok	100	0	0	0	100	100
Czech Republic	Instagram	66	16	0	17	99	66.6
Czech Republic	YouTube	100	0	0	0	100	100
Germany	TikTok	100	0	0	0	100	100
Germany	Instagram	19	2	51	20	92	20.6
Germany	YouTube	94	0	1	0	95	98.9
Greece	TikTok	98	0	0	0	100	98
Greece*	Instagram	95	2	0	4	100	95
Greece	YouTube	95	3	2	0	100	95
Italy	TikTok	349	0	0	0	349	100
Italy	Instagram	224	65	78	78	445	50.3
Italy	YouTube	99	0	1	0	100	99
Portugal	TikTok	98	0	0	1	99	98.9
Portugal	Instagram	91	2	2	4	99	91.9
Portugal	YouTube	91	0	0	0	91	100
Spain	TikTok	98	0	1	1	100	98
Spain	Instagram	27	16	16	40	99	27.2
Spain	YouTube	87	0	0	3	90	96.6
Sweden	TikTok	96	0	1	3	100	96
Sweden	Instagram	94	0	2	4	100	94
Sweden	YouTube	100	0	0	0	100	100
Türkiye	TikTok	66	0	0	0	66	100
Türkiye	Instagram	58	13	10	15	96	60
Türkiye	YouTube	85	0	0	1	86	98.8

Note: *Data includes an account presented as Greek and Cypriot.
Source: Elaboration on Hype Auditor data

the other hand, it is the very relevance of these 3,451 accounts, reaching out a total gross audience of fifteen billion followers,[5] that offers a unique opportunity of delving into the culture of social media. It has also to be highlighted that our research is concentrated on what people actually watch and follow online. The "nationalization of online spaces and communications", needless to say, also results from more structural aspects: "search engines providing different information to users depending on where they happen to be located", country-level names of domain, or the selection operated by the algorithms (Skey, 2022, p. 845). As Lukasz Szulc wrote, however, a main gap "in the scholarship on banal nationalism and the internet is related to paying little attention to audiences", with studies hitherto "confined to content analysis": with the consequence of emphasizing the ubiquity of media culture and the decentralization of its production and overlooking the physically bound nature of consumption (2017, p. 68). An additional limitation of this study is its purely quantitative dimension, which deals with the lists of the most followed accounts, without any *qualitative* exam of what the images look like in those pages. Hypothetically speaking, we cannot rule out that different channels share the same approach to the construction of their contents, and therefore contribute to the shaping of a common visual macro-text: simply, the organization of this work does not consent to address this aspect, which will require ad hoc investigations.

At least at the scale of the most-followed channels, the result is unquestionable: overall, 88.4% of them are national; ranging from 62.7% in the case of Instagram – the most global platform, from this standpoint – up to 97.6% for YouTube, and to an astonishing 99% for TikTok. The bigger dataset we have analyzed for Italy is indicative, as all 349 channels are Italian, with the first foreign influencer ranking 352 (Mia K. from Cali, Colombia). In the cases of YouTube and TikTok, there are no huge discrepancies among the countries: national profiles respectively range from 92.7% to 100%, and from 96% to 100% of the most-followed channels. The Instagram data varies within a broader interval, with a minimum of 20.6% of national accounts in Germany, and a maximum of 97.7% in Belgium. In the majority of cases – and excluding here the only non-EU country, Türkiye – it strikes the absence of non-national European channels in the list of the most popular: in the Bulgarian and Greek TikTok data; in both TikTok and YouTube data in Belgium (with only one on Instagram), Czech Republic, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Germany; and in none of the three platforms in Sweden.

The distribution of contents does not align with the global affordance of the platforms, I stated; with national profiles being responsible for a clear majority of the successful posts, and the properly European dimension being barely visible. What is more, exceptions to such norm are not hard to explain. Out of the sixteen EU channels in Czechia, for example, fifteen are from Slovakia: something which may suggest the existence of a regional or sub-regional pattern, more than a European one. As to the other two outliers – 16 EU Instagram channels in Spain (out of 100), and 65 in Italy (out of 450) – they allow for a different consideration. In Spain, these

accounts are all about football, starting with the top one, Cristiano Ronaldo, either they celebrate teams or individual players: Paris Saint Germain, British Premier League, Zlatan Ibrahimović, Juventus, Gareth Bale, Tony Kroos, Manchester City, Eden Hazard, Luka Modrić, Raphael Varane, Ivan Rakitić, Robert Lewandowski, Philippe Coutinho, and Borussia Dortmund. To this list we can add up the unspecified "Home of Football" channel, from Netherlands; and, outside the European Union, three Swiss accounts, Adidas Football, FIFA World Cup, and UEFA Champions League – with the latter being, after all, the only proper *pan-European* phenomenon in the whole series. It remains true that a majority of those football stars plays or used to play in the Spanish major league; but the impression is that the role of popular sports in fostering a European common identity – their "subliminal" impulse towards Europeanization (Weber, 2022, p. 247) – has been gravely overlooked in scientific research.[6] Sport, and football in particular, is also a core topic in the Italian Instagram-sphere, where we can find Kylian Mbappé, Zlatan Ibrahimović, Alvaro Morata, Mario Mandžukić, Wojciech Szczęsny, Dries Mertens, Gerard Deulofeu, Radja Nainggolan, Ivan Perišić, Theo Hernandez, Adrien Rabiot, Sebastian Vettel, João Cancelo, Borussia Dortmund, Christian Eriksen, Patrice Evra, Matthijs de Light, Blaise Matuidi, Romelu Lukaku, Sami Khedira, Charles Leclerc, Franck Ribéry; and, from non-EU European countries, Edin Džeko, Dušan Vlahović, Hakan Çalhanoğlu, Granit Xhaka, Erling Haaland, Novak Djokovic, Lando Norris, Aaaron Ramsey, Miralem Pjanić, and a more generic "England Football". In sum, more than half of the European contents are related to major sports, with no other thematic category significantly represented – besides rare concessions to Eastern European supermodels – in a ranking that is slightly altered by the presence of many corporate accounts, especially those of French luxury brands.

At the theoretical level, if anything, these data go against the alleged universality of the images, famously stated by Roland Barthes (1980), and largely contested in the last decades. The rhetorical question about "vision transcend(ing) specific or local forms of social construction", following William J. T. Mitchell, so as "to function like a universal language" (2002, p. 171), rather gets some empirical backup. There is an additional nuance to be considered, here, as YouTube and TikTok display *audiovisual* contents, while Instagram is a purely visual platform: and it is evident that national posts are more successful when the language comes to play, in YouTube and TikTok videos, vlogs or tutorials.

Premised on that, and digging into the same data from Hype Auditor, we sorted out the idioms used by the audiences of the most followed accounts in the ten countries. It is hardly necessary to remind that one of main reasons for which Europe is "far from being a community" is that "the European people do not share a common language", which would bring with it the "memories of a common history" (Thomassen & Bäck, 2009, p. 185); and that "the stagnation of social Europe" can hardly be solved, "in the absence of a fair and efficient solution to Europe's central language problem" (Van

Parijs, 2011, p. 3). A more precise understanding of the pattern behind the social media statistics, in this respect, is disclosed by the demographics of the followers. As the disaggregated data were not always available, this time we have worked on a sample of 2,822 – out of the previous 3,451 – channels, between YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. By and large, and as expected, the impact of national vernacular on the described distribution could hardly be exaggerated. National idiom is the most used by the TikTok followers in nine of the ten countries, with the exception of Türkiye – where both European and non-European languages are significantly represented. In the case of YouTube, the use of mother tongue is prevalent in nine of the ten audience groups, with the exception of Sweden, where English is more common. We already alluded to Instagram as the most global platform, and something similar can be inferred from the distribution of languages: the respective national one is widely used in the cases of Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, and Portugal; English is predominant in Germany, Italy, Spain, and Sweden; while in the Turkish case we have a combination of several languages. We can also observe that YouTube and TikTok audiences are more fragmented, with the national lists of top-followed channels poorly overlapping with each other; while Instagram users are more prone to follow international personalities and global celebrities. That the national languages would dominate the statistics is far from unexpected – at the same time, though, it has not to be taken for given. Despite the linguistic fragmentation of the continent, transnational phenomena are still possible: this is, by definition, the case of rock and popular music. As a paramount example, between the 1960s and the 1970s, a few French- and German-based radio stations – as *Europawelle Saar* – fulfilled the goal of offering a cross-border programming for the European youth, including not only music but also quiz shows and bi-lingual talks (Maldener, 2022, pp. 205–2013). That social media platforms are *not* reaching this result and getting as far in the same direction, at least at the level of the most-followed accounts, it is therefore a finding that should not go unnoticed.

1.3 An analysis of national audiences

Let us go back to our dataset. In Belgium, and this is a well-known story, the use of French also results in the dependence of cultural industries on the importation of movies from Paris – like in a periphery orbiting around the core of “French circles”, as Malte Hagener describes it (2007, p. 103). In the case of video-sharing platforms, on the very contrary, we see that 260 top channels – out of a total of 266 – are Belgian, and in fact there is space for one single French account, that of the fashion influencer known as Lima Ché: whom, truth being spoken, is a *Belgian* woman, based in both Paris and Antwerp. We have no explanation for this difference – the gulf between the massive importation of French movies in Belgium, and its impermeability to French influencers – which nonetheless confirms how closer analyses may make visible more nuanced and intricated patterns, when compared to

the all-embracing explanations we are accustomed to. The data about Sweden is revealing too, as English is largely spoken in the country; and, as the Hype Auditor metrics confirm, commonly used by video sharing consumers as well. For some reason, this notwithstanding, 290 out of the top 300 channels are home to national influencers: so that the use of a foreign language, apparently, does not favor international exchanges while being incorporated into local habits.

It is our impression that more granular investigations are needed, when faced with a common tendency in the internet studies, which is – at the very opposite – that of listing out the general features of social media or digital platforms (see Van Dijck, 2013, pp. 26–29; Van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018, p. 9). It is certainly a genuine theoretical need, that of formulating ample hypotheses and making conceptual order, which by definition requires the subsuming of the empirical cases into more comprehensive categories. The issue is rather how far these categories would drive us from the material objects they are claimed to describe. As to media platforms, more specifically, they are radically diverse from each other in respect to a number of technical, economic and cultural components. As a matter of fact, online platforms differ from each other even upon their way of using the data, even though the so-called *datafication* is supposed to be their underlying rationale. Data actually plays a central part in the business model of those which are flued by their exploitation, such as Facebook, Instagram, Google, TikTok, or YouTube; while at other times they are used for such classical purposes as the market profiling, which is what Amazon Prime or Netflix do – not to mention Microsoft and Apple, which are basically industrial companies (Miconi, 2022, pp. 114–116). Other players directly collect a fee from the final consumers or from the service providers, as in the conditions of use laid out by Uber, Deliveroo or Airbnb. As we are working on a limited number of platforms, our results cannot scale into a general lesson: the impression, this being said, is that the closer we get to the platforms' socio-technical assemblage, the less the all-embracing taxonomies will prove to be useful (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 Distribution of the followers of 2,822 social media channels for the demographics analysis

Country	*Number of channels*	*Mean*	*Standard deviation*
Belgium	300	763762.3	1218734.0
Bulgaria	294	341697.1	355353.3
Czech Republic	299	2085975.9	7367511.5
Germany	312	9529092.4	16474821.3
Greece	289	526709.5	895899.9
Italy	323	17951704.3	44602898.4
Portugal	298	1026341.5	1906095.8
Spain	120	33174531.4	59100460.2
Sweden	300	1353620.2	2928149.0
Türkiye	287	7198781.2	8217745.0

Source: Elaboration on Hype Auditor data

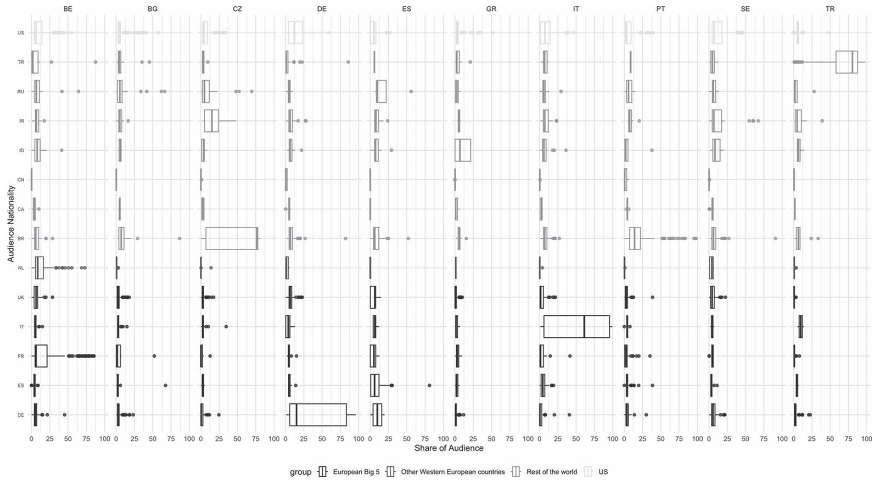

Chart 1.1 Audience distribution of the top-followed social media channels in ten countries

Source: Elaboration on Hype Auditor data

After the language of the followers, we took into observation their geographical location. Chart 1.1 represents the internal distribution of the entire audiences of the top-channels in the ten countries.[7] Basically, the shorter the boxplot, the smaller the audiences from the country indicated in the vertical axis, where we listed all the nationalities included in the demographics; when the plot is skewed right, conversely, that would indicate a large share of audience from the corresponding country. In this way, and with all limitations due to the considered dataset, we aimed at detecting the degree of internalization of the market, and – what is more relevant for our purposes – the level of overlapping between the national audiences.

In the case of top-listed channels for Belgium, to start with, the longest boxplots correspond – not shockingly – to viewers from Belgium, the Netherlands and France; in the case of Bulgaria, the wider audience is from Bulgaria; in Czechia, from Czechia, Slovakia and Brazil (as some of the top-influential channels in Czech Republic are from Brazil, whose population outnumber the local twenty to one). The main audiences of top influencers in Germany are from Germany, Romania, and Pakistan, rather than from German-speaking areas, such as Austria or Switzerland, as it could be expected (and as it is true in video-on-demand consumption, as we will see in Chapter 2). This is possibly due to the "transnational digital networks among refugees and migrants", which help to reinforce the "social ties to persons who successfully migrated" to Germany (Borkert, Fisher, & Yafi, 2018, pp. 8–9). The case of Portugal is different, finally, as the most followed channels predictably have a relevant audience in Brazil; while the top-channels in Italy, Greece, and Türkiye are mostly followed at the national level.

The main finding, as stated, is the national embedding of social media experience, especially in the circumstances of TikTok and YouTube. If we pull into focus the overlapping among national audiences, on the other hand, it appears how rare cross-European tendencies actually are. A partial exception is Belgium, where people happen to follow the same channels as in the Netherlands and France, but also as in the United States and the UK. Bulgarian users appreciate influencers also followed in the United States and in Russia; the German, those also followed in US, Pakistan, and Romania; the Czech, the same as in Slovakia, Brazil, and India. Italy, Sweden, and Greece reveal a more familiar profile, sharing their respective favorite channels with the American audiences; Portugal, with both US and Brazil, the latter obviously due to the common language, but also with Poland. In particular, Polish and Portuguese audiences have a common interest in men and women of spectacle from both Portugal and Brazil (madalenaa.oliveira; Zwairowani), with disc jockeys being frequently represented in the list: Alberto Bertouht Monteiro, djzanova, and HUGEL.

Audiences of the top-followed channels in Spain are scattered, as they are distributed in Latin American countries, while the popular accounts in Türkiye are frequently successful in India. Based on our data, thus, the citizens of European countries more easily share their favorite social media channels with the audiences in the United States, Russia, India, Brazil, and Latin America, *than with other European citizens*. As Manuel Castells noted, that ubiquitous media come to play everywhere a dominant role in no way guarantees that they shape a consistent, common identity. Key to European weakness, in Castells' words, is rather the lack of "pan-European media" when compared to big countries such as the United States, Russia, China, or India, to the wide Hispanophone Latin-American audience, or to the Pan-Arabic networks based in the Gulf (Castells, et al., 2018, p. 184). Here the national entanglement of media cultures is visible in all its strength, when one considers the super-national and meta-territorial diffusion of the digital services we are I am working on.

If the prevalence of national accounts is hardly surprising, I also noticed how the audiences can have more in common with those living in far countries than they have with the rest of Europe. As I will discuss again in Chapters 3 and 4, two main explanations of this pattern are possible, which are respectively bound to *historical* and *sociological* evidence. At the historiographical level, the explanation goes that the only thing that the "European nations have in common is America", to quote a half-serious statement by *The Observer*'s columnist John Naughton: people essentially consume national contents and those produced in the United States, as simple as that. As already remarked, this is Donald Sassoon's position, resulting from his comparative analysis of European cultural industries in the 19th and 20th centuries. In a similar vein, Thomas Elsaesser puts forward the juxtaposition between European movie-making, inspired by the myth of national authorship, and the American large-scale industry, acting as a "constitutive other"

of European identity (2005, pp. 491–492 in particular). What the evidence related to social media demographics may suggest, though, is that the audiences are either attracted by national or by *global* contents: hence the profiles cited from India, Brazil, or Russia. It is by generalizing from 20th-century history, in fact, that we assume that American cultural industries would take the lion's share: which is undeniable – but undeniably the *result* of the historical process, rather than the general rule to be singled out, and to which the process itself abides. Audiences may be attracted by local influencers but also by personalities from Brazil and India, we have observed in the case of social media channels: exactly as people have loved, across the industrialization of culture, Italian opera and Brazilian telenovelas, Japanese manga, Portuguese DJs and philosophical booklets from India. If we work backward, this disjuncture between economic and cultural flows has been held as a proof of the unbound property of post-colonial world (Bhabha, 1994; Appadurai, 1996): based on the fact that the United States do not export *any* single cultural form they produce, in the end, despite their long-lasting financial hegemony (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 238); and that successful genres may well come from non-Western countries. At the heart of this common position, though, lies a serious misunderstanding of the basic rules of the world-system. What the core-periphery theory prescribes, in fact, is not that the central region would be the only exporter: rather, that the exchanges are organized – in one direction or the other – along that very pathway connecting core, semi-peripheries and peripheries. In compliance with long-duration economic history, each hegemonic power – whether it is a region, a city, or an empire – produces a hierarchization of commercial spaces, positioning itself at the center of material and cultural routes. As Immanuel Wallerstein describes it:

> The axial division of labor of a capitalist world-economy divides production into core-like products and peripheral products. Core-periphery is a relational concept. . . . As a result, there is a constant flow of surplus-value from the producers of peripheral products to the producers of core-like producers. This has been called unequal exchange.
>
> To be sure, unequal exchange is not the only way of moving accumulated capital from politically weak regions to politically strong regions. There is also plunder, often used extensively during the early days of incorporating new regions into the world-economy.
>
> (Wallerstein, 2007, p. 28)

Therefore, the explanation goes, mutual contaminations *among* peripheral and semi-peripheral countries are scarce and occasional, as the flows mostly cluster around the main hubs of the international networks. Multilateral import-export exchanges between countries are rare, we can read in an analysis of Euro-Mediterranean trade market, whereas the flows collapse around a center: a main commercial core acting as a connector, and also bridging together the peripheral nodes (Alcidi et al., 2017). And what is true

in trade markets, it is often so in media and digital markets, with this tendency affecting European identity as well. By ambitiously combining Fernand Braudel's core-periphery model and Bourdieu's sociology, Pascale Casanova stressed this aspect to its limits, by identifying the "unification of literary space through" the international competition and the setting-up of "common standards": at the end of the story, Paris emerged as the "Greenwich meridian" of the global literary market (Casanova, 1997/2004, pp. 85–87). The same, unheard-of centralization of cultural production in the 19th century has been noticed by Franco Moretti: the plain fact that "two cities, London and Paris, rule the entire continent for a century, publishing half (if not more) of all European novels" (1997, p. 186). Of paramount importance, for Moretti, is that Paris would eventually take over the artistic hegemony, in the same years in which London became the *economic* capital of the Western world-system (1997, p. 184) – in a way that recalls Pierre Bourdieu's lesson on the "semi-autonomous" nature of social fields, once again.

We can somehow rephrase Sassoon's hypothesis, therefore, by comparing cultural consumption to an *ellipsis*, which revolves around two foci: the pole of national contents; and that of the contents produced by *the most influential country in each specific field*. No doubt that in this way – and either way – Europe is shrinking: lost somewhere in the middle between the local and the global; *too big* to be felt as a community of humans; but *too small*, or too fragmented, for producing a hegemony of its own. As one might assert, and as I will argument in Chapter 3, there is nothing new in the fragile legitimacy of Europe, at least when one endorses the world-systems approach: as Wallerstein would say, Europe is even "historically aberrant" (1993, p. 295), nothing less. From our part, the clarification goes, we will isolate and analyze the aspects that can be explained upon the laws specific to media studies and cultural sciences.

2 On the Balkanization of the web

2.1 The end of the web as we know it?

According to a common interpretation in internet studies, the fragmentation of the web into national clusters goes by the name of *balkanization*: and the convention has it that we refer with this label to two different processes. On the one hand, it is about the "governmental fragmentation" of "the global public Internet being divided into so-called "Balkanized" or digitally bordered national internets", as Drake, Cerf, and Kleinwächter (2016, p. 6) recounted a few years ago, in their report for the World Economic Forum. In the other way, the same category also indicates the consequences of users' behavior, which preferably stay in touch with like-minded others – or with those speaking the same language, at the very least – thus cocooning in self-referential shells and augmenting the insularity of the web ecosystem (see, among the others, Romm-Livermore, 2012, p. 322; Boyd, 2014, pp. 154–156). And it is a fact that the same two facets – the rise of social media as walled

gardens; and the role of the governments in regulating the net – have been evoked by World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee, in his denunciation of the end of the cyberspace as we knew it.

> The Web as we know it, however is being threatened in different ways. Some of its most successful inhabitants have begun to chip away at its principles. Large social-networking sites are walling off information posted by their users from the rest of the Web. Wireless Internet providers are being tempted to slow traffic to sites with which they have not made deals. Governments – totalitarian and democratic alike – are monitoring people's online habits, endangering important human rights.
>
> (Berners-Lee, 2010, p. 80)

Berners-Lee explicitly takes together non-homogeneous things: authoritarian countries paving the way to the state control of the Web; platforms walling users off from hypertextual navigation (and users willingly accepting that); or algorithms clustering the audiences for commercial purposes. The importance of this last aspect has surged as a popular argument after Eli Pariser's (2011) seminal work on the Page Rank filtering operations: triggering the discussion among scholars as to whether the clusterization of the web is prevalently due to the technical set-up of the algorithms, or to what people do when online (Sunstein, 2017, pp. 92–94). Pariser's analysis holds great importance for how it shed light on the very hidden level of tracing the users, storing the data and tailoring the search results, as performed by Google after the acquisition of the digital marketing company Double Click, back in 2007 (2011, pp. 15–20). As this book does not deal with implications of this like of the balkanization trends, we will limit ourselves to observe that the notion of *bubble* has been taken too literally, when not blown out of proportions. What Pariser actually outlined, in the end, is a tendency – more than a well-rounded outcome – which, as such, is or can be counter-balanced by *other tendencies*, with recommendation systems not necessarily hindering people from unexpected encounters and open confrontations (something that has been also assessed in the EU official documents[8]). Suffice is to say that there is even empirical evidence, at that, of social media exposure being positively correlated with participation, as Vaccari and Valeriani explain in their well-documented, large-scale comparative survey (2021, pp. 156–157, 168–169 and 180 in particular).[9] My take is that the more diffused social media are – both in terms of gross subscriptions and daily time of use – and the less useful any generalization is condemned to become. Yet, academic and public debate are animated by apodictic statements about the internet "making us stupid"; or digital revolution "disorienting and diminishing us"; or 24/7 connection causing youth to be at-risk of loneliness and mentally ill; with the users being called to delete their social media accounts[10] – or conversely, about social media making people smarter, improving their life and empowering their social capital.[11] It is time to acknowledge these categories as improper, and

eschew such broad generalizations altogether. As we are showing, even in Europe – which is a relatively small and uniform continent of 450 million people – important differences pop out, which derive from the assemblage between the material affordances of online platforms, and the discursive features of people's identities and cultures (see Carpentier et al., 2023).

Let us go back to the fragmentation of the global interconnected network into an archipelago of nationally bound clusters. Two explanations, among those that took hold, are relevant to our research goals. The first hypothesis is that the rise of national internets results from the incomplete fulfillment of globalization processes, if not from their backfire effect (see Mueller, 2017). This tendency would be closely coupled with the so-called *de-globalization*, which occupies so much space in the agenda of both scholars and decision-makers.[12] It is almost inevitable for the discussion on Europeanization to be framed by this overarching narrative, with de-Europeanization proceeding in parallel with the broader, earlier-mentioned de-globalization (see Töth, 2021). Here I am not indulging in general geopolitical problems, for all that, while drilling down the relationship between media history and European culture. From this standpoint, it is possible to make room for an alternative thesis, upon which the strength of the national media and audience systems is premised in their *long durée* history, and precisely in the fragmentation of the European continent, and in its hierarchical geo-cultural segmentation. It is Peruško, Vozab, and Čuvalo that have made the most advanced attempt to bring long-duration variables into comparative studies, in their work on post-Socialist media systems. "The causal configurations that impact present-day media systems are influenced by the longue durée", the authors state, and "these influences extend from the period of modernization and from the period of socialism" (2021, p. 194). As they are mostly interested in structural aspects, Peruško, Vozab and Čuvalo isolate a few main dimensions: the accustomedness to media freedom and the strength of the market (2021, pp. 236–242), in particular, with attention also placed on media pluralism, restriction policies and regulations (2021, pp. 158–164).

Even though in this book I am prioritizing the cultural implications of Europeanization over its infrastructural backbone, I adhere to the idea of long-duration processes acting as "casual configurations" of contemporary media landscape – an aspect that is commonly overlooked in the internet studies. The necessary clarification is that neither this book is concerned with the legal dimensions of media systems: in other words, I will insist on the social and cultural implications of digital platforms, rather than on the role of the state and international organizations in regulating them. As regards to this, to put it shortly, Berners-Lee was probably right, in raising the alert about the interventions of authoritarian states: in all likelihood, in fact, democratic countries have been eventually implementing – or trying to implement – control strategies based on their example.

Let us focus again on the two possible explanations of the national internet phenomenon. The first interpretation we have mentioned, based on the

discontinuity between globalization and de-globalization waves, is probably the most common. This explanation would echo Samuel Huntington's model of democratization cycles, which codifies the alternation between periods of institutional stasis and breakthroughs. The major changes, more precisely, are concentrated between 1943 and 1962, due to the aftermath of World War II; in 1974, with the collapse of the last Western dictatorships; and more recently, with the fall of the Berlin Wall (Huntington, 1991, pp. 13–26). For what refers to the Europeanization process, the first wave impacted on Western and Central Europe; the second one affected Greece, Spain, Portugal, and to a lower extent a few Baltic and Eastern European countries; while the latest has led to the post-Socialist transition at large. As a consequence of this, in scientific literature de-Europeanization is also synonymous with de-democratization. This is a very relevant topic, which nonetheless we do not have the space, or the ambition, to settle conclusively in this book. What we can rather do, is to point out the gulf between two alternative ideas about the national embedding of the European media: the *political* interpretation of it as consequence of de-globalization; and an approach keen to its understanding as a result of long-duration *cultural* processes.

In this respect, it is easily inferred that the clusterization of the web was ultimately unexpected, supposedly coming as a side-effect of cultural homologation and technological convergence, with negative consequences of globalization eventually overriding its benefits. At that, the geo-political metaphor is itself telling, as it hinges on the breakdown of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into a constellation of autonomous states, frequently hostile to each other. This unexpected "return" of the state has been overtly called upon by Scott Malcomson (2016, pp. 133, 140–152), for explaining the split of the web into national clusters (what he names the *Splinternet*). In synthesis, this approach argues, as the globalization process is losing its attractive – and the Europeanization process as well, we may add (Mazierska, 2015, p. 51) – nationalism will inevitably grow stronger: an observation that seems to fit our case. One can think at social media in Europe, as discussed, with those continents populated by people speaking national languages – the *Italian* Facebook; the *German* Facebook; the *Bulgarian* Facebook – and drifting away from each other. As stated, though, an alternative explanation would trace this back to the cultural fragmentation of Europe, reading it *in continuity* rather than in discontinuity with the past, as the timespan of reputed recent processes (*balkanization*; *de-globalization*) would imply. It makes sense to highlight that this dilemma, far from being purely theoretical, bears very concrete repercussions. When framed as a backfire effect of media convergence, the concept of clusterization easily takes on a derogatory connotation; and it is showcased as the proof that something did not end up properly. Such assumption is sustained by a common bias in the academic discourse, in its turn, in which Europeanism and nationalism are basically equaled, respectively, to *good* and *bad*. Regardless of whether I can personally agree or disagree with this position, a more balanced and distant

approach would be necessary for scientific research to run its course. In this respect, following Delanty and Rumford, we can state that the "national culture is not to be identified with the State", as it is the product of a plurality of factors, encompassing all aspects of people's life (2005, p. 105). My hypothesis, in this respect, prioritizes the nation as the embodiment of proximity and materiality of everyday life: which has little to do – or has to do only in marginal cases – with nationalism in its strong sense. As Benedict Anderson would say, envisioning the community through the media rituals reassures the people "that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life" (1983, pp. 35–36). This being said, both Anderson and Billig – on whom I will rely as well – are aware that this very same function, providing the citizens with an abstract representation of the administrative unit to which they belong, will be performed in peculiar ways in each given context. What if, in other words, "the historical experience of a conflicted, divided and disharmonized Europe a "Balkanism" as such", had always been there, "long before the term was forged to describe our own experiences" of today? (Hasanović, 2021, p. 87).

2.2 Looking back to banal nationalism

Let us take the argument from a different side. As those who are old enough to remember the first age of network culture might recall, balkanization is hardly a new concept, as it was already thematized back in the 1990s. Not that the concept ever got widespread popularity: after all, those were the years of California-inspired optimism; of the new economy reaching the peak of its capitalization (Castells, 2001, p. 103); and as is always the case in the utopian stage of technological development (Wu, 2011, p. 6), any critical remark was sidelined by stakeholders, journalists and divulgators. It is a fact, this notwithstanding, that between 1995 and 1997 the point was made about "the balkanization of the Internet into multiple interconnected network families" (Paul, 1997, p. 126); and emblematically, in the same papers addressing such a primitive problem as the slowness of internet connections. Economic, social, and geo-political implications of the web clusterization were actually discussed: and it was pretty clear that "an emerging global village represents only one outcome from a range of possibilities", while "it is also possible that improving communications access through emerging technology will fragment society and balkanize interactions" (Van Alstyne & Brynjolfsson, 1996, p. 3). Network analyses already showed how the "difficulty in finding useful information is related to the balkanization of the Web structure" (Weibel, 1995; Huberman et al., 1998, p. 95), with the legal ramifications of the process successively addressed in scientific literature (see, for instance, Earle & Madek, 2003). How to counteract the fragmentation of cyberspace was a common research question, and so it was how to mitigate the effects of people's selective exposure to online news sources (see for instance Kobayashi & Ikeda, 2005; Björnebor, 2009). Not that we can indulge here in an archeology of the 1990s World Wide Web, which would

demand a wider analysis. I am rather using these examples to make a theoretical move: suggesting that the local and the global dimensions – as well as the national and the European – have been going hand in hand over the whole story of digital networks. As a consequence, doubts can be cast on the rebranding of balkanization as a contemporary phenomenon, tied to – if not caused by – the spread of sovereignist ideas in commercial social media. In terms of long durée continuities, this also means

> that nationalism is never simply opposed to cosmopolitanism, as many advocates of the idea of Europe have assumed. Nationalism and universalism not only emerged in Europe in the same historical epoch, but they belong together. Since the eighteenth century, ideas of Europe have repeatedly not only tied that idea to the culture of a particular nation-state, but also conceived of Europe in nationalism terms, even when the models have been federalist.
>
> (Weller, 2021, p. 275)

It makes sense to remark that Billig's view of banal nationalism is premised in a similar postulation: that "historically the rise of nationalism entailed the creation of internationalism", as one nation can only be imagined "among other nations", and against the backdrop of what can be defined the "universalization of particularism" (1995, p. 83). It is not our intention to address such a broad topic as the relation between universalism and nationalism, in this book – rather, to observe the very same tension through the prism of media systems. As we know, the urge "to move away from the nation-centered stance" has been largely accepted in television and communication studies, probably on the footprints of Ulrich Beck, and his celebrated attack to "methodological nationalism" (Oren, 2012, p. 373).[13] As Hepp and Couldry noticed, if "the methodological base of international media research is comparative", its focus has not to be "national-territorial", while the entire plurality of economic and cultural flows has to be used as the unit of comparison (Hepp & Couldry, 2009, pp. 32–33). What can be objected to is that in our case the national pattern in media organization is not the methodological premise of the work – while coming *as a result* of the observation. The utility of Weller's and Billig's readings, in this perspective, is to interpret the relevance of *national* media culture as an *international* phenomenon, in a way that cannot be neglected even in a world-system perspective. This is somehow the same complication we have already seen in Elsaesser, whit his idea of European cinema as being rooted in the tradition of national authorship – so as to be perceived, in the end, as a series of "seemingly discrete national film cultures" (Bergfelder, 2005, p. 315).

In this sense, the media landscape results from the encounter and conflict among different patterns – the national, the European and the global – and among the political and economic forces behind those patterns. An agreed-upon category for framing this delicate dialectic between the local and the global is that of *space of places*, put forward by John Ruggie and lately

appropriated by Manuel Castells for his general theory of the network society (with no acknowledgment at all, we may add[14]). As the case was already made that globalization produces a transnational interconnected network of both cultural and material strains – which we can refer to as the space of *flows* – Ruggie beholds that this is only half of the story, with the world-system being made of an assemblage of territorial and de-territorialized patterns.

> Perhaps the best way to describe it, when seen from our vantage point, is that these links have created a nonterritorial "region" in the world economy-a decentered yet integrated space-of-flows, operating in real time, which exists alongside the spaces-of-places that we call national economies. These conventional spaces-of- places continue to engage in external economic relations with one another, which we continue to call trade, foreign investment, and the like, and which are more or less effectively mediated by the state.
>
> (Ruggie, 1993, p. 172)

Castells (1996) picks up on this point and even talks about a dual nature of contemporary society, with the elite going global, and subaltern classes spending their daily life in the aforementioned space of place: the environment animated by local identities and stable communities, and filled with proximity and ethnicity. A major difference between the two is that Ruggie ascribes the local dimension of the space of places to the strength of the state, and to its ability to take economic traffics under control; while Castells puts in the same category all possible forms of territorial identity, whether they are national, regional, ethnic, or religious. What was implicit in Ruggie while rising to the forefront in Castells – where the concept took on its full geopolitical charge – is the idea of the space of places as a *defensive* adjustment; as a reaction strategy put in place by the institutions and the social groups excluded from the benefits of the space of flows. There is little doubt that the flows/space dichotomy – the class struggle in the age of the information society, according to Castells – is in line with the concept of extensive accumulation, and aptly describes the post-Fordist allocation of wealth in the global networks of finance, Big Tech, digital platforms, and super-national governmental organizations. Upon this new sovereignty – what Negri and Hardt defined the *empire*, in opposition to the imperialistic ambitions of national states (2001, pp. xii-xiv and 166 in particular) – globalization can be thought of as a twofold process, simultaneously reducing the differences *among* countries, and widening the internal imbalances *within* each of those countries (Piketty, 2013, p. 80; Harvey, 2014, p. 171).[15] As a consequence, a deepening divide would separate the ruling classes connected to the backbone of global exchanges – whether in terms of physical, cultural, or financial flows – from a majority of people bound to the physical limits of their daily horizon.

Castells' theory is far from perfect, especially as it does not bear upon the internal stratifications of the space of flows: and in particular, it disregards

the part of immigrants, which is the peculiar case of subaltern classes no longer bound to any place, and rather forced to international, when not intercontinental mobility (see Moores, 2012, pp. 86–87). This being said, there is little doubt that such juxtaposition between the global and the local lies at the heart of European moral economy: where it takes the shape of pro- and anti-EU instances; *leave* versus *remain*; gentrified cities and minor towns; English and non-English speaking population; creatives classes and gig workers; and the more. The current interpretation of web balkanization, and this is perhaps less convincing, also went so far as to characterize it as connected with the spread of the strong types of nationalism. This would require an alike academic understanding of it: ranging from the description of "digital nationalism", supposedly reinforced by the diffusion of social media (see Ahmad, 2022)*;* to the more ambitious individuation of "ethnopolitical" patterns in cyberspace, fostered by "the unregulated and limitless media space and new one-to-one and one-to-many webs of communications enabled by the Internet", and "resulting in increased nationalism" and "in strong(er) national identities among minorities" (Saunders, 2011, p. 88). In some influential cases, the critique to online nationalism is even imbued with judgmental thoughts, as in Christian Fuchs' work on the connections between the very idea of nation, on the one hand, and on the other hand, authoritarianism, patriarchy, militarism, and the rhetorical construction of the public enemy (2019, pp. 2–7 in particular). In this respect, the Brexit and the election of Donald Trump have monopolized the attention of scholars, resulting in an uninterrupted – and possibly *biased* – association between nationalism as a latent ideology, and disinformation as a strategy exclusive to it, and to right-wing discourse.[16] We basically agree with Mihelj and Jiménez Martínez, when they say that

> future research should resist the temptation of restricting nationalism to its most exclusive, aggressive variants and instead examine how digital media contribute to the reproduction and spreading of different varieties of nationalism, including those that are more open to diversity or more compatible with liberal democratic values.
>
> (Mihelj & Jiménez Martínez, 2021, p. 342)

The more relevant implication of this argument, as stated, is that the current definition of balkanization entails the strong conception of nationalism as anti-European, anti-immigration or protectionist ideology: what would be sanctioned by the semantic reference to the tragic history of the Balkans. In the United States, Barack Obama himself called to action against the "balkanization of news media", intended as a driver of populism, a main "damage" to democracy, and ultimately a poisoned fruit of Donald Trump's regency (Visoka & Richmond, 2022, p. 88). The spread of nationalist and ultra-nationalist instances online has been largely analyzed (see, for a recent example, Fuchs, 2022): on no possible reading of the evidence, though, can

that be said that web and social media have a specific affordance for right-wing propaganda. Similarly, that the national internet phenomenon, also played out by our research data, belongs to the same family of the nationalist attacks to the EU, is far from being proved. Here the point is that the capillarity of online communication allows populist leaders to "circumvent gatekeepers" and directly address the electorate, therefore blowing on the fire of disintermediation, demagogy, and anti-elitist discourse (Schaub & Morisi, 2020, p. 753). It is not our intention to underestimate the spread of such ideas in commercial social media, which is commonly addressed in scientific literature. We would rather remark upon the distinction between the *use* of these channels on the part of populist leaders, which is a state of fact, and the supposed predisposition of the platforms for the circulation and success of these stories. More granular studies actually show that the contents labeled as *scientific* and *misinformation* go through the same spreading pattern, with minor measurable differences in the temporal "length of the cascade" (Del Vicario et al., 2015, p. 558; see also Cinelli et al., 2020). A topic-modelling analysis of a sample of 4.3 million Italian tweets, consistently, reveals a symmetric tendency towards polarization at both ends of the political spectrum, the populist and the progressive (Pilati & Miconi, 2022, pp. 558–560).

As a matter of fact, and more concretely speaking, the national embedding of social media culture is also in place in those countries where the populist sentiment is relatively under control, or where people are largely *in favor* of the European Union. According to the last EuroBarometer polls, for instance, in winter 2022–2023, 75% of the Swedish and 60% of the Portuguese "tend to trust" the European Union, both standing above the general average of 48% of the population in the EU27 (European Commission, 2023, p. T36). When it came to the sharing of contents in social media, this notwithstanding, we saw how relevant the national discourse might be in these countries as well, also regardless of how widely spoken is the English language. We may append that the national contents are of paramount importance in any single country, whether their population "tends to trust" local institutions, as in Germany, Sweden, Czech Republic and Belgium (respectively 70%, 75%, 63%, and 62% of the citizens, over a 56% EU average); or is in line with the European average in that matter, as in Portugal (56%); or does not trust its own public bodies, as in Spain (47%), Italy (42%), and Greece (37%) (European Commission, 2023, p. T31). This encourages the hypothesis that the online *political* nationalism in a proper sense – despite exercising an impressive grip over academic debate – might be overestimated, when compared to a purely cultural factor, as it is the dependence of national audiences on contents, frames and memes coming from their daily environment.

Europe being a continent of many countries of *comparable* size and relevance, Tzvetan Todorov wrote, an integration and a synthesis would unlikely emerge – in the past as in the present, based on the *long durée* of geo-cultural patterns (Todorov & Bracher, 2008, p. 7). As we will see in Chapter 3, in fact, historical research shows a very limited circulation of cultural contents among

European countries, in the span of two centuries (Moretti, 1997; Sassoon, 2006). The argument has been made that centers on the idea that national sentiments thrive online as *reactive* forms of identity: this is Manuel Castells' interpretation of the space of places, again, intended as the primary resistance of subaltern classes to the spread of global flows (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1999). Here we are taking a different stand and arguing that the importance of the local in social media has to do with the *cultural* needs of the audiences: something closer to Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined community (1983), who not accidentally considered the media of the time – novels and newspapers – as the main drivers of collective identification. In other terms, we are back to what, after Michael Billig, is commonly defined *banal* nationalism:

> Why do "we", in established, democratic nations, not forget "our" national identity? The short answer is that "we" are constantly reminded that "we" live in national: our identity is continually being flagged.
>
> (1995, p. 92)

Billig's work is explicitly based on Anderson's (and Gellner's) idea: "nation-states are not founded upon objective criteria, such as the possession of a discrete language", but they have to be "imagined" by means of the "banal flagging of nationhood" itself (Billig, 1995, p. 10). We argue here that Billig's theory is not necessarily in opposition with the orthodox interpretations of nationalism: rather, it adds to the discourse all the unnoticed signs by which people's belonging is identified. What is notable, is that the revolutionary impact of Billig's concept has been commonly assumed in general theory, while at the empirical level it emerges how nationalism evolves through an interplay between its *hot* and *banal* forms (Koch & Paasi, 2016, pp. 4–5), which are easily merged into the same practices, as exemplified by the rituals of the American people during the Independence Day (see Paasi, 2016, p. 22). As to Europe, the same combination of hot and banal nationalism has been detected in several investigations: on the symbology of English female sport (Bowes & Bairner, 2019); on the bi-lingual road signs in Wales (Jones & Merriman, 2009); on the visual representation of Italy and Italian people (Antonsich, 2016); on the Serbian popular music (Atanasovski, 2015, pp. 85–86), or on the Opening Ceremony of the London Olympic Games (Closs Stephens, 2016); and, at the pan-European level, in the case of the BoycottGermany campaign (Lekakis, 2017).

In both Anderson and Billig, nationalization measures spill over into how people live their daily experience: or better, they are legitimized, if not brought to existence, by that daily life experience. As to the scholarship about the concept of banal nationalism, that we can not address as a whole, we will shortly debate the major objections related to our specific case-study, the role the media in the process. According to the first critique, such thesis would imply the passivity of the citizens in receiving, and being shaped by,

the top-down stream of information contents (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001, pp. 3–4); while the second one apprises the over-emphasizing of the actual homogeneity of national media cultures (Rosie et al., 2006, pp. 334–336). We will not deal with these counter-arguments per se – if anything, because the author himself eventually provided his point-to-point reply to the critiques (Billig, 2009). What we need to do is to simply clarify our positions in that matter, for what affects the operational choices inspiring the research. As to the first aspect, we are purposedly offering a perspective centered on people's *choice*: which social media channels are the most followed; or which movies are more appreciated in video-on-demand platforms. Not that we agree on Billig considering the media audiences as passive, properly speaking: while we do think, as already explained in respect to Smits' work on illustrated journalism, that ordinary consumption is a real blind spot in many reflections on media systems, whether national or super-national. The second objection is directly related to this last aspect, as it questions the very existence of a consistent national media culture. In this sense, the banal nationalism model would assume "that a national media addresses and constitutes a coherent national public", Michael Skey opines (2009, p. 335), "and though this process disparate individuals are, to paraphrase Anderson, able to imagine themselves as belonging to the same community". In this case, we think that Skey is simply right: there is no such thing as a national media culture to be taken for granted – rather, it is constantly shaped and reshaped through a negotiation process; it inevitably results from the compromise between local and foreign contents; and in the end, it only exists in the context of a plurality of tendencies and forces, some of which can work against its consolidation and stability. Given that we will sketch an interpretation of this aspect in the final chapter of the book, here we can limit ourselves to state, as a general remark, that the same can be told about *any form of nationalism*, regardless of its theoretical framing. In fact, homogenous entities only exist in theory, with the modern world being ruled by Max Weber's polytheism of values: so that the very idea of the nation does not exist as a "coherent" ensemble, and its foundational narratives – including, but not limited to, *media* narratives – are always counter-balanced or contrasted by alternative stories.

We also know that Anderson's model has been applied to the post-national constellations as well, in the case for global, rather than national forms of identification and belonging (see Bhabha, 1994; Appadurai, 1996). Once again, in keeping with literature review it is not easy to separate the two themes: *internationalization* of a series of trends; and *Europeanization*, which would necessitate the convergence of those trends towards a common set of cultural forms and images. In the latter case, and when it goes down to the very idea of Europe, its existence as an imagined community has been questioned, due to the fact that alternative "narratives compete for visibility and resonance", and travel through the continent "in a segmented way", thus not reaching the stage of crystallization into a solid and overarching discourse (Oleart & Van Weyenberg, 2019, p. 9). We have found traces of this fragmentation in the analysis of social media top-accounts, which sketch the

profile of local worlds of experience, albeit against the background of global platforms. Likewise, the flagging of European markers in media contents may have a little effect on audiences, as shown in a study made in Bulgaria and the UK, according to which the "trends of potential banal Europeanism" evident in the "recognition of symbols were not replicated at the level of identities" (Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2014, p. 56). We will talk through this matter in Chapter 3, when considering the role of the media in the possible delimitation of a European imagined community, or in the shaping of a "banal Europeanism".

2.3 What people watch on VOD platforms

So far, we have put to the test the idea of the national embedding of the web as a form of banal nationalism: which has more to do with audiences' cultural habits, than with their political radicalization. For a better understanding of this pattern, let us shift the attention from social media to another major aspect of contemporary visual culture: what people watch on video-on-demand platforms. For this purpose, we analyzed the weekly top-watched movies between November 1, 2021, and February 28, 2022, in the most used VOD providers in each of the ten considered countries. For the precision's sake, we selected Netflix, iTunes, Disney+, and VRT Max in Belgium; Netflix, HBO Max and iTunes in Bulgaria; Netflix, HBO Max, and Amazon Prime in Czech Republic; Netflix, iTunes, and Amazon Prime in Germany; Netflix, Google TV, iTunes, and Ertflix in Greece; Netflix, Amazon Prime, Google Play, Disney+, and iTunes in Italy; Netflix, Disney+ and HBO Max in Portugal; Netflix, HBO Max, and Disney+ in Spain; Netflix, HBO Max and Disney+ in Sweden; whereas in Türkiye, finally, only Netflix data were available.[17] The variable size of the samples is due, in its turn, to the findability and reliability of the data; while public service media have been considered only where – in Belgium, Greece and Italy – their streaming platforms actually have some popularity. As it was the case in the analysis of video-sharing platforms, and as already observed in section 1.2, our research focuses on the *head* of the distribution curve – the most influential accounts, or the top-watched movies – rather than on its tail. That this "long tail" of digital distribution would open up a brand-new market is notoriously Chris Anderson's idea (2004); and according to him, it would even lead to a more democratic configuration of the system. Here and elsewhere, the positive anomaly of the long tail is apodictically stated, while it would need to be empirically tested – as much as made possible by the data, given that the exact figures of daily consumption are hard to come by. In their in-depth analysis of a specific genre and context – the documentary in Belgian VODs – Iordache and Livémont unraveled for instance a different pattern: in fact, the movies made available in a plurality of platforms are usually "big-budget", "well-known" and award-nominated productions. The same can be told about audience's preferences, showing how – even in the case of the documentary, which is a niche genre *per se* – "consumers' appetite for hits continue to grow" (2018, pp. 4623–4624).[18]

Table 1.3 National productions and co-productions in the weekly top ten watched movies in VODs

Country	*Platform*	*Total national successes*	*Comedies*
Belgium	iTunes	23	10
Belgium	Netflix	3	3
Bulgaria	HBO Max	3	3
Czech Republic	Netflix	32	9
Germany	Netflix	18	13
Germany	iTunes	12	8
Germany	Amazon Prime	12	11
Greece	Ertflix	4	0
Italy	Netflix	23	13
Italy	iTunes	30	16
Portugal	HBO Max	1	1
Spain	Netflix	25	19
Sweden	Netflix	2	0
Türkiye	AppleTV	1	1

Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data

All in all, the main indication of our dataset is that the American productions get the majority share in all markets – and in a more impressive fashion on Google Play, iTunes, Disney+, and Apple TV – with no macroscopic differences with respect to theatrical movies screening. As we will analyze this aspect in greater detail in Chapter 4, for the moment we will narrow down the discourse to the success of national movies, which is shown in Table 1.3.

In Table 1.3 we listed out the rankings in which national successes are indeed present – which is not always the case, exactly because VOD platforms are hegemonized by American productions. The main indication, at a first glance, is the centrality of the comedy as a typically national genre: as it accounts for 13 of the 26 top-watched titles in Belgium; three out of three in Bulgaria; 32 out of 42 in Germany; 29 out of 53 in Italy; and 19 out of 25 in Spain. The only local movie appreciated in Portugal is a comedy, *Ladrões de Tuta e Meia*, and so is the sole national success in Türkiye, *Recep*. The Sweden case is different, as the two national titles are both dramas, and they are both released by Netflix; while in Czech Republic comedies account for a smaller – albeit not irrelevant – number of successes, and precisely 9 out of 32. In Greece, finally, national movies only get some notoriety in the public service media platform, Ertflix, and in this case no comedies are included in the top-watched list.

The success of the comedy as a specifically national format can be explained, following Steve Neale, with its flexibility as a narrative format. The comedy, Neale and Krutnik (1990, p. 198) opine, can easily be adapted to historical changes, so that their themes will be the closer to the material phenomenology of people's life (whether we consider it as a *genre* or as a *mode*: an aspect of Neale's reflection that we cannot take into account here).

The comedy as the drama situation "in which the physics and conditions of everyday life" are represented, in other words, and "transposed into a new register" (Bukatman, 2012, p. 2). "It is clear", Edgar Morin wrote in his celebrated praise of mass culture,

> that the spectator tends to incorporate himself and incorporate into himself characters on the screen according to physical or moral resemblances he finds there.
>
> (Morin, 1956, p. 184)

Indeed, this movement only explains half of the emotional loop that binds the spectator to the imagery of the movies (the "polymorphous projection-identification"); as well as we know that the magic of cinema, for Morin, springs off the possibility of identifying oneself with the otherness ("kids in Paris and Rome play cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers"; "little girls play mommy"; "little children, murderers"; "good women play the whore and mild civil servants the gangster"). Still, if we stick to our empirical evidence, we bear witness to a sort of *division of labor* among the symbolic forms: the national cinema is the marker of *closeness*, as it embraces the identification and the recognizable characteristics of what daily happens; the American cinema, on its part, is the realm of narrative digression, imagination, and suspense. On the margins of his comparative analysis of European TV markets, Jérôme Bourdon puts forward a similar view, with American movies being defined a "special resource" for holiday moments, and national cinema as the provider of ordinary contents and daily life narrative (2011, p. 109).

A more granular observation is possible in the case of Amazon Prime in Italy, as we could gather data about the daily, rather than the weekly top-watched movies. Out of 247 positions occupied by national productions or co-productions, 233 titles are either labeled as *comic* or *comedies*, thus confirming the previous research pitches. "Jokes and many other ingredients of comedy rely heavily on short circuits between signifier and signified", Franco Moretti observed: it follows that "they are weakened by translation", and more likely to be appreciated by local audiences (Moretti, 2001, p. 94). It is also interesting that among the thirteen non-comedy hits we would find – along with one single film presented as drama – six times a documentary, about swimmer and Olympic champion Federica Pellegrini; and seven times a title presented as a *suspense* movie, which nonetheless is the biography of the Italian scientist and former congresswoman Ilaria Capua. In a similar vein, among the Italian top-watched positions on iTunes four documentaries stand out; while in Netflix *Yara* recurs three times, which tells the story of a 13-year-old girl horrendously raped and murdered in 2010, in the North of the country. We may add that two positions in the top-watched Spanish ranking are taken by documentaries as well, while the Czech list includes two "social issues dramas" available on Netflix, and the Belgian one comprehends ten biographies, all released by iTunes.

Some additional information is provided by the lexical occurrences in the titles of the audiovisual works. We will dig into this research question by narrowing down the analysis to a smaller corpus: the most-watched movies and TV-series in Italy, in both Netflix and Amazon Prime, in the same period (from November 1, 2021, to February 28, 2022). Which inferences are made possible by the titles and their recurrences is questionable, for sure – besides their general, twofold function of accompanying or replacing the consumption of a given work (see Genette, 1987). In the specific instance of the movie industry, the function of the titles in a regime of over-abundance has been repeatedly remarked upon, as well as their importance as morphological devices (see, for instance, Altman, 1999, p. 79; Re, 2006, 2013; Brunetta, 2004, pp. 44–46), but very rarely investigated at the empirical level (see Miconi, 2014). As Franco Moretti explains in his work on an archive of 7,000 English novels, the titles gain a particular importance in the age of overproduction, as they "develop special "signals" to place books into the market niche" (2013, p. 204). In short, we will consider the markers contained in the titles as basic indicators of the contents, and locations in particular.

In Tables 1.4 and 1.5, we have first isolated the toponyms and the proper names included in the titles, and referred to Italy, Europe, the United States, or the rest of the world.

Table 1.4 Geographical and local names in the most viewed Netflix movies and TV shows in Italy (November 1, 2021–February 28, 2022)

Category/Region	*IT*	*EU28*	*USA*	*Rest of the World*
Toponyms	0	105	50	96
Proper names of persons	204	21	0	11
Other proper names (i.e., Juventus; Plaza Hotel; New Amsterdam Hospital)	58	3	26	1

Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data

Table 1.5 Geographical and local names in the most viewed Prime movies and TV shows in Italy (November 1, 2021–February 28, 2022)

Category/Region	*IT*	*EU28*	*USA*	*Rest of the World*
Toponyms	47	54	17	68
Proper names of persons	180	21	0	0
Other proper names (i.e., Juventus; Plaza Hotel; New Amsterdam Hospital)	58	0	0	1

Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data

Let us focus on the most striking difference among the clusters. When audiovisual works refer to the United States or to the rest of the world, it is all about *places*: respectively, 67 titles out of 93; and 164 out of 177. All proper names have to do with regions, cities, or regions: *spaces*, which, as in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the "chronotope", are the "formally constitutive category of literature" (1937, p. 84), or what we can call the "elementary unit of imagination", in the creation of both novels and movies (Keunen, 2010, p. 35). Each place generates its own mythology; calls for a particular action; unfolds a whole catalogue of stories, events, adventures, encounters. The mentions of proper names related to Europe, on the very contrary, often indicate *real people*: 384 times, compared to 47 toponyms, for Italy; and 42 times in the case of non-national European markers. If we go into the details of the Italian case, in particular, we see that references are made to the popular movie director and actor Carlo Verdone (89); to the most famous couple of influencers, known as the Ferragnez, after the fusion of their two names (81); to a swimmer and former Olympic champion (10); and to the already cited Yara Gambirasio (17), atrociously killed in winter 2010 (see Table 1.6).

Analogous examples can be found in the datasets related to the other nine countries: where the names stand out of Louis Whain, Anna Frank, Carlo Verdone, Angèle, the Ferragnez, Neymar Junior, Georgina Rodriguez, Federica Pellegrini, or the Juventus football team. These names do not have anything in common, besides the simple fact that, in all cases, they introduce to the stories of *real* persons, no matter how romanticized they are. A comparison with the American market will make it clearer the narrative implications of these basic recurrencies. In Italy, the titles including proper names of persons (or sport teams) occupy 255 positions in the statistics of the top-watched movies and TV shows; in the United States – sticking to the same period and to the same source – only *20* positions (see Tables 1.7 and 1.8).

Table 1.6 Geographical and local names in the top Prime and Netflix movies and TV shows in Italy (November 1, 2021–February 28, 2022; at least ten weeks in the top ten)

IT	*EU28*	*USA*	*Rest of the World*
Vita da Carlo (89)	Hotel Transylvania: Transformania (54)	New Amsterdam (26)	Narcos: Mexico (27)
The Ferragnez (81)	Emily in Paris (28)	Ozark (11)	Natale sul Nilo (17)
All or Nothing: Juventus (58)	*The Electrical Life of Louis Wain* (21)		
Come un gatto in tangenziale – ritorno a Coccia di Morto (38)	The Girl from Oslo (12)		
Yara (17)	*Munich: The Edge of War* (11)		
Federica Pellegrini – Underwater (10)			

Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data

Table 1.7 Proper names of persons in the tiles of the most-watched movies in the US (November 1, 2021–February 28, 2022)

Category/Platform	*Netflix*	*Number of weeks*
Movies	*Alyleen Wournos: American Boogeywoman*	1 (Week 4)
TV-shows	*Yara*	2 (Weeks 44, 46)
	King Arthur	2 (Weeks 44, 45)
	Mariah Carey's Merriest Christmas	1 (Week 47)

Source: FlixPatrol

Table 1.8 Proper names of persons in the tiles of the most-watched TV-shows in the US (November 1, 2021–February 28, 2022)

Category/Platform	*Amazon Prime*	*Number of weeks*
Movies	*The Electric Life of Louis Wain*	1 (Week 45)
	House of Gucci	1 (Week 8)
	King Richard	4 (Weeks 1–4)
TV-shows	*RuPaul's Drag Race*	8 (Weeks 1–8)

Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data

When working on the "five major axes of differentiation: cultural, institutional, economic, spatial, and political", Thomas Elsaesser individuates in the "reference points" a major deviation between European and American cinema. European movies "carry linguistic boundaries", the idea goes, while Hollywood productions are "less particular", and devoted to universal poetics (2005, p. 492). It would be of advantage, at this stage, to conjecture a similar division of labor in the field of video sharing platforms. On the one hand, we have YouTube and TikTok channels, where the dominant genre is the vlog: and no matter how specialized this format may be (tutorials, playthroughs, unboxing, ASMR, decluttering, and so on), it will basically come with the features of the *blog*. At the formal level, it is about the close-up shoot; at the rhetorical level, it is the informality of style and language; at the content level, the tale of everyday life; and at the pragmatical level, the allusion to an intimate relationship with the audiences.[19] Along the spectrum of local versus global, Instagram places itself at the very opposite end, as the platform where celebrities and stars come to play, setting a different tone: that of the on-stage rather back-stage performance, highlighting the distance with common web users and followers. Not accidentally, among the most-popular positions in Instagram we find several celebrities in the very classical sense, which obtained their reputation outside the web – unlike in YouTube

and TikTok, where success is regularly beneficial to *native* influencers. And in Instagram, for the very same reason, there is more space for international channels, whereas TikTok and YouTube rankings are topped by national profiles, blinking an eye to the proximity and the warmth of people's daily experience.

To some extent, several evidence – the relevance of comedies; the frequent reuse of real histories; the success of local vloggers telling common stories – prompt the suspect that European countries might suffer from a *lack of imagination*; which once again, may come as a result of their *long durée* history. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of Modern Age*:

> It is not only that there was a new founder figure, one who might seem to correspond better to this tendency to shift the beginning of the age to earlier periods; it is also that there was a different type of initiating gesture, one stamped by *not so much the pathos of beginning anew* and opposition to what is past *as concern for what already exists*, humility before what has already been said.
>
> (Blumenberg, 1966, p. 471; italics ours)

European culture can never start over, according to Blumenberg, as the richness of its history is also its curse, the inertia that makes it stick to "what already exists" – and this is true in the media production as well.

3 The media are national?

3.1 Reading dailies, watching TV

If we started off with social media, and with visual social media in particular, is because they could be expected to favor cross-national sharing of contents (which is not always the case, as we saw). When looking at the industrial complex on which classical media theories have been built – newspapers, radio, and TV – one would rather imagine observing the national dimension at its height. This section is dedicated to these traditional comparts of media production, albeit the investigation is limited to newspapers and TV, due to the dramatic lack of data about radio programming and consumption. Generally speaking, we may assume that the radio systems in Europe – besides the exceptions due to the universal glamor of popular music – are a predominantly national affair, either in terms of audience distribution, contents, or ownership (Kleinstuber, 2011, p. 68). This being said, further research will be necessary to properly assess the impact of radio broadcasting: despite the recurring celebration of the radio as a legendary "resilient" medium, as a matter of fact, its role in contemporary European landscape is far from being understood.

As to the press, its role lies at the heart of the most classical inquiries in the national public sphere, starting with Walter Lippman's pioneering

observations in the aftermaths of World War I (1922, pp. 106–111 in particular). In Jürgen Habermas' reading, similarly, the press opened up an unprecedented space for political debate, as bourgeois citizens were gifted with the "opportunity both for reading newspapers and journals, and, just as importantly, for discussing what has been read" (1962, p. 72). As stated, we are framing our analysis of national media patterns in Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined community, and for a very specific reason. When listing out the historical features and novelties of newspaper reading, in fact, Anderson insists on a property that would ideally fit the case of electronic media as well – that of *simultaneity*.

> The significance of this mass ceremony – Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers – is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated *simultaneously* by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion.
>
> (1983, p. 35; italics added)

This characteristic is key to the reinforcing of imagined communities, according to Anderson, at two different levels. In one way, readers are aware of their "substitute for morning prayer" being performed, in the very same moment, by "thousands or millions of others". This is another point of contact with Billig, in his turn commenting that the "individual members" of the nation will never get to know each other on a personal basis: hence the need of a mediated replacement of that; of a symbolic identification with the large group that they are part of (Billig, 1995, p. 68). In the other way, for Anderson the two main symbolic forms accompanying the European ascent to modernity – the daily newspaper and the realist novel – have in common the propension to rely on daily life stories, thus equipping the citizens with the ideal representation of the national empty space they belong to.

Nowadays, the importance of newspapers is fading almost everywhere: this is a well-known tendency, also affecting the high-reputation outlets. As Oran Soffer pointed out, in the age of digital media Anderson's exposure to "someone reading the paper" has been replaced by "the exposure to people reading unknown content" online, with the feeling of simultaneity still playing a pivotal role (2013, p. 54). According to the World Association of News Publishers, dailies' diffusion has been declining everywhere in the West, in the last decades, and in Europe as well. Even the most read newspapers reveal a low figure: in the UK, *Daily Mail* has a 7% reaching, with *Sun*, *Guardian* and *Observer* hitting 4–5% of the national potential audience; in France, *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* respectively sell 393,103 and 331,927 daily copies; in Italy, *Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica* respectively 204,082 and 158,328 copies; in Germany, *Bild* sells 427,024 copies. A synthesis of this sharp decline in paper press circulation is provided in Table 1.9.[20]

Table 1.9 People reading written press in Europe, 2010–2018, percentage of the population

Frequency/ Year	*2010*	*2011*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*	*2015*	*2016*	*2017*	*2018*
Every day or almost	35	35	34	32	32	31	29	28	26
1–3 times per week	38	36	37	33	33	32	32	30	29
2–3 times per month or less often	15	17	16	19	18	18	18	21	20
Do not know/ never	12	12	13	15	15	20	20	22	24

Source: EuroBarometer

Table 1.10 Success of different types of print newspapers in eight European countries, 2015 (percentage of national samples)

Type/ Country	*BE*	*DE*	*DK*	*HR*	*HU*	*IT*	*PL*	*PT*	*Sample avg*
National daily	51.8	37.3	34	65	18.9	49.5	45.6	47.3	45.6
Local daily	23.6	36	56.7	35.1	26.7	44.4	43.8	21.7	34.6
International daily	0.7	2.7	4.8	2.6	0.7	4.8	3.5	4.2	2.9
Weekly newspapers	21.8	28.3	13.9	12.3	9.2	24.8	62.3	28	25.6
Free newspapers	51	51	56.7	30	42	18.6	58.2	43.5	46.2
Magazines	60	36.8	52.5	49	39.2	46.5	25.8	42.5	42.5

Source: Nossek, Adoni, & Nimrod, 2015

As to the aforementioned national dimension of the press culture, at the empirical level – whatever the adopted framework – it is confirmed by the modest diffusion of international newspapers. As synthetized in Table 1.10, foreign dailies get everywhere a very small share of the readership, with no perceptible variations or increases due to the state of media trust, to the level of journalistic professionalism, or more banally to the quota of English-speaking persons.

On the other hand, one may be surprised by how important local dailies are in some countries; while the relatively high share of international newspapers in Italy is probably due to the internal composition of the readership, and to its class structure separating a few cultivated readers from a mass of non-readers (AudiPress, 2022). Also in accordance to the last complete report released

by the World Association of News Publishers, national newspapers are still predominant in Europe, with a very few strands of internationalization being visible. The most remarkable aspect to be noted, if anything, is the interest of American readers for online English dailies, such as *Mail*, *Guardian*, and *Telegraph* (Wan-IFRA, 2015, p. 29). In this case too, therefore, it can be assumed that internationalization trends do not necessarily favor Europeanization: and upon some circumstances, as hinted by the importance of the US-UK media complex, they might even be detrimental to it. And in terms of Europeanization, there is one more aspect to be pointed to: that the actual inexistence of a cross-European press is one with the lack of a proper European news coverage, which is also highlighted in political sciences (Machill, Beiller, & Fischer, 2006; de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001). And it is possibly the continuity with the main functions of the press, those of gatekeeping and news-making, to explain the national embedding of TV culture (see Bondebjerg, Novrup Redvall, & Higson, 2015), to which we will now turn our attention.

Traditionally, TV industries are considered to be deeply national, in terms of audiences and contents, not to mention their regulation (Papathanassopoulos & Negrine, 2011, pp. 91–92). To which extent the proliferation of the so-called OTT services – ranging from cable TV to pay TV, to the internet TV – has changed this geo-cultural configuration will be discussed in the next chapters, as it will call into action the regional dimension in the organization of media systems. What is interesting, is that traditional TV is a purely national affair in the majority of European countries – transversally to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) three spaces – while the audience share of foreign TV channels tends to grow, the closer we get to the Eastern borders of Europe. In 2019, it accounted for 4.5% of the total in Bulgaria; 24.5% in Estonia; 27.4% in Hungary; 22.2% in Latvia; 5.9% in Lithuania; 8.2% in Poland; and 14.2% in Romania (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2020). In former Yugoslavian countries, in a similar way, non-national TV contents can account for 22% of the total in Macedonia; 38% in Montenegro; 34% in Serbia; 34% in Slovenia; up to 45% in Croatia and 54% in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Peruško, Vozab, & Čuvalo, 2021, p. 187). Even though the metrics of the two detection results do not match each other – with the first study based on the audience share, and the second on the programming contents – both analyses confirm the peculiarities of Eastern European media, which will be considered again in Chapters 2 and 4. In any case, as a general rule it appears that the national embedding of TV is proportional to the historical strength of media industries, thus explaining the major permeability of some Eastern European markets (Mihelj, 2011, p. 175).

The centrality of TV cannot come as a surprise, additionally, as the medium – despite some naïve announcements of its death – is simply in very good health. If we put things in a longitudinal perspective, the decrease rate in TV watching has been slowing down almost everywhere in Europe, with the overall average net result of –4 minutes per day, over the 2011–2019 timespan. Daily TV watching has significantly increased in a number of

countries: Romania (+67 minutes), Cyprus (+45), Portugal (+44), Slovenia (+39), Slovakia (+29), Bulgaria (+26), Türkiye (+26), and Austria (+25). To a lower extent, daily TV watching has also grown in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Greece, and Croatia. While the ballooning of TV consumption is properly visible in two areas – the Mediterranean and the Eastern Europe – the cases of Austria and Baltic countries are harder to explain upon the commonly used frameworks, and even upon our current stereotypes. For what concerns Southern European countries, we may suppose that they have been more deeply affected by the post-2008 economic crisis, also reflecting in the contraction of the more expensive activities, and in the following centrality of domestic cultural consumption (Bergés Saura & Papathanassopoulos, 2015, pp. 55–57). On the other hand, a sharp decrease in the time spent watching TV is measured in four countries: Netherlands (–35 minutes), and more markedly the UK, Denmark, and Ireland, with –1 hour approximately. In short, and overall, Europeans watch national TV as much as they used to do in 2001: to the point that a tangible decrease, over the 2001–2019 timeframe, is only visible in eight countries: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK, with barely significant variations in Slovakia (–4 minutes) and France (–1).

Based on the most detailed data, related to 2013 (see Table 1.11), we can cluster European countries in groups, depending on the relevance of national

Table 1.11 Daily audience share of TV channels, 2013 (percentage values)

Country	*National Public Channels*	*National Private Channels*	*Foreign Channels*
Austria	34.9	9.7	39.7
Belgium_CF	20.9	5	60.7
Belgium_VLG	40.3	40.8	4.9
Bulgaria	7.4	73	8.1
Croatia	26.1	53.1	3.5
Cyprus	19.4	52.5	NA
Czechia	29.2	60.3	1.2
Denmark	66	4.4	25.1
Estonia	17.6	34.6	25
Finland	41.8	48.6	NA
France	30.6	55	NA
Germany	44.1	50.6	NA
Greece	7.9	74.6	2
Hungary	14.9	57.8	19.9
Ireland	29.6	13.3	24.5
Italy	38.7	53.5	NA
Latvia	12.6	41.1	23.3
Lithuania	8.7	56.1	15.7
Netherlands	33.6*	18	38.8
Norway	41.3	40.7	17.9

(*Continued*)

Table 1.11 (Continued)

Country	*National Public Channels*	*National Private Channels*	*Foreign Channels*
Poland	30	52	12
Portugal	17	53.8	17.7
Romania	5.4	71.4	14.1
Slovenia	25.8	37.5	21.5
Spain	24.8**	66.1	4.5
Sweden	35.3	32.9	31.1

Notes: *Including 1.7% of regional public channels
**Including 8.4% of autonomous public channels
Source: European Audiovisual Observatory

TV channels. In the first group I have placed the countries where national channels get 75% or more of the total watching time: the Flemish Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Spain. The countries of the second group are characterized by the regional influence of some most equipped media industries: Austria with the respect to Germany; the French-speaking Belgium with respect to France; and Ireland with respect to the UK. As we will see in the next chapter, this geo-blocking release strategy plays a main part in the distribution of contents, still in the era of global platforms. Countries of the third group are united by the English fluency of their population, which would explain the success of international channels in Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden. The fourth group is that of Eastern media markets, which we have already touched on, where it is the weakness of local industries that makes space for foreign competitors: as in Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia. The Baltics are probably a story of their own, as they combine a common use of English to well-established cooperation agreements among Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian governments and cultural industries; so that, also due to their small dimensions, they have traditionally constituted an integrated market (Kõuts-Klemm, Rožukalne, & Jastramskis, 2022, pp. 545–546).[21] In the other way, it is evident that public TV is more appealing to the audiences where people have a higher degree of trust in both the media and the institutions. At the very opposite, in none of the eleven post-Socialist considered countries– where state-owned channels used to be the carrier of Communist propaganda – does public TV get the majority share.

3.2 Nation-states and the EU: a **vertical** *Europeanization*

The point I will stress, in conclusion, is that the national embedding of the media does not only result in quantitative data, while also taking the shape of a specific *framing*: due to the outlets being "primarily formatted for national and regional markets", and delivering "messages that they think have propriety for and that are attractive" for national audiences (Thiel,

2011, p. 129). As Terhi Rantanen wrote, "the media use primarily a national frame" even "when they try to make sense of global events", on account of the news originating "from official sources", and on local experts being regularly involved and interviewed (2012, p. 147). Additionally, what wide-scale surveys show, in any country, is that people's interest in the EU peaks when European issues overlap with local problems – that is to say, with those which are locally *perceived* as such (Sifft et al., 2007, p. 143). As this tendency leaves little or no space for dialogue among nations, it can be cited as a proof of vertical Europeanization being more relevant than horizontal Europeanization, to use a commonly accepted terminology. Brüggemann and Kleinen von Königslöw released the most accurate study in this matter, which spans over twenty years and takes into exam five "quality newspapers": the Austrian *Die Presse*, the German *Frankfurte Allgemeine Zeitung*, the British *The Times*, the French *Le Monde*, and finally *Politiken* for Denmark. The authors organize the results in a matrix including four clusters: "segmented Europeanization", if the discussion centers on the EU but not on the other European countries; "comprehensive Europeanization", when both dimensions are covered; "Europeanization aloof from the EU", in case only the horizontal integration is treated; and "parochial public sphere", finally, "if there is neither vertical, nor horizontal Europeanization" (2007, pp. 4–5). The main finding, besides the differences among the considered news outlet, is "the common and statistically significant trend" towards "increasing levels of vertical Europeanization", as "national discussions focus increasingly on the EU but there are no indications of increasing horizontal exchange" (2007, p. 10). This prevalence of the vertical over the horizontal Europeanization has been confirmed by further investigations. Kleinen von Königslöw (2011) found evidence of the same "segmented Europeanization" in her longitudinal content analysis on six newspapers in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, and the UK, on a constructed sample of two week per year, over the 1982–2008 period. Koopmans and Statham, in their turn, refer to horizontal Europeanization as a "weak variant" of the common media coverage of European affairs – "for instance, if a German newspaper reports" about the activities of the French National Assembly, which is pretty rare (2010, p. 41). Wessler, Brüggemann and Kleinen von Königslöw (2008) also experimented in a more advanced elaboration, by breaking down the horizontal and vertical dimensions into granular indicators, with the aim of calculating the decree of compromise between the two in different news outlets, or what they define the "differential Europeanization".

What matters for the purposes of this essay, research shows how people's feeling is still largely based on the state of *national* public opinion, with spoken language inevitably playing a main part, once again (Koopmans, 2003, p. 3; Machill et al., 2006, p. 60). Here the distance between the two axes, which Koopmans referred to as *vertical* and *horizontal* Europeanization (Koopmans, 2003; Koopmans & Erbe, 2007), clearly widens: with the first process accounting for the institutional assemblage between any given member state and the EU; and the latter for the exchanges among different

countries, populations, or social groups. Sifft and others take a similar stance, while studying the longitudinal evolution of media coverage in five countries – Germany, UK, France, Austria, and Denmark – from 1982 to 2003. As the authors run a content analysis on the main newspapers, the findings go that discussion of European themes has been growing in all the five countries, whereas opinion-sharing and circulation of contents *among the countries* remain quite rare (2007, p. 143). To put it differently, the newspapers have been offering some space to the relations between their own state and the union, without broadening the horizon to the relations among countries, or making the exchanges among them more frequent. In the authors' view too, two dimensions emerge, that they respectively define as "monitoring of governance" and visibility of EU institutions; and "integration and cultural exchange" (2007, p. 132). These two levels basically correspond to the aforementioned vertical/horizontal dyad. As far as the media are concerned, it would follow that a few exceptional moments – summits; financial negotiations; debt crises – are intensively reported by national newspapers and broadcasting (Barisione & Ceron, 2017, pp. 92–99), with little attention placed to Europe in those normal situations on which imagined *communities* and *banal* forms of belonging are grounded. A confirmation is provided by Peters and de Vreese's quantitative scrutiny, showing how, in what they call "routine periods", the "share of EU stories in political news was not higher than 5 percent" (2004, p. 14). In more general terms, this would also corroborate the lack of interest in the institutional legitimacy of EU as such, which has been already documented, and discussed, in several scientific fields (Rose, 2015, p. 3). In the domain of media studies, such lack of attention has been investigated in particular by Claes de Vreese, "both in relation to covering domestic politics and in more general terms as problem of inadequate audience competences" (2005, p. 67). As a result, it is ultimately the diffidence towards the "EU decision-making process" that explains the latency of a trans-European narrative:

> Despite the fact that Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands are all geographically relatively close to centers of power such Brussels and Strasbourg, the distance is experienced as a constraint when composing an EU story.
>
> (de Vreese, 2005, p. 65)

In the already cited book on the history of TV programming, Bourdon notices how in all countries the pan-European live *Jeux sans frontières* was oddly less popular than the national declinations of the very same format (2011, p. 149). Interestingly enough, the program was antecedent to the *Television Without Borders* directive, the France- and Germany-inspired intervention, which in 1989 paved the way to the EU attempts of shaping a single media market across the continent.[22] JSF started in 1969 with four countries represented – Belgium, Italy, Germany, and France – and it rose from a very similar ambition, with Charles De Gaulle allegedly "said to have contrived

the idea" (Harvey, Fielder, & Gibb, 2023, p. 3). For sure, Bourdon's remark says something about the hiatus between top-down and bottom-up ways to Europeanization, with strategically released pan-European contents failing the test of people's interest. In this section, I am making the argument that news coverage is affected by a similar bias, with national frames filtering out the EU-related contents. This is the more relevant, when one considers that the Europeans mostly get news about the European Union through their *national* media outlets: TV, press, and radio (Table 1.12).

On the whole, 52% of EU citizens primarily use TV as a source of information about the Union; 23% prefers the Web; 9% the newspapers; 6% the radio; and 6% social media. In only three countries does the web serve as the main source of news: in Czech Republic, Estonia, and Latvia; with the radical specificities of Baltic countries to be kept in mind, which may easily explain such exceptions to the rule. To be clear, that people mostly use TV for being informed – rather than newspapers, or the web – is not surprising, per se. As a

Table 1.12 Getting news about the European Union by country, winter 2020–2021 (first source of news)

Country	*TV*	*Press*	*Radio*	*Web*	*Social Media*
AT	45%	16%	8%	15%	11%
BE	41%	27%	11%	15%	6%
BG	67%	1%	1%	16%	9%
CY	49%	1%	4%	27%	13%
CZ	37%	4%	5%	51%	3%
DE	50%	12%	9%	20%	8%
DK	48%	16%	9%	20%	6%
EE	35%	9%	8%	43%	5%
ES	51%	6%	5%	26%	3%
FI	42%	21%	4%	30%	3%
FR	48%	11%	12%	17%	4%
GR	41%	3%	4%	39%	13%
HR	56%	3%	3%	29%	8%
HU	48%	2%	3%	38%	7%
IE	33%	18%	13%	24%	12%
LT	44%	6%	6%	37%	7%
LU	25%	27%	14%	24%	10%
LV	38%	2%	8%	41%	11%
MT	38%	10%	3%	23%	24%
NL	38%	25%	4%	28%	5%
PL	53%	3%	5%	32%	6%
PT	60%	9%	3%	23%	5%
SE	42%	17%	13%	21%	7%
SK	49%	3%	6%	26%	15%
EU27	52%	9%	6%	23%	6%
EU28-UK	52%	9%	6%	23%	6%

Source: Euro Barometer

matter of fact, in recent years the importance of newspapers has decreased in *any single* country – including Slovakia, where it was already very low (29% of the population in 2017, and 22% in 2020). What is more, in the 2017–2020 timespan only in three countries has the use of “online sources” for getting news increased, and very little: Netherlands (+1%), Norway (+2%), and Poland (+3%). While there are no variations at all in Austria and Spain, percentages are even decreasing, to a different degree, in no less than thirteen countries: Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Slovakia, and Türkiye.[23] Scientific literature can furnish an explanation, as it is widely stated that at the current state the news is not simply merged with other contents – as it was already in the case of *infotainment* or *politainment* – while appertaining to a new modality, we can refer to as that of “networked publics” or “affective publics”. Upon this modality, news may well be shared and delivered, without people even accessing official sources; and with no perceived discontinuity between information, game, flirt or socialization (see Boyd, 2010; Papacharissi, 2014).

In the last section, I observed that TV consumption has been reducing its decrease, in the last decade, and in some countries it has even increased. What is rather confounding is that TV is in good health – while its information offering *is not*. If we level down the discourse to this specific content, in fact, we bear witness to a very serious decline in the relevance of TV news, in all the countries where the data are available, with the exception of Greece, where a moderate increase is registered (Table 1.13).

Table 1.13 Relevance of TV news, 2013–2020

Country	+/–
AT	–10%
BE	–12%
CZ	–9%
DE	–15%
ES	–9%
FI	–11%
FR	–20%
GR	+1%
HU	–5%
IE	–2%
IT	–1%
NL	–13%
NO	–11%
PO	–16%
PT	–3%
RO	–18%
SE	–8%
SK	–13%
TR	–7%

Source: Reuters Institute for Digital Journalism

Table 1.14 Source of news in European countries, 2020; percentage of the population

Country	*On line (all kinds)*	*TV*	*Print*	*Social media*	*For pay online news*
AT	71%	68%	51%	45%	11%
BE	77%	63%	33%	41%	12%
BU	86%	77%	24%	71%	10%
CZ	88%	76%	24%	49%	10%
DE	70%	70%	33%	37%	10%
DK	80%	62%	21%	47%	17%
ES	79%	63%	34%	56%	12%
FI	88%	64%	37%	43%	19%
FR	66%	64%	15%	39%	10%
GR	92%	67%	24%	71%	11%
HR	88%	76%	36%	55%	7%
HU	84%	67%	15%	64%	10%
IE	80%	74%	32%	50%	12%
IT	74%	73%	22%	50%	10%
NL	77%	67%	33%	39%	14%
NO	88%	61%	25%	52%	42%
PO	87%	65%	24%	66%	20%
PT	80%	78%	33%	58%	10%
RO	83%	66%	15%	50%	16%
SE	84%	64%	28%	50%	27%
SK	79%	66%	22%	54%	12%
TR	85%	68%	42%	58%	NA
UK	77%	55%	22%	39%	7%

Source: Reuters Institute for Digital Journalism

Even more decisive to our argument, is that in any single European country people state to browse online sources more than TV, for searching news – with the partial exception of Germany, where both TV and the Web are equally used by 70% of the population (Table 1.14).

3.3 Conclusions

Let us summarize this last evidence, starting with a prudential statement. As is commonly the case, the metrics of the different reports are not consistent with each other: sometimes, the most common news source is isolated as a variable; whereas in the last survey, it is the share of audience using the different media. By and large, in any case, the impression is that we face two different – if not opposite – tendencies. In absolute terms, and more than likely in their daily life, the Europeans are well used to collect news through the web and social media: with these data being in line with global figures, and in particular with the consolidated practices of American citizens, as delineated in both the Pew Center and the Reuters documents (see respectively Newman, Levy, & Nielsen, 2016; Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). According to the most recent statistics, the quota of Europeans that have used social media

for getting news "in the last week" is 40% for Facebook (with an additional 11% using the Facebook Messenger); 23% for YouTube; 16% for WhatsApp; 14% for Instagram; 9% for Twitter; 4% for Telegram; and 5% for TikTok, which however is still raising in popularity (Newman et al., 2022, p. 25). In order to be informed about European affairs and the EU, on the very contrary, the Europeans *mostly rely on the national media*, and namely on television. What this purely empirical finding may suggest, is that a continuous national framing of the European discourse is in place, and more so in the coverage of sensitive topics.

Based on the review of scientific literature, it is a frequent acquisition that the European news are framed as national concerns. A topic-modelling analysis of 130,000 news related to the refugee crisis in five countries – Hungary, Spain, Germany, UK, and Sweden – detected relevant differences, derived from the traditions of local journalism: with Swedish outlets focusing on "the human-interest frame", for instance, and the Spanish on the role of the EU (Heidenreich, Lind, Eberl, & Boomgaarden, 2018, pp. 179–180). De Vreese, Peter, and Semetko set out to study the introduction of the common currency as portrayed in the "main evening news programs on the two most widely viewed channels" in four countries: Denmark, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands. As a result, German and Danish media emphasized the impact of the Euro on local affairs, both micro- and macro-economic, with the British and the Dutch offering a wider range of interpretations (2001, pp. 116–117). On a bigger scale, cross-national variations are also measured by Schuck et al. (2013), in their content analysis of the 2009 European elections, as depicted by 58 TV channels and 84 newspapers, in 27 countries of the EU. Díez Medrano and Gray's more "descriptive" work confirms this, individuating variable approaches to the media coverage of European affairs – particularly in relation to the frames of "security and peace" and "economy, trade and prices" – proposed by a given set of news outlets in Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, and the UK (2010, pp. 203–204). It is possibly emblematic that the debate around the European Constitution – which was a rare, if not unique case of news "reported from a European angle" – has been accompanied by negative tones, with the journalists themselves being very critical about the accomplished results, and about the "EU institution's press work" as well (Gleissner & de Vreese, 2005, pp. 227–228).

Let us take a step forward. The Europeans are mostly informed by television about the European Union, we stated, which is clearly in countertrend with their common habit of searching for news online. This is a salient aspect, when one considers that getting news in social media *is statistically correlated with a positive view* of the European Union. This is laid out in the clearest way in a study covering Germany, the UK, Greece, Sweden, Czech Republic, and Romania ("the largest country in each stage of EU enlargement", the methodological premise goes). What the regression analyses show is that the use of social network sites for searching news – unlike the use of

blogs, for instance – is a predictor of both support to, and positive opinion on the European Union (Mourao et al., 2015, pp. 3203–3206). This result is consistent with those of Hänska and Bauchowitz's analysis on a corpus of 583,244 tweets related to the 2015 Greece bailout crisis, showing that the Europeans can use social media to build an "ad hoc transnational European communication space that displayed hallmarks of vertical, horizontal and supranational Europeanization" (2019, p. 11). This notwithstanding, we may face an ambivalent issue, in the end. In one way, the last findings seem to suggest that additional investments in social media engagement would be key to the shaping of a pan-European public sphere. The counterpoint is that anti-European ideas can spread as fast as pro-European ideas: as Dutceac Segesten and Bossetta (2019) brilliantly put it, "Euroscepticism contributes to the Europeanization of national public spheres", exactly as 19th-century nationalism and the contemporary populism are actually a *cross-European* phenomenon (see Weller, 2021, pp. 76–77, 275). Additionally, more granular evidence – and namely the correlation between *a specific use* of social networks sites and the pro-EU positions – allows for the hypothesis of a deep divide between two cultural factions, separated by how much they are attracted by global trends (what we have already individuated with the spaces/flows dyad).

The pattern that is beginning to come into focus, once again, is that the European dimension is somewhere in the middle, between the local one of traditional media, and the global one of online platforms. An additional aspect to be singled out, in conclusion, is that *internationalization* should not be mistaken for *Europeanization*, as we already happened to claim. In Chapter 4, I will draw some theoretical conclusions concerning this aspect.

Notes

1 Internationalizing of media studies has been called for, amongst the others, by Myung-Jin Park and James Curran (2000); Daya Thussu (2009); Jürgen Osterhammel (2015); Dennis Nguyen (2017); Hanan Badr and Sarah Anne Ganter (2021). In Chapter 4, I will take into consideration some theoretical implications of these proposals. Practically speaking, in the meantime, it is a fact that despite the repeated call for de-westernizing media scholarship, the "contribution of non-core regions" to the scientific canon – namely, to the papers indexed in the Journal Citation Reports – is still very limited (Demeter & Goyanes, 2020, pp. 11–13).

2 I am mostly referring to Schiller (1996); Tunstall (1977, 1986). It is particularly evident in Schiller the embracing of a purely American perspective on global communication (1996, pp. 91–94), which will be addressed in the fourth chapter in its turn.

3 This research task has been coordinated by the New Bulgarian University team, also responsible for the methodological plan, and namely by Dessislava Boshnakova, Evelina Christova, Stokyo Petkov, Boriana Gosheva, Desislava Dankova, and Justine Toms. In the other countries, data collection and analysis has been realized by Yasemin Gümüş Ağca and Irmak Dündar in Türkiye; by Vilhelm Andersson in Sweden; by António Vasconcelos in Portugal; by Ioanna Archontaki

and Achilleas Karadimitriou in Greece; by Sofie Van Bauwel and Daniël Biltereyest in Belgium; by Volker Grassmuck in Germany; by Nico Carpentier and Miloš Hroch in Czech Republic; by Panos Kompatsiaris and Andrea Miconi in Italy; by Valentina Latronico and Francisco Lupiáñez-Villanueva in Spain. For the methodological explanation, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable D3.1- Methodological Framework, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

4 For the methodology, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable D3.4- Catalogue of Best Practices and Main Obstacles to Europeanization, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

5 Due to the aggregated data that we have used, it is not possible to calculate the number of unique followers.

6 A notable exception in this sense is Crolley and Hand (2006), which analyzes European and national narratives in the press coverage of sport events. On the role played by the UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) in pushing towards Europeanization, see also Vonnard 2020.

7 Statistical elaboration and data visualization have been realized by Alessandro Galeazzi, at the time a member of the Ca' Foscari team in the EUMEPLAT project. For the methodological details, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable D3.5- Video Data Clustering Report, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

8 See, for instance, European Parliament Research Service, 2019, pp. 9–17.

9 At the analytical level, Vaccari and Valeriani's work provides extraordinary insights into the state of on-line participation. On the other hand, one may argue that the authors are tempted to take a theoretical shortcut, when contesting the well-known thesis of web balkanization. It is a fact that such idea has been vulgarized into asserting that social media, per se, would make democratic dialogue impossible. More seriously speaking, though, the question is not whether digital platforms have generated on their own the homophily bias – which exists in the off-line experience as well. The question is whether or not social media is creating a more fragmented and polarized environment *when compared to the previous media*, and in particular with respect to the ability of TV to merge the different social spheres, pointed out by Joshua Meyrowitz (1985). Vaccari and Valeriani shortly acknowledge this aspect (2021, pp. 88–89), which we should probably bring to the forefront of the discussion.

10 I am referring, among the endless possible examples, to Keen (2007, 2012); Carr (2011); Turkle (2011, 2015); Twenge (2017); Lanier (2018).

11 See, for instance, Rainie and Wellman (2012); Rheingold (2012).

12 This issue will be partially addressed in Chapter 4, though we do not have space for an in-depth discussion about deglobalization. For its current interpretations, see Balsa-Barreiro, Vié, Morales, and Cebrián (2020); Kornprobst and Paul (2021); Paul (2021).

13 I will discuss the most authoritative among the critiques to methodological nationalism, that of Gerard Delanty, in the third chapter of this book.

14 It is a fact that John Ruggie is never quoted in the *Information Age* trilogy, howbeit Castells (1996, 1997, 1999) basically uses his very same concept and terminology.

15 The authors' standings are radically different, in terms of theoretical approach: Harvey works at the fine-tuning of the Marxist paradigm, whereas Piketty adopts a marginalist framework (and not accidentally, he does not provide any conceptual definition of *capital*, as paradoxical as this may seem). What is significant, is that they do agree on this common finding, for what concerns the social stratifications of the XXI century society.

16 Interestingly enough, it is quite common in academic debate to associate misinformation, hate speech and fake news *only* to right-wing politicians and militants, which is hardly credible, scientifically speaking (see, for instance, Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018, pp. 105–140 in particular; Bratton, 2021, pp. 154–155;

Ekman, 2019, pp. 554–555; Filkenstein, 2020, pp. 3–6; Frimer & Skitka, 2020, pp. 846–848; Klein, 2020, pp. 195–196; Suhay et al., 2014, p. 659; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021, p. 43).

17 Also in this case, New Bulgarian University was in charge for the methodology and the workplan of the research task, for which the credits go to Dessislava Boshnakova, Evelina Christova, Stokyo Petkov, Boriana Gosheva, Desislava Dankova, and Justine Toms. As to data collection and analysis at the national level: for Belgium, Femke De Sutter, Daniël Biltereyst and Sofie Van Bauwel; for Czechia, Miloš Hroch and Nico Carpentier; for Germany, Volker Grassmuck; for Greece, Stylianos Papathanossopoulos, Ioanna Archontaki, and Achilleas Karadimitriou; for Italy, Panos Kompatsiaris and myself; for Portugal, António Vasconcelos, Sofia Ferro Santos, Rita Sepúlveda and José Moreno; for Spain, Valentina Latronico, Jim Ingebretsen Carlson, and Francisco Lupiáñez-Villanueva; for Sweden, Vilhelm Andersson; for Türkiye, Yasemin Gümüş Ağca, Lutz Peschke, Irmak Dündar, and Seyedehshahrzad Seyfafjehi. For the methodology, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable D3.1- Methodological Framework, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

18 The fact that a small segment (the niche market of Belgian documentary) follows the same rule as that of the blockbusters (the top-watched movies on Netflix), more theoretically speaking, would be consistent with the "free-scale" nature of the Web: according to which the distribution of all services, regardless of its scale, is regulated by the power-law. This is also considerable, as the long tail is actually the final part of the very same statistical curve we know as 80/20, or power-law (Barabási & Albert, 1999, pp. 509–510); an aspect that Anderson will fall short in problematizing (on this, see also Barabási, Albert & Jeong, 1999, 2000).

19 All in all, this is actually the main goal of the book: giving justice to the stratification of layers – national, regional, European, and global – by which contemporary media landscape is made. On the role of blogging in setting the standards of social media communication, see Lomborg, 2014, pp. 75–85 in particular.

20 This research task has been coordinated by the National and Kapodistrian University, and namely by Stylianos Papathanassooulos.

21 Such integration has led to the institution of the cooperation platform known as Baltic Films, active between 2005 and 2009, and it has been eventually ratified at the highest level with the 2015 agreement among the National Film Centre of Latvia, the Estonian Film Institute and the Lithuanian Film Centre. The purpose of the accord is to provide a framework, "establish co-production fund for films and TV-productions between Baltic States", and to promote the "distribution of Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian films" in the three countries. See the *Cooperation Agreement between National Film Centre of Latvia, Estonian Film Institute and Lithuanian Film Centre*, 2015. Retrieved from www.lkc.lt/docs/Collaboration-Agreement-between-the-Baltic-Film-Institutions.pdf.

22 See the Television without Frontiers (TWWF) Directive (1989), available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/television-broadcasting-activities-television-without-frontiers-tvwf-directive.html.

23 Source: Elaboration on World Association of News Publishers and Reuters data. This research task has been coordinated by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens team, and namely by Stylianos Papathanassopoulos. For the details about the research, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable D1.3- Patterns in Media Consumption, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

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2 Divided Europe
The regional patterns

1 Comparing media systems today

1.1 On macro *and* meso *regions*

All in all, the regionalization of Europe is an issue not specific to media and cultural studies: on the contrary, such dilemma has frequently drawn the attention of scholars and policymakers. Alfred Toynbee possibly contributed to canonize the three-space model in its contemporary interpretation, at the time of World War I – for "this war, and the diplomatic struggles which preceded it, have pressed the question of nationality upon the attention of all Europe" (Toynbee, 1916, p. 9). Resulting from the clash among the ambitions of the most powerful states, the resilience of some "fragments of nations", and the legacy of the super-national empires, three macro-regions would take their shape, that can be summarily referred to as Western, Central, and Eastern Europe (ibidem, pp. 52–53). What is relevant, is that Toynbee was well aware of the precarious, if not arbitrary nature of such delimitations: an aspect to be taken in mind, as a substantial shortcoming of the media systems model, as we will see, is the normative tint it has taken on in scientific literature. In particular, Toynbee observes the misalignment between two geographical patterns: respectively, those based on "nationality" and cultural identity, and those based on "economics" and material traffics – or, how Federico Chabod would say one generation later, "the geographical individuation and the cultural-moral-political individuation do not match each other, or not yet" (1943–1944, p. 18). The historical explanation goes, in Toynbee's view, that "most living European nations have attained self-consciousness" way before the industrial revolution, which would give "rise to economic organization on the modern scale" (Toynbee, 1916, pp. 32–33). If we embrace the idea that Europeanness rests upon the balance between the material and the discursive (Carpentier, 2017, 2021; Carpentier et al., 2023), copying with all the possible disjuncture and asynchronies between the two fields would become a necessary methodological correction to any systemic model.

After World War II, a simplified two-space scheme would be commonly accepted: "West versus East", Oscar Halecki wrote in his seminal work on the

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divisions of European history, is "the basic issue which is emphasized whenever the opposition between different regions and the corresponding spheres of culture is discussed" (1950, p. 105).[1] As Nico Carpentier observed, similar interpretations come at the price of "de-Europeanizing" the central regions and removing from the map a number of "key-cities" of the Mittel Europa, due to the polarization triggered by the Cold War (2021, p. 235). In any case, it is interesting that in Halecki, as it was in Toynbee, material and symbolic patterns do not necessarily overlap with each other, in this case due to the differences between the physical and the cultural regions – with Western Europe being crossed, for instance, by the deep divide between the Protestant and the Catholic civilization (1950, p. 106). Not dissimilarly from the historical ages, therefore, the separation between geographical spaces is not rigid nor it is to be taken for given, and it implies a series of "zone of transitions", characterized by the compresence of inhomogeneous elements (ibidem, p. 109).

In a different fashion, in another classic analysis of European geographical history, Jenő Szűcs put forward a three-region model, including Western, Eastern, and East-Central Europe[2]: with the latter being somehow "squeezed" between the two larger zones (1983, p. 135). By partially elaborating on the aforementioned studies, Gerard Delanty proposed a six-space model, listing out North-Western Europe, Central Europe, Mediterranean Europe, East-Central Europe, South-Eastern Europe, and North-Eastern Europe (2013, pp. 245–263). Northwestern Europe includes the "British Isles", the Netherlands, France, and partially Scandinavia – which might well be a "distinct region" in itself – with Germany placed at the borders with Central Europe (ibidem, p. 245). The latter comprehends Southern Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and partially Czechia, Slovakia, and Slovenia (ibidem, p. 251). In the Mediterranean cluster we can group the Iberian countries, Southern France, Italy, Greece, and some areas of the Southern Balkans (ibidem, p. 248). In the East Central Europe quadrant, Delanty gathers Hungary, Poland, and partially the "former Czechoslovakia" (ibidem, p. 253). South-Eastern Europe "concerns the Balkans, including Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, Greece, and Romania" (ibidem, p. 257), and North-Eastern Europe, finally, the Baltics, Kaliningrad, Belarus, Ukraine, "and possibly Moldova" (ibidem, p. 261). If anything, Delanty's work reminds us of how porous all borders actually are, and that the regional divide not necessarily overlays with the barriers between the nation-states. Mishkova and Trenscényi (2017) set forth an alternative scheme, with the continent being organized into a series of "mesoregions": Western Europe; Scandinavia; The Baltic; The Mediterranean; Southern Europe; Iberia; Balkans/Southeastern Europe; Central Europe; Eastern Europe; and Eurasia. Such composition, along with the more complex ten-space pattern, results from the historical assemblage of heterogenous forces, as the overarching goal is that of assessing how "European transnational (meso)regions have, and are being conceptualized over time" (2017, p. 2; italics removed). In his turn, Delanty paves the way to a geo-cultural schematization based on "meso-regions" rather than on "macro-regions":

in short, transnational units that can be made of two countries, or by *some areas* of *different* countries, in comparison to the conventional solution of grouping the territories into larger entities (see Medeiros, p. 2013). In this regard, it has been extensively observed how the *meso* dimension is seldom considered in the official discourse around Europe, and that the EU itself either prioritizes the macro or the micro-regional organization. The first one has a main role at the institutional level (Sielker & Rauhut, p. 2018) and it has been implemented in the European Council framework (McMaster & van der Zwet, 2016), as it would respect the canonic principles of international cooperation (Dubois, Hedin, Schmitt, & Sterling, 2009, p. 4) and better serve the purposes of regulation and governance (Gänzle & Kern, 2016). The micro-regional or sub-regional pattern rather comes to play when it gets to the most dynamic innovation districts and to the technological transfer in Europe (see Leydesdorff, Cooke, & Olazaran, 2002), and it has inspired, for instance, the INTERREG program (see Witte & Braun, 2015). In the media field, not dissimilarly, the global industry is "characterized from a geographical point of view by a heavy concentration to a limited number of large cities, where large media clusters have emerged" (Karlsson & Picard, 2011, p. 3). In other words, the global market hinges on the gathering of infrastructural resources and human capital in a few innovation milieux, which are usually identified with urban areas or micro-regional spaces: in Europe, for instance, Bavaria, Amsterdam, London, but also Montpellier, the Scottish Silicon Glen, the French Midi, and some experimental enterprises in the Southern area, from Bari to Malaga (Castells & Hall, 1994, p. 7). It is also relevant, if not emblematic, that according to the EU nomenclature, by meso-region – identified with the markers NUTS 1 and NUTS 2[3] – it is intended a medium-size territory, whose dimensions range from "the city or district level" to "the level of the nation" (Roth, 2007, p. 19). Upon this understanding, meso-regions would belong either to the national or to the sub-national level, in other words: which is fairly legitimate, while bringing with it serious conceptual complications. For sure, this geographical pattern does contradict the world-system theory, for which "capitalism was from the beginning an affair of the world-economy and not of nation-states; with national barriers historically used as a "defensive mechanism of capitalists located in states which are one level below the high point of strength in the system" (Wallerstein, 1974, pp. 401–402). This nexus between European spatialization and world-system pattern will be investigated in the last chapter of the book.

When compared to the institutional appeal of the *macro* dimension, and to the operational utility of the *micro*, the transnational meso-regionalization idea is more specific to scientific research, and in particular, it has been introduced and sustained by the historians working on the case of Eastern Europe (Troebst, 2010, pp. 78–80). In this chapter, we will firstly deal with a typical macro-regional theory – the one accepted in comparative media studies – before analyzing two alterative hypotheses, respectively based on macro-regions and economic divisions; and on meso-regions and commercial media

strategies. Overall, the objective is to enrich the discussion around European media, by giving justice to the plurality of geographical scales and patterns by which the landscape is composed. As it has been noted,

> there is considerable doubt at present as to whether the supranational, national or subnational units of organization should be dominant within the European polity. This uncertainty may be attributed to the multitudinal identities that make up the European political space – European, national, regional and local – all of which compete for power.
> (Longo, 2003, p. 477)

While the *micro* and the *macro* dimensions are more commonly addressed, in this sense, one goal of the chapter is to argue whether the division of Europe into meso-regions – either due to co-production agreements, sharing of common languages, or geo-blocking commercial plans – would offer a better understanding of media industries, in comparison to the larger systems we are used to, at least since Hallin and Mancini's (2004) comparative work. As to the communication ecosystem, there has been traditionally little attention to its connection with European regionalization, despite its role in defining geographical spaces is recognized since Harold Innis' pioneering work on the material backbones of human civilization (Innis, 1950): probably since it is only in the 1980s, that Europe caught up its historical delay, and "managed to compete with U. S. communication" companies at the global scale (Mattelart, 1996, p. 54). In some cases, the standard categories – and namely the macro-regions of northern, southern, western, and central Europe – are plainly transferred into the information field (Valcke, Pickard, & Sükösd, 2015, p. 7), and also the UNESCO statistics on media freedom and development are premised on this scheme (see for instance UNESCO, 2014, pp. 68–88 in particular). There is little doubt, in this sense, that Hallin and Mancini's work is to be considered the most significant attempt of building a geographical taxonomy, grounded on the laws specific to the media sector.[4]

1.2 Two problems with the comparative media approach

In their investigation on media systems, Hallin and Mancini make use of four crucial dimensions: the development of the media market, with attention placed to the peculiar role of the press; the size of what they call "political parallelism"; the level of journalistic professionalism; and the degree and kind of the state intervention in the communication and information sector (2004, p. 21). The emphasis they put on the written press, to start with, is possibly due to both the example provided by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, and to the embracing of a normative view of media industries, and their relations with democratic societies. It is also clear that the authors aim at building an ideal-typical scheme, with qualitative insights being more relevant than statistical data: hence, for instance, the insistence on the gulf

between the popular and the elite dimension of daily press, respectively in Northern and Southern Europe (ibidem, p. 22).

By political parallelism, secondly, Hallin and Mancini refer to the links between political parties and the media, which can take the shape of four different versions. In the "government model", by definition, the media are under the control of the political majority; while at the opposite, the "professional" way is set apart by the autonomy of news outlets form the other powers, as in the venerable case of the British BBC. The "parliamentary" or "proportional" solution is rather denoted by the influence of different political forces, in proportion to their electoral relevance; and the "civic" or "corporatist" would split the responsibility of controlling the media between the parties and other social actors, among which associations and trade unions (2004, pp. 30–31). The two main concrete cases would therefore be those of the "external pluralism", with a variety of available channels reflecting different ideologies; and the "internal pluralism", with all outlets, regardless of their number, committed to represent various standpoints and positions (ibidem, p. 29). Journalistic professionalism, in its turn, can be measured by considering three indicators: the already cited autonomy of journalism; the existence and strength of professional norms, horizontally shared by the professionals; and the orientation towards the public service (ibidem, pp. 34–37). As to the role of the state, Mancini and Hallin hold on the establishing of a public broadcasting, with a minor space dedicated to other forms of interventions, such as hate speech laws, or professional secrecy guarantees (ibidem, p. 43).

It is no secret that Hallin and Mancini are not specifically interested in the Europeanization process, unlike many authors which have subsequently worked at the application of their model. The ideal-typical forms they came out with, therefore, can be labeled as Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist; North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist; and North Atlantic or Liberal, also including the United States. The Polarized Pluralist system is characterized, first of all, by a low literacy rate, resulting in the elite circulation of the newspapers and in the hegemonic role of TV, and coupled with a notable level of polarization. The state plays an influential part, either in terms of regulation, control exercised over the news outlets, or direct funding of the press. The qualification of journalism is generally low, with outlets being frequently owned by non-media companies, and a weak consensus on the professional standards and rules (ibidem, pp. 98–134), easily degenerating in what Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) had defined as media *clientelism*. Regarding the geographical scope, this cluster includes Italy, Spain, Greece, France, and Portugal – to which we may arguably add Cyprus and Malta. As we will debate again, the collocation of France is particularly problematic, here and elsewhere, with some historical anomalies already noticed by Hallin and Mancini themselves (2004, pp. 97 and 121).

The geographical coverage provided by the Democratic Corporatist model encompasses Northern and Central Europe, and in fact, the countries that

have first recognized the freedom of the press as a fundamental value: Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (ibidem, p. 147). The main features, in this case, are a high literacy rate and a proper mass readership, in the press market, and a relevant – though not invasive – role of the state, whose interventions also caused a delay in the introduction of the private broadcasting. In opposition to the Mediterranean case, a high level of journalistic professionalism is established, also made possible by the self-regulation capability of the press sector. The democratic maturity of the system is attested by its "segmented pluralism", which gives space to the variety of traditions, ideas and interests diffused in society at large (ibidem, pp. 151–173).

The North-Atlantic model, finally, is deeply grounded in the Anglo-American tradition, which, as Mancini and Hallin aptly observe, it is not as unitary as it is commonly considered to be (ibidem, p. 198). Such model is distinguished by the mass diffusion of the press; by a medium to strong professionalization of journalism; and by the "relative" autonomy of the media from the state, with the fact-centered news reporting reducing the space for subjective opinions, and therefore limiting the rate of parallelism (ibidem, pp. 198–230). In the latter case, some judgmental bias is evident, as confirmed by the idea that, upon the Liberal system, the place of politics in the media arena is not in orienting their contents, while in being held accountable by the news outlets, as the outmost fulfillment of the democratic goals of the press (ibidem, p. 241).

On the whole, the importance of Hallin and Mancini's book could hardly be exaggerated, inasmuch as it opened up a new and fruitful season for comparative media studies.[5] For the purposes of this chapter, more practically speaking, it makes sense to remark upon two specific aspects: the expected convergence of the different models towards the liberal type; and the already mentioned normative implication of the classification put in place by the authors. In the chapter about "forces and limits of homogenization", to start with, Hallin and Mancini take a resolute stand: not only is convergence affecting the media systems, but this process is of *endogenous* nature – a "change *internal* to European society", and only modestly accelerated by the pressure of external factors, and namely by technological innovation (ibidem, pp. 256–260; italics in the original). The decisive factors at the roots of the homogenization course are therefore the modernization and secularization of societies, and the commercialization of media systems (ibidem, pp. 261–267). Even though the authors do not directly deal with such issues as the European identity – nor they contemplate all the European media industries – this statement somehow synthetizes a perspective on Europeanization, possibly accepted at the time: that geo-cultural divisions would be gradually overtaken, and a common, integrated market will eventually shape out.

Curran, Iyengar, Lund, and Salovaara-Moring explicitly appraised the hypothesis of a convergence impulse in the evolution of media systems: in their words, the path of a common "movement towards entertainment-centred, market-driven" arrangements (2009, p. 5). For this goal, they compared

the two Liberal countries, the US and UK, and two Democratic-Corporatist, Denmark and Finland. More precisely, they took into account the two major TV channels and two or three selected dailies per country; and they analyzed the contents, respectively, of the "main evening news" shows and of the "main news sections", in the period between February and April, 2007 (ibidem, pp. 8–9).[6] As to the results, the prime – and predictable – difference is that American broadcast is all focused on soft news and on local issues, with the European public service media rather paying attention to the overseas event: in the end, British and American outlets only look abroad when it comes to the geopolitical interests of their own nations (ibidem, pp. 11–12). Interestingly enough, the analysis of newspapers' contents unravels a diverse pattern: in this respect, American dailies are more concerned with *hard* news than the European, and "British and Danish press prioritize" domestic news "more than the American and Finnish press" (ibidem, pp. 12–13).

In their theoretical inquiry on the relationship between media systems and globalization tendencies, Flew and Waisbord make an additional argument against the convergence hypothesis. In short, they see two divergent forces, albeit of different nature, that would counter-balance the process: the permanent power of the state in regulating the markets (2015, p. 625); and the role of the cities as innovation incubators and hubs for creative industries (ibidem, p. 622). By taking in her turn a theoretical stance, Katrin Voltmer observes that the original Hallin and Mancini's overview only covers eighteen countries (2012, p. 225), and that widening the discourse to the global scene would inevitably reveal the existing of "new types of media systems" – thus necessitating the *multiplication* of the models, more likely than their merging into a unique paradigm (ibidem, p. 235). With a similar goal, Ramus Kleis Nielsen assessed the evolution of six media markets – Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the US – to explore their possible confluence towards a common pattern, or their expected "Americanization". Four indicators are identified for the purpose, more or less directly derived from Hallin and Mancini's framework: the newspapers industry per capita revenue; the commercial TV per capita revenue; the level and kind of "internet use"; and the state funding of public service media (2013, p. 396). Had the convergence thesis been confirmed, some empirical evidence would have been expected, and namely: the alignment of newspapers revenue to the American average; public service media losing ground, and "advertising and audiences" moving "to private providers in Democratic Corporatist and Polarized Pluralist" countries as well; a similar diffusion of the Web in the different nations; and finally, the decrease in public funding of the media in Europe, with the adoption of a more liberal management methodology (ibidem, p. 397). As a result, no trace of convergence emerged from any research question: though the rise of pay TV and the internet can be partially "seen as example of the increasing importance" of American-born media forms, in the end, "both have in many ways developed in quite different ways" (ibidem, p. 399–404). The main reason of this divergence, as laid out by Nielsen, is that post-Fordist systems – unlike the Fordist – would work against standardization, and

therefore valorize different interests, and favor niche markets and "structural differences" (ibidem, p. 408). This explanatory part is possibly less convincing, in Nielsen's analysis, as it is contradicted by post-Fordist accumulation rather giving rise to unheard-of knowledge monopolies, and even to a new industrial gigantism. For our aims, in any case, I will remark upon the contribution of his study to the fine-tuning of comparative media studies. On the one hand, Nielsen does not take a clear position about a relevant aspect of Hallin and Mancini's hypothesis, the idea of an *endogenous boost* to liberal arrangements: as the concept of Americanization can easily imply the action of an exogenous factor, such as the pressure exercised by the most powerful media industry. With this in mind, on no possible reading of the evidence he proposed can it be said that convergence – either towards the American model or to the Liberal system – is the main force behind the current evolution of media markets. Patahanassopolous and Negrine realized a similar exercise, analyzing the de-regulation of European broadcasting between 1980s and 1990s, and tracing the "elements of commercialism" and the possible transition towards the liberal paradigm, which "prevails in its purest form in North America" (2011, pp. 19–20). Even in a relatively small area as Western Europe, the process ends up with three variants: the public monopoly with "mixed revenue"; the private monopoly, albeit limited to Luxembourg; and the more common dual market, fueled by the competition between commercial and state channels (ibidem, pp. 21–22).

In their foreword to *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* – and in force of the contributions collected in the book[7] – Hallin and Mancini loyally acknowledge that the idea of "global media systems . . . converging toward the Liberal model" has been generally dismissed by media scholars (2012, p. 284). Despite the undoubtable influence of the Anglo-American model, convergence is not the "dominant tendency" (ibidem, p. 285); or, at the minimum, it is not to be considered as a "one-way" process (Hallin & Mancini, 2010, p. 64). The two facts – that convergence *is actually happening*, without being the *igniter* of evolution – are both relevant to our discourse around European media: as they remind us that history is not driven by an immanent logic, and it rather results from the assemblage or the conflict between contrasting forces. What makes thing more complicated, as Paolo Mancini has noted, is that the supposed convergence of media systems towards the Liberal order has been studied, as it was inevitable, against the backdrop of the globalization paradigm (Mancini, 2020, pp. 5765–5766). Once again, I need to recall that in the evolution of modern societies, divergent forces come to play so that internationalization *does not necessarily work in favor* of Europeanization, as we will discuss in greater detail in the next chapters.

The second facet of the problem to be considered is the evaluative implication of the systems model. As remarked by Alfonso de Albuquerque, Hallin and Mancini's very taxonomy is shaped by a normative understanding, as the "Polarized Pluralist model is defined in a negative manner", entrenched in its historical delay in relation to the other two orders, rather than in a

positive way (2012, p. 75). This is one of the most critical themes in relation to *Comparing Media Systems*, as the authors had somehow anticipated (2004, pp. 13–15). My argument is centered on the idea that this normative tone results from the legacy of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's contribution, which is the more evident in the case of the liberal model, basically replicating the original Anglo-American libertarian frame – with the very word *liberal* retaining its old sense (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956, p. 57). We will therefore turn our attention to *Four Theories of the Press*, as it can be checked out as the very original prototype of comparative media studies. According to Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, four paradigmatic visions for understanding and regulating media systems have appeared in modern history: the *authoritarian* theory, developed between the 17th and the 18th centuries with the diffusion of the press; the *libertarian*, which sprang out in the late 17th century in England and lately in the United States; the *social responsibility*, which is the real paradigm of the 20th century; and the *Soviet-Communist*, after the Russian revolution (1956, p. 7). The authoritarian theory, the authors argue, has provided the almost "exclusive basis" for determining the social role of the press, for two hundred years (ibidem, p. 10). It reflected the pre-democratic stage in the evolution of Western societies, to the point that the most common tool for regulating the market was the granting of patents to a few privileged actors, authorized to publish news (ibidem, p. 20).[8] By both managing public-owned organs and keeping under control the private media, authoritarian states could exert their undisputed power in the communication field as well (ibidem, p. 19), as simple as that.

The libertarian theory, on its part, was built on the basic principles of bourgeois philosophy, ideally dating back to the 1689 English Bill of Rights (ibidem, p. 47). Freedom of speech and the counter-power function of the press can easily be assumed as the pivotal features of this model; though Siebert, Peterson and Schramm opportunely observe that different "libertarian societies have solved the problem" in various ways (ibidem, p. 65). The social responsibility theory would add to the picture the demand for regulating the press, due to its increasing power, in the name of the necessary complementarity of freedom and accountability. Along with the liberal goal of "serving as a watchdog against government", the media are now vested with the functions of providing the set of information necessary to the political order; sustaining the stability of the system; improving people's knowledge and awareness; entertaining the audiences; and propelling the economic development (ibidem, p. 74). This is basically the theory which has inspired the management of media industries in Western Europe across the last century – not accidentally, the authors state, by establishing a sort of compromise between the principles of individualism and those of collectivism (ibidem, p. 82). A dramatic turn towards the collectivist ideology can be observed, finally and by definition, in the Soviet theory. In this case, the media are instrumental to the consolidation of the Communist party's power, to the fulfillment of its objectives and to the shaping of a totally new social order, exclusively acting as channels for propaganda (ibidem, pp. 120–130). We

may notice that Siebert, Peterson and Schramm sharply separate the Communist from the other totalitarian practices, which would rather belong to the authoritarian type (ibidem, pp. 30–36), due to the fact that Soviet Union, unlike "the Nazis", did not allow any form of private ownership (ibidem, p. 143). Set aside this relevant distinction, though, the authors seem barely aware of the familiarity among the 20th-century forms of totalitarianism, highlighted in its most advanced interpretations.[9] The instrumentality of the mass media to propaganda and their integration "with other instruments of State power", in particular, is not really a prerogative of the Soviet empire, as they opine (ibidem, p. 121), while being a constant in the totalitarian organization of cultural industries.

While it is hardly necessary to recall the relevance and impact of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's book, I will focus on a more singular element. The major complication, here, is that *Four Theory of the Press*, despite having inspired generations of comparative scholars, is more an essay on *media history* than it is on media geography. As a matter of fact, and far from relying on synchronic patterns, the four theories can be put in a precise chronological order: starting with the authoritarian, which was born with the press itself, in the context of pre-democratic societies. After that, a transition would occur, with the "transfer of the mass media from authoritarian to libertarian" (ibidem, p. 47), favored by the "libertarians" opposing public monopoly (ibidem, p. 52). Later on in history, the social responsibility paradigm would *replace* the libertarian (ibidem, p. 75), due to the combination between two major instances: the freedom of speech, inherited from the previous theory; and the case for the protection of collective interest. By drawing on this latter principle – by importing the idea that "freedom and responsibility are inseparably linked" (ibidem, p. 129) – the Soviet order would eventually flip the balance, by subordinating the principle to the goal of building a new world and putting the media at the service of the project.

We may say that both the best and the worst of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's work come from this historical organization. In the first case, I refer to the framing of the four media theories in their long-course history: respectively, the postulates of the authoritarianism (ibidem, pp. 10–15); the dawn of liberalism (ibidem, pp. 41–43); the professionalization of journalism and a less naïve understanding of libertarian slogans (ibidem, pp. 83–85); and finally, the Marxist-Leninist doctrine of a classless society (ibidem, pp. 106–112). As a confirmation of their historical stance, and in spite of the very title of the book, the authors also reflect on how each theory has been adapted in front of the rise of a new communication system, the radio-TV broadcasting.[10] In any case, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's insistence on the persistence of structural historical variables has not caught scholars' attention as much as their comparative ambition; and this long durée dimension has been brought into media studies only in rare cases (Bajomi-Lázár, Balčytiene, Dobreva, & Klimkiewicz, 2020, pp. 278–290; Peruško Vozab, & Čuvalo 2021, pp. 237–242 in particular).

A major drawback of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's study, on the other hand, is that the diachronic perspective is marked by a teleological interpretation of history. The libertarian theory, in fact, expresses the rise of freedom as a modern valor, and human ascent from the darkness of obscurantism. The social responsibility model would perfect the liberal idea, by balancing individual rights with the need of a collective voice and the respect of the common good. Historical course will finally arrive at its tipping point with the Soviet, which picks up on this aspect and instrumentally prioritizes the ideological mission of the press, exactly as it appropriates the principles of social democracy for legitimizing its own power. This teleological and judgmental approach is made evident by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's constant reference to *civilized* (1956, p. 39) and *underdeveloped* countries (ibidem, p. 67), and it arguably explains the normative implications of Mancini and Hallin's comparative model, that the authors themselves acknowledge (2004, pp. 1–10).

1.3 Operationalizing media systems

The importance of Hallin and Mancini's work is confirmed by the impressive corpus of research and analyses that have drawn on their original scheme. For what is of our interest, we can group these studies into three categories: the widening of the geographical scope, with an emphasis on non-Western media systems; the adaptation of the framework to the new technological configuration due to digitization; and finally, the endeavor of breaking down the three ideal-typical categories into material indicators, so as to back up the theory with statistical evidence (see Miconi & Papathanassopoulos, 2023, pp. 16–29; Papathanassopoulos & Miconi, 2023, pp. 4–6). For the specific goals of this book, I will focus on the last strand, as it is the more likely to provide alternative hypotheses about European regionalization. In this section, therefore, I will propose an overview on the most relevant attempts of operationalizing the media systems model, and to bridge together empirical observation and theoretical assumption.

Esser and others' (2012) well-structured study largely draws on Hallin and Mancini, as it compares the TV news and political offer in thirteen countries: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK. By selecting a sample of years over a three-decade span – 1977, 1987, 1997, and 2007 – the authors aim at identifying both "differences in political information opportunities" and the evolution of the "underline trends" across the three media systems (ibidem, p. 249). Based on these data, they sort out five regional groups: one including Belgium, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK; one limited to Germany; the third taking together Greece and Portugal; the fourth comprehending Austria and Switzerland; and finally, a cluster with Italy and Spain. In the countries of the first group, TV offers the most diversified diet, both in terms of programming slots and "access points" for the

audiences. Germany is a very "peculiar case", as public channels show a rich scheduling strategy, while private broadcasters reveal a "poor performance". Greece and Portugal are in an intermediate position, as TV news offer is abundant in quantitative terms and programming time, while lacking "scheduling diversity" at the qualitative level, and, possibly as a consequence of that, attracting a limited audience. In Austria and Switzerland, private channels are too weak to feed public debate and contribute to news circulation, like it was in Germany: but in this case, public broadcasters only release news twice per day, and the non-state outlets limit themselves to their plain imitation. In Italy and Spain, finally, the offer is the less diversified, also due do the adoption of the "American model", with all major channels airing the news shows in the same time-slot (ibidem, pp. 263–265). As the authors bring into play Hallin and Mancini's work, and as their indicators are thereby defined, this research is useful to reflect on the comparative model – exactly for the empirical clusters do not perfectly overlap with the original three-space regionalization.

Brüggemann and others published an even more ambitious contribution, aiming at providing statistical back-up to Hallin and Mancini's "qualitative approach" (2014, p. 1038). By means of a very advanced operationalization of the original dimensions (ibidem, pp. 1044–1051) – that cannot be discussed here in detail – the authors develop two lines of reasoning. Firstly, they assess the consistency of the four classic categories: as a result, while "*inclusiveness of the press market*, *political parallelism* and *journalistic professionalism* showed acceptable levels of internal consistency" – therefore offering an "empirical support for Hallin and Mancini's original conceptualization" – *role of the state* is a spurious and "multidimensional category", consisting of multiple layers (ibidem, p. 1053, italics original). Secondly, they group the analyzed countries according to the empirical data, resulting in a four-space pattern: Northern Europe, including Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden; Central Europe, extending to Austria, Denmark, Switzerland, and the UK; Western Europe, covering Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Portugal, along with the United States; and Southern Europe, comprising France, Italy, and Spain (ibidem, pp. 1055–1056).

The Central model is characterized by a public service-oriented broadcasting, rigid ownership regulation, and low funding of the press. The Northern countries rather showcase "generous press subsidies", along with an inclusive newspapers market, a strong public broacasting, and the highest journalistic proefessionalization. In this respect, the authors observe, the advantage of breaking down the *role of the state* into a sub-set of dimensions is to allow for a differentiation between central and northern countries (ibidem, p. 1056), which Hallin and Mancini had taken together under the category of Democratic Corporatist. Countries of the Western type have in common a weak role of public broadcasting and limited press subsidies; while the Southern model is distinguished by the highest rate of political parallelism coupled, as is often the case, by a modest professionalization of journalism, with both cooperating to the shaping of the "least inclusive" press market

at all (ibidem, pp. 1056–1057). If we look at the geographical pattern, some changes to the original model are quite problematic – for instance, the inclusion of the United Kingdom in the central cluster, and its separation from the US. On the other hand, the Southern cluster includes France, with Portugal rather belonging to the Western class. Such changes to Hallin and Mancini's scheme do not come as a surprise, this time: the collocation of France in a regional quadrant is actually the most problematic; while Portugal is quite often an outlier, according to various statistical variables, in the Mediterranean or Polarized cluster.

In this sense a closer look at the Nordic countries, that Hallin and Mancini group together as Scandinavia, offers additional indications. Practically speaking, in fact, it can be stated that "a single Nordic media market does not really exist even if basic similarities are still evident" (Nord, 2008, p. 107). Differences stand out among the nations, which range from media ownership limitations, state funding of the press, or advertising in public service media (ibidem, p. 106). Such dissimilarities involve both the structural set-up of the system – with a weaker role of public TV in Denmark, for instance – and the professionalization of journalism: with Finnish reporting being more impartial, and the Swedish more similar to the American model; and with a more common political affiliation of the newspapers in Norway (ibidem, pp. 103–105).

Grounded on the methodology defined in the previous study, the same research group released a more recent study, aiming at combining the variables based on Hallin and Mancini's dimensions with selected indicators related to digitization. In such a way, they integrate the model by applying the various categories – media regulation, economic support, freedom of speech, and so forth – to both the legacy media and the online platforms (Humprecht et al., 2022, pp. 152–153). The cluster analysis reveals the existence of three patterns, largely overlaying with the original media models. The first one includes the Nordics countries, along with Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, and it clearly corresponds to the Democratic-Corporatist pattern. The second one comprises Eastern and Southern media markets, and namely: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain. The third group rather takes together countries which were originally allocated in different categories; France, Italy, and Portugal from the Mediterranean model; Belgium from the Democratic-Corporatist; the US, the UK, and Ireland from the Liberal; and three Eastern countries, Czech Republic, Estonia, and Lithuania (ibidem, pp. 155–156). This "hybrid cluster" is marked, the authors conclude, by average values in most of the statistical categories, and therefore it would not falsify Mancini and Hallin's model, as the included countries were probably not representative of their own geo-cultural cluster (ibidem, p. 157).

Independently from Brüggemann and his colleagues, albeit in the very same period, Peruško, Vozab, and Čuvalo (2015) released a similarly sophisticated operationalization of the media systems' categories. More precisely, they isolated four major dimensions: overall *inclusiveness of political, social,*

and economic institutions, measured by means of the official indicators on the state of democracy; *digital media market*, based on the circulation of newspapers and on the diffusion of online services and devices; *media culture*, quantified through the import/export balance of creative industries; and finally, *globalization* and global connectivity indexes (2015, pp. 347–350). Clearly enough, the authors' intention is to extend Hallin and Mancini's reasoning to the platform environment and to the "hybrid media systems" (Peruško, 2021, pp. 41–43), so as to fill the existing gap in comparative media theory.

A first cluster is characterized by lower inclusiveness, a moderate degree of globalization – and therefore a less open creative economy – along with a less developed digital market, and a notable level of TV concentration. This is the circumstance of Eastern Europe – precisely, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia – and also the case of two countries originally included in the Mediterranean type, Greece and Portugal. The nations of the second group are united by high inclusiveness and globalization, generally developed digital market, low TV concentration, and an open creative economy. This cluster basically overlays with Western Europe, as it comprehends Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the UK. In a similar vein, the third cluster reproduces the geographical map, as it includes Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, due to high inclusiveness and globalization, highly developed digital market, low rate of TV concentration, and an only "moderately open" creative economy. As to the last cluster, Israel stands out as a very peculiar case, due to the combination of various factors: lower political inclusiveness and higher social inclusiveness, relatively low globalization, moderately developed digital market, highest TV concentration and less open creative economy (Peruško Vozab, & Čuvalo 2015, pp. 353–355). We argue, in the end, that the most significant deviations from Hallin and Mancini's scheme are justified by the authors excluding the role of the state from the picture: something that could explain the break-down of the Polarized Pluralist type, in which public powers play a supreme role, and the allocation of Italy in Western Europe, and Greece in the Eastern cluster. A possible reason behind this methodological choice made by Peruško Vozab and Čuvalo, we suppose, is the axiological dimension too easily implied by the theory of state – and by its very notion – that I will discuss in the conclusive part of this section.

In line with Mancini and Hallin's main research goals, Ciaglia took a closer look to the link between political powers and the media, by working on three exemplary cases: the English BBC for the Liberal model; the German ZDF for the Democratic Corporatist; and the Italian RAI for the Polarized Pluralist (2013, p. 446). Results show that the interaction between political and media actors appears in "different forms" in all countries, so that the real cases would fall somewhere in the continuum between the abstract poles (ibidem, pp. 450–452). Aalberg, van Aelst, and Curran (2010) worked as well at the refinement of Hallin and Mancini's scheme, by comparing political TV

news in two Liberal countries, the US and UK, and in four countries usually clustered in the Democratic Corporatist type – Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. In each case, the authors collected data from the most used TV guides about the four major broadcasters, in the years 1987, 1997, and 2007. As system theory generally allows for synchronic analyses, such longitudinal perspective – here and in general – is of paramount importance in revealing a number of differences among the nations, and variations across time. Firstly, the offer of political news has increased in all the considered European countries, over the three-decade period, while decreasing in the American broadcasting: where, on the other hand, daily advertising time has grown (ibidem, p. 26o). In almost all countries, the commercial channels progressively air political news during the peak hours; this time, with the anomaly of the UK (ivi). All in all, a most relevant difference pops out, which separates the United States, where public service media play a minoritarian role, from Europe, where they get a wider audience, though with a few exceptions (ibidem, p. 263–264). At a more granular level, what is more, no consistent pattern would be found: the audience of political news has shrunk in Norway, Sweden, the UK, and the US, while remaining stable in Belgium and Netherlands (ibidem, pp. 264–265). As the authors point out, several "statistics demonstrate that there are also significant differences in TV news consumption among the various countries", regardless of the system they belong to (ibidem, p. 264).

A final consideration is needed about the empirical evidence I have reviewed by means of secondary analysis. What is to be pointed out, is that the divergence between the original model and the statistical patterns hardly confutates Hallin and Mancini's interpretation; more likely, it puts on the foreground an epistemological implication that the authors have possibly neglected. I am referring to the iatus which separates the ideal-typical categories – such as Mancini and Hallin's – and the empirical evidence. Ideal-types, Max Weber wrote one century ago, are nothing but an analytical construct, obtained by "the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view", as a backdrop against which to observe the "diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concerete individual* phenomena" (1922, p. 77, italics original). There is little doubt, in this sense, that an idealtypical model, *per se*, would hardly pass the test of empirical validation: if anything, because idealtypes are mutually exclusive, while data collection always unravels vast grey zones and endless mixed cases (Gehring & Oberthür, 2006, pp. 325–334). How problematic the adoption of such neo-Kantian categories may be, is confirmed by an additional complication: that the idealtype easily implies, already in Weber's reflection, an inevitable orientation towards the structure of values by which intellectual activity is inspired (Weber, 1922, p. 76 in particular). The methodological and the historical problem are actually one, as the isolation of the nation-state as a unit of analysis brings with it – and yet back in Weber – an explicit or implict idea about social order, and a sweepingly judgmental approach (see Fitzi, 2009, p. 36; Mommsen, 1984, p. 187).

1.4 The perspective of audience practices

The studies I have considered so far, and the literature on media systems in general, mostly deal with the overall organization of media markets, with a few selected macro-social indicators, and with some deepening about the regulation of the communication compart. Starting with Hallin and Mancini, on the other hand, little attention has been paid to media *consumption*, besides the purely quantitative estimates of newspapers circulation. For this reason, in this section I will try to bring into the discourse the dimension of audience practices, and when possible, its qualitative aspects.

It makes sense to start this literature review with Tomas McCain, whose clustering of European countries, based on audience's metrics, was realized in 1986, way before the formulation of the comparative media method (and, surprisingly enough, it has never been quoted by comparative media scholars, including Hallin and Mancini themselves). McCain gathered data related to a wide set of indicators: TV and "color TV" access and viewing minutes; diffusion and use of the videorecorder; radio and "car radio" reach; penetration of teletext, telephone, and cable TV; circulation of newspapers; and the cost of all these services, in proportion to the average national income (1986, pp. 235–236). Beyond the details, and sticking to the big picture, three statistically consistent clusters emerge: Dutch Belgium, French Belgium, and Netherlands; France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK; and Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland (ibidem, pp. 240–243). As one can see, there is no clear correspondence with the three macro-regional entities that would be built upon the structural organization of the market: with the partial exception of the last cluster, which largely – but not perfectly – overlays with the Democratic Corporatist group.

A few years after Mancini and Hallin's input, Elvestad and Blekesaune (2008) usefully integrated the model with an in-depth inquiry on one of its most prominent dimensions, the relevance of newspapers. More precisely, they considered the daily reading time in 23 European countries[11]: an indicator that is complementary, as they repeatedly state, and not alternative to the gross diffusion of newspapers itemized by Hallin and Mancini. It appears, in terms of results, that individual variables – among which gender and education – influence reading time more than national constants (ibidem, pp. 433–435), so that the overlapping with the three classical zones is far from perfect. On average, reading time is higher in Democratic Corporatist countries and lower in the Mediterranean: nonetheless, the ranking is unexpectedly topped by Ireland, with 53 minutes per day (ibidem, pp. 432–433) – the last country being Greece, with 16 minutes. When compared to the system regionalization we are used to, it also strikes the low figure of daily reading in France and Belgium (22 minutes per day), and the relatively low rate in Denmark and Luxembourg (respectively 31 and 30.9 minutes, compared, for instance, to 30.2 in Hungary, and 32.1 in Slovenia).

Along a similar line, Fletcher and Nielsen (2017) adopted the media systems pattern for studying audiences' practices in online news environments, by considering six countries, in representations of the three codified spaces: Germany, Denmark, France, Spain, United States, and the UK. By relying on the data collected for the 2016 Reuters report – a survey of 50,000 subjects in 26 countries – the authors address the continuum between audience fragmentation and audience replication, across the different online platforms (ibidem, p. 484), and they model users' behavior through a classical network analysis (ibidem, pp. 486–488). Two results stand out, among those presented in the article. Firstly, the fragmentation of the public varies from country to country: for instance, news audience networks overlap "less in the UK and Denmark" than in Spain and in the United States (ibidem, p. 491). Secondly, there is unexpectedly no correlation between the increase in available "news media environment" and the dispersion of the audiences; and in some cases, the "high-choice" online spaces are even less scattered, in terms of audience duplication, than the "comparatively low-choice offline news media environment" (ibidem, pp. 490–491). According to Fletcher and Nielsen, what makes the difference is the perceived quality of the offer: as a matter of fact, fragmentation would not increase with the competition among different outlets, as in the current theses about cyber-balkanization; but rather, when a *single* organ takes on a hegemonic position, therefore excluding alternative positions and keeping many users out of the official picture (ibidem, pp. 491–492). On the one hand, the research confirms the importance of what Hallin and Mancini had called "internal pluralism" for tackling societal polarization; and in the other way, it shows, in its turn, that convergence is not the commanding major force shaping the platform media landscape. As already observed in Chapter 1, additionally, doubts can be cast on the idea of social media promoting radicalization, as polarization may well be due to broader societal issues, that we still have to put in to focus.

A more advanced attempt of bringing the audience dimension in comparative media studies has been produced by Peruško, Vozab, and Čuvalo. Their ambition is to apply the structure/agency dyad to the media field (2013, pp. 139–140), by confronting the geographical pattern drawn by structural variables with the one inferred from people's consumption choices. We do not have the space to discuss, in all its theoretical implications, the proposal of coding the audiences' activities – or the "mediatization of practices" (Peruško, 2017, p. 759) – as a form of *agency*: though, on a general note, we do agree on "communication theory . . . rarely relat[ing] agency and structure" and barely facing the major dilemma in social theory (Peruško, Vozab, & Čuvalo, 2013, p. 141). What is relevant here is that the authors come out with two different geographical maps. The regionalization of Europe hinged on the structure of the market – and based on variables akin to those used by Hallin and Mancini, or derived thereby – results in a three-space organization (ibidem, p. 148): the "South and Eastern European model" (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Spain); the "European

mainstream model" (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and UK); and the "Scandinavian model" (Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden). While the possible resemblance between the Eastern and the Southern media systems have been largely discussed, for the moment it has to be highlighted the misalignment between this pattern, and the one depending on people's use of press, radio, TV, Internet and social media (ibidem, pp. 143–144). In the latter case, only two consistent ways of media use stick out: the "Southern" (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Spain), and the "Northern" (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germania, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, and UK), respectively connoted by "lower" and "higher mean score" in the use of radio, newspapers, internet and social media, while no relevant differences appear, in this case, in TV watching time and practices (ibidem, p. 150).

Finally, an additional study can be cited, which proposed a regionalization of Europe grounded on a totally qualitative analysis of audience's behavior. Vittadini and others (2015) reflected on whether the use of portable devices, besides their statistical penetration, is changing the relation between the people and their environment, by studying *where* the media are used. Five groups or spatial patterns, in this sense, are empirically identified: *flexible* people, using the media almost everywhere but in particular in public transportation; *ubiquitous*, which by definition deal with the media in any possible place; *hardworking*, mostly doing so at the workplace; *secretive*, which privilege private spaces and especially the bedroom; and *homebodies*, which mostly stay connected from their living room (2015, pp. 422–423). The aspect I will single out, for our interests, is the comparison between the considered countries, based on a total of 10,492 cases: Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Poland, and Portugal (ibidem, p. 427). In this case, the authors' ambitious goal is to provide a link between socio-demographic variables and the European scenario, as the "spatial uses of media still tend to reproduce some traditional patterns of inequality in mobility" (ibidem, p. 429).

As to "country-specific configurations", the authors write, "notable dissimilarities emerge regarding the distribution of the five patterns" (ibidem, pp. 426–427). Croatia has the highest rates of Flexible and Ubiquitous profiles, while in Belgium and Hungary the use of the media in public spaces is particularly rare – with Belgium having a strong ratio of Hardworking and Homebody; and Hungary a high quota of Secretive. In Northern European countries, the Homebody group is "notably larger" than the Secretive group, probably due to the organization of daily life, with the online access from the bedroom being more frequent, we may suppose, where young people leave the parental household at a more advanced age. Needless to say, we are in face of a methodological issue – how to combine the *in-depth* evidence of qualitative analysis with the wide *extension* necessitated by comparative studies – which leads us into an uncharted territory.

So, who is right, in the end, and how many regions should we count? *Three*, as in the original definitions of the geo-political divisions in Europe – or as in the three patterns identified by Hallin and Mancini? *Five*, as it is customary in geographical studies – Northern, Western, Central, Eastern, and Southern (i.e., Manić, Mitrović, & Popović, 2017) – or perhaps the *six* clusters codified by Delanty? Is Europe split into *two* modes of media use, or even in *two* social entities hostile to each other, in a new version of the conflict between the space of flows and the space of places (Ruggie, 1993) – the pro-EU part, where the media are trusted and the press holds a strong reputation; and the anti-EU part, where the fog creeps, and official news rarely win the heart of the people? Is Europe *one*, due to the EU case for a digital single market, or is it still an archipelago of *many* identities, either national, regional, or local?

As this paramount question will be addressed in the next chapter, let us draw some conclusions about the macro and meso-regional pattern in the organization of media markets. Firstly, it makes sense to recall that any regionalization results from arbitrary choices, and for this very reason, it can easily be contested. According to Michael Keating, these artificial constructs may belong to six ideal views of European regionalism: *integrative*, aiming at the cooperation among different places; *competitive*, dealing with the economic advantages reached or claimed by one territory; *warfare*, based on the defensive reaction of marginal areas; *identity*, inspired by the principles of people's self-determination; *government*, expressed by the articulation of local administrations; and *interest*, when the geographical delimitations refract those of the on-site business activities (2017, pp. 11–16). Finding the place of the media in this intricated pattern, in its turn, comes at the price of sharp methodological choices and painful exclusions, and requires prioritizing one aspect over the others. From my side, as I will detail in Chapter 3, I will opt for interpreting the divisions in European media systems along two axes: that of vertical and horizontal Europeanization; and that of top-down and bottom-up Europeanization.

An implicit consequence of this discourse, is that regionalization of Europe would take a different form, depending on the set of variables taken into exam. In the case of TV watching, for instance, we can group European countries in six clusters[12]: *very high use*, with over 300 minutes per day on average (Romania and Serbia); *high use*, between 250 and 299 daily minutes (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, and Türkiye); *medium-high*, between 200 and 249 minutes (Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain); *low to medium*, between 150 and 199 minutes (Austria, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, UK, and Italian Switzerland); and *low* use, below 150 minutes per day (French and German Switzerland, Luxembourg, Sweden, and Norway). If we move to the statistics related to radio listening, and released by the European Broadcasting Union, we see the emergence of four different clusters. A first type is that of strong users, with an average of more than one hour per day: Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovakia,

and Slovenia. A second group takes together countries with an average daily listening between 50 and 59 minutes: Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Malta, and Netherlands. In Lithuania, Polonia and Portugal, people listen to the radio, on average, between 40 and 49 minutes per day; and finally, less than 40 minutes in Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, and Spain.[13] As to the online media, and by combining data related to the access with more granular information about the sessions of use, Hasebrink and others (2015) proposed a three-space pattern: *heavy* use, in Belgium, Germany, and the UK; medium use, in Croatia, Hungary, and Poland; and *low* use, in Italy and Portugal (2015, pp. 448–450).

How to deal with this multiplicity of patterns, in the end, might become a paramount research question for the years to come. Any analysis, I stated, requires sharp choices: in other words, in order to study the "shifting spatial pattern of human activity", with this activity being "infinitely varied" in itself, "*selection* and *organization* become major problems" (Pounds, 1990, p. 4, italics added). "Abstraction and quantification", Franco Moretti echoes, are necessary steps to the individuation of geo-cultural patterns, whose meaningfulness is "proportional to the simplicity" of the indicators (1997, pp. 4–5). Somehow, we are back to Max Weber: to the need of isolating one aspect of the real, to be unilaterally accentuated – but *which aspect* must be selected, is a matter of conceptual priorities. It is not always the data we lack: sometimes, it is a strong theory.

2 Economic divisions and media markets

2.1 Four economic regions

The positive correlation between the economic health of a country or region and the state of media infrastructure is a historical constant, which took its current proportions with the development of the telegraph and the first globalization of communication flows – in a way that would close the distance between media evolution and the overall world-system scheme (Hugill, 1999, p. 242). This notwithstanding, media studies rarely made room for economic spatializations, and they have commonly put into focus the diffusion cycle of innovations, despite Everett Rogers' (1962) original, and always-cited work saying a very few words about the case of media markets.[14] In this section, I will adopt a synchronic perspective, so as to cope with the regionalization of Europe drawn by the economic forces. I will therefore isolate a basic indicator, such as the average pro-capita income, and specifically, I will bank on the four-region model defined by Ivan Berend by the use of this same parameter (see Table 2.1). In this respect, the author develops the classical three-space division accepted by the European Union, in terms of "more advanced", "transitions", and "less advanced" regions (2020, pp. 78–79). Interestingly enough, Berend frames this geographical pattern in the same tension between the "special and unique dynamics" of each country – or the

Table 2.1 Four European economic macro-regions

Region	*Countries*	*Average pro-capita income*
Northern Europe	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Lichtenstein, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, UK	49,317 USD
Mediterranean-Irish	Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain	31,198 USD
Central European and Baltic	Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia	15,635 USD
Russia-Turkish-Balkan	Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine	6,241 USD

Source: Berend, 2020

"fragmented and parochial kind of capitalism" – and the broader convergence tendence fostered by financial globalization (ibidem, pp. 57–58 and 153), that inspired Mancini and Hallin's conclusions. The serious utility of Berend's proposal, in our view, is in abstracting the economic element from the context and grouping together totally different cases (i.e., Ireland and Greece; or Hungary and Slovenia), which evade the perimeter of material cooperation areas and sub-regional clusters, and only have in common the selected macro-indicator. In other words, and for this very same reason, it is a way to pinpoint the economic factor as an independent variable and put it to the test.

Berend's approach is deliberately unilateral, and there is no question that it overlooks many other aspects of the European economic organization. As we do not have space for indulging in this and other methodological aspects, I will highlight the very practical advantage of his model: exactly that of singling out a *sole* variable, resulting in a clear regional pattern and in a sharp difference between the four clusters. A deep divide is visible, in fact, between the high-income (49,317 USD on average), the medium-high-income (31,198 USD), the medium-low-income (15,635 USD), and the low-income countries (6,241 USD). For what concerns media markets, it will not come as a surprise that the distribution of the most recent technologies – web and social media – is particularly affected by the average income, with the economic and the media clusters basically overlapping with each other (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3). The diffusion of both Internet connections and social media respects Berend's pattern, with the four regions – Northern Europe, Mediterranean-Irish, Central European and Baltic, and Russia-Turkish-Balkan – arranged in the same order. As is always the case, the average values make the outliers hardly

Table 2.2 Diffusion of internet connections in the four economic regions, 2022 (percentage of population)

Region	*Considered Countries*	*Average*
Northern Europe	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, UK	94.25 %
Mediterranean-Irish	Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain	86.58%
Central European and Baltic	Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia	85.6%
Russia-Turkish-Balkan	Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine	79.53%

Source: Elaboration on ITU- International Telecommunication Union

Table 2.3 Diffusion of social media in the four economic regions, 2023 (percentage of population aged 18+)

Region	*Considered Countries*	*Average*
Northern Europe	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, UK	81.06%
Mediterranean-Irish	Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain	75.28%
Central European and Baltic	Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia	71.66%
Russia-Turkish-Balkan	Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine	63.97%

Source: We Are Social-DataReportal

visible: France, for instance, is not properly in line with the other countries of the Northern Europe region; Portugal is a few steps ahead of the Mediterranean area; and the same can be told, to a various degree, for Estonia and Albania, when compared to the other nations of their clusters. In the case of a synoptic observation, and besides the variations internal to each class, we can state that the macro-diffusion of digital media is basically aligned with the distribution of wealth.

The large overlapping between the two samples, though, should not prevent us from considering alternative explanations to the plainly economic

one. In other words, it remains unclear whether the inequalities are caused by the lack of advanced infrastructures and the role of low-income laggards – which are economic variables – or they also have to do with the *cultural* implications of the platform society. As it has been repeatedly observed, the 24/7 mobile connection and the so-called networked individualism express a specific form of identity, akin to what can be defined the neo-liberal self (i.e., Dean, 2013, pp. 141–143; McGuigan, 2013, pp. 82–83). I have made a similar argument in respect to the comparative media theory, as the different systems were expected to converge towards the liberal model – and still, empirical observation has basically confuted this hypothesis. In both cases, a question arises as to whether – in the multi-layered structure of the platform society – internationalization tendencies are leading to a common European pattern, or rather towards a *world* dimension, which, as such, can be subject to variable spatializations, and to alternative hegemonies as well. And if so, *which is the best road to Europeanization*: following these global trends, or contesting them, in the name of the European tradition of nation-states? In Chapters 3 and 4 I will deal with these prominent research strands.

If we go back to the statistics, and as it was likewise foreseeable, the previous indication is mirrored by the data related to TV watching time, with a daily average of 3 hours and 15 minutes in the Northern European region; 4 hours and 14 minutes in the Mediterranean-Irish region; 4 hours and one minute in the Central-European and Baltic region; and 4 hours and 18 minutes in the Russia-Turkish-Balkan region.[15] That TV is more popular in the less wealthy areas is not a surprise, as it possibly provides an easy substitute for more expensive forms of cultural consumption; but once again, we cannot axiomatically exclude the impact of different, and non-economic causes. Another data would confirm the major divide between areas more and less influenced by TV and provide a hint of its relevance for Europeanization processes: the use of the press for getting information about European affairs. In short, newspapers are mentioned as the first source of news by 19.1% of the citizens in the Northern region; 9% in the Mediterranean-Irish region; 4% in the Central-European and Baltic region; while in the case of the Russia-Turkish-Balkan region, data is available only for Bulgaria, though it is quite impressive and possibly telling (1%).[16]

Despite the clear intersection between the economic and the media pattern, it is necessary to conclude with a consideration of carefulness. As observed in the first chapter, late capitalism is segmenting societies in a new way: resulting, following both Piketty's statistical series (2013) and Harvey's (2014) theoretical inquiry, in a decrease in the disparities among countries, and an increase in the internal imbalances within each country, albeit in both cases to a variable degree. As to Europe, within nation inequalities are even more radical in the recently admitted or candidate countries (Heidenreich, 2003, p. 322), and they are based on the opposition between urban cosmopolitism and service regions; or core industrial regions and economic peripheries (ibidem, pp. 332–333). "In a multilevel system like the European Union", as

Heidenreich elegantly put, "social conflict are defined mainly in territorial categories" (ibidem, p. 313): and this is evidence that the media studies will have to carefully consider in the next future.

This assumption is also relevant at the methodological level, as the national data are reliable as long as the nations are relatively homogeneous; or, more technically speaking, when the real cases follow a normal distribution. Not only is the deepening divide between the rich and poor, or between connected and disconnected areas – also labeled as a flows/spaces juxtaposition – reshaping our societies: it questions as well whether the nation-state is still the right *unit of analysis* for comparative studies, when the internal data are drifting away from the median value. As Wallerstein put it, the observation of a single national case hardly allows for understanding the transition from an historical stage to the next: "if the proper entity of analysis is the world-system", on the other hand, we can give justice to all the contradictions and asynchronies of geographical units, as a world-economy is characterized by both "a single division of labor and multiple cultural systems" (1974, pp. 389–390). Needless to say, this methodological option is not in contradiction with the long-lasting persistence of national cultural boundaries, that I have discussed in the first chapter: the centrality of the nation-state may well be a *finding* of the research, in fact – it has not to be its *premise*.

2.2 *A matter of trust?*

By touching on the previous indications, we investigated the possible correspondence between the economic divisions and the distribution of media trust across Europe. It is hardly necessary to remind the urgence of this topic, as trust in the news has been constantly declining in Europe, with almost half of the EU citizens stating that their media outlets are "not free" (Siapera & Sighele, 2017, p. 140). As we do not have to space for a detailed literature review on media trust, I will list out the analytical dimensions which are relevant to our discourse. A first aspect to be observed is that research efforts have been mostly dedicated to the identification of the factors causing people's distrust in media: either in terms of systemic or individual causes. As to the most structural variables, it is universally accepted that trust in the media is positively correlated with the freedom of press, which in its turn happens to be the highest in Northern Europe.[17] At a closer look, this notwithstanding, this correlation looks more tendential than conclusive, and not always confirmed by the empirical research: possibly depending on the specificities of the countries selected for the observation, and on the unclear distinction between two indicators – trust in the *media*, and trust in the *news* – that should not be used interchangeably (Kalogeropoulos, Suiter, Udris, & Eisenegger, 2019, p. 3684). In this respect, Macek and others proposed a more granular observation, in their study on 3,654 Europeans living in Estonia, Czechia and Greece, and aged 14–25. Based on the breakdown of common categories into a series of statistical sub-sets related to age cohort and people's opinion, it appears that media trust is largely influenced by the

national context, and its predictors, in their turn, significantly vary from case to case (Macek et al., 2018, pp. 347–350).

If there is a general agreement on media trust being linked to the freedom of information at the macro-level, dealing with the *individual* variables has proved to be way more complicated. A survey on people living in German Switzerland and aged 16+, for instance, shows “mixed results” in terms of media use and political orientations, and no correlation at all in the case of socio-demographic indicators: media trust, in the end, appears to be mostly associated with the exposition to news via public service broadcast (Arlt, 2018, pp. 238–244). Schranz, Schneider and Eisenegger worked on the 2016 Reuters report data, in order to assess the state of media trust in thirteen countries, grouped in their respective regional system: Switzerland, Austria, UK and Germany for the Central type; Norway, Sweden, and Denmark for the North; Italy, Spain and France for the Southern cluster; and the US, Ireland, and Belgium for the “liberal” or Western model (2020, pp. 79–80). As a result, some predictors of distrust in the media are clearly delineated: at the macro level, the geographical area, with Northern countries showing a higher level of trust; and at the micro level, with female trusting the media more than men, and middle-aged more than the youth and the elderly (ibidem, pp. 84–85). The strongest predictor, statistically speaking, is people’s media diet: the use of public service broadcast is positively correlated with trust, while an intense use of social media, at the very opposite, is negatively correlated with faith in the legacy outlets (ibidem, pp. 85–86). That the domestic use of the media is beneficial to both a “better knowledge” and “more positive attitudes towards the EU and Europe as a community” is also the finding presented by Scharkow and Vogelgesang (2009, p. 86), based on the 2004 EuroBarometer data. By using the 2017 Reuters statistics on 35 countries, Kalogeropoulos, Suiter, Udris and Eisenegger have reached slightly different conclusions, with the use of both news outlets and social media being correlated with trust in the media: while it is the use of social media as *main information sources*, more precisely, to be correlated with low trust in the media (2019, p. 3673).

Interestingly enough, the macro and micro patterns also diverge in regard to the connection between media trust and media use. At the micro-social level of individual preferences, a correlation immediately pops out (Kalogeropoulos, Suiter, Udris, & Eisenegger, 2019, pp. 3677–3683; Schranz, Schneider, & Eisenegger, 2020, pp. 79–85 in particular; Strömbäck et al., 2020, pp. 147–151), while not showing up, for some reason, at the wider scale of nationally aggregated statistics. This can be observed in both *absolute* terms, with radio being allegedly trusted while occupying a little space in people’s daily life; and in *relative* terms, with the countries more dependent from TV showing a major skepticism about its trustworthiness, when compared to the Northern-European region.[18]

Relevant takeaways are offered by a survey conducted in 2019 on 6,347 people in ten EU countries: Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Greece, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and Sweden (Brosius,

Ohme, & de Vreese, 2021, p. 653). While the hypothesis of a generational gap in this matter is not confirmed, media trust is positively correlated with political trust, and negatively correlated with "perceptions of bias in the media" and negative opinions about the accuracy of mainstream news reporting (ibidem, p. 657). Beyond Europe, and more generally speaking, the impact of "perceived media bias" is also the main acquisition in Ardévol-Abreu and Gil de de Zúñiga's work on the American case (2017, pp. 711–175). In the other way, Brosius, Ohme and de Vreese's conclusion on the generational thesis is not consistent with that presented by Rodríguez-Pérez and Canel: which, grounded on the secondary analysis of the EuroBarometer data about 27 countries, individuates strong differences between men and women, and between young and mature people, in terms of media trust and exposition to misinformation (2023, pp. 35–36). The importance of the latter theme is rather in line with Brosius, Ohme and de Vreese's findings, and it is also comfirmed by Stubenvoll, Heiss and Matthes' investigation, according to which perceived misinformation is the single main predictor of distrust in the media: and in its turn, it grows in proportion to "strong partisanship" and exposure to political contents in one's social networks (2021, pp. 2770–2771). With a similar goal, Shehata and Strömbäck gathered data about 3,327 Swedish citizens aged 18–80 (2022, p. 149). All other things being equal, trust in media proves to be positively correlated with the use of public service media and negatively correlated with the use of alternative right-wing sources, while not varying with the preference for alternative media from the left (ibidem, p. 152). Though the affinity between right-wing orientation and distrust in official media is a widely accepted idea, and it has been largely touched on, some studies actually provide opposite indications. Brosius, Van Elsas and de Vreese's survey on ten countries, for instance, concludes on the very contrary that "right leaning" is commonly associated to media trust, which is not impacted by the coverage of immigration either (2019, pp. 458–459). A study realized on 200 people in Serbia, similarly, shows no correlation whatsoever between media distrust and the embracing of populist ideas, contrarily to what was expected (Markov & Min, 2020, pp. 71–75).

As observed, there are many spurious correlations between media trust and the covariant factors; and the results largely depend on the expected causation relations and on the methodological choices behind the aggregation of the data. For our purposes, I will break down the general statistics into more granular indicators, related to people's trust in a number of *specific* media – as shown in Table 2.4, with respect to the thirty-three countries for which we could find reliable data.

The most relevant aspect has to do with the divide between the legacy media and the online media: trust in newspapers, radio and TV is generally higher in the richest regions, while trust in the internet and in social media is higher in the low-income areas, in line with other recent findings (Fotoupolos, 2023, p. 8). In particular, we see that in the former Socialist and Communist countries, and understandably so, the audiences declare a strong diffidence towards the official sources of any kind. All in all, this data might

Table 2.4 Trust in different media in the four economic regions (percentage of the population aged 15+, 2021)

Region and considered countries	*Average trust in the press*	*Average trust in radio*	*Average trust in TV*	*Average trust on the Internet*	*Average trust in social media*
Northern-Europe (AT, BE, DE, DK, FI, FR, IS, NL, NO, SE)	62.66%	71.58%	64.43%	32.08%	13.45%
Mediterranean-Irish (ES, GR, IE, IT, PT)	49.2%	56.6%	47.6%	37.8%	26.2%
Central European and Baltic (CZ, EE, HR, HU, LT, LV, PL, SI, SK)	43%	53.9%	50%	41.2%	24.22%
Russia-Turkish-Balkan (AL, BA, BU, ME, MK, RO, RS, RU, TR)	35.5%	41.5%	50.25%	41.75%	34.12%

Source: Elaboration on Standard EuroBarometer 98, winter 2021–2022

support the hypothesis that the web and the social media – far from having a proper affordance for political participation – are vested with great expectations where the mainstream media are thought of as biased and unreliable, if not censored by political authorities (Jamali, 2015, pp. 12; Margetts, Hale, Yasseri, & John, 2016, pp. 115–118). If anything, our findings confirm the ambivalent status of public service media, whose strentght is positively correlated with media trust in the free countries, and negatively correlated with media trust in non-democratic areas (see Tsfati & Ariely, 2014; Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019). In our case, we found similar evidence in Eastern European nations, where state broadcasting, before the democratic transition, used to be the vehicle of Socialist propaganda, resulting in the long-lasting bad reputation of official outlets.

Let us focus again on this aspect, and on its consequences. The connection between trust in politics and trust in the media – the *nexus*, in their words – has been exemplary illustrated in Hanitzsch, Van Dalen and Steindl's article, which is possibly the most complete and advanced study in this respect. When compared to our research goals, the authors follow different and more ambitious questions: it is true that they limit the observation to the trust in the press, rather than in the different media; but on the other hand, they work at the wide-scale comparison among 45 countries in the world. The

main finding, for our purposes, is the statistically proved correlation between trust in political institutions and trust in the press (2018, pp. 14–15), which makes sense to investigate also in the European case. Based on EuroBarometer data,[19] we put into focus the link between trust in the media and trust in the institutions, and specifically in the European Union, by collecting 32,915 entries related to the state of people's trust. We isolated as independent variable the trust in different media, by using a set of sub-categories: trust in written press; in radio; in TV; in the internet; and in online social networks (see Table 2.5). As a dependent variable, we coded the level of trust in the institutions, and the trust in the European Union. Our colleague Sara Cannizzaro therefore ran a two-step study, including a factor analysis and a logistic regression. We then ran a principal component factor analysis, with the first item explaining 92% of the variance, the second 32%, the third 5%, and the fourth 7%.[20] Therefore, we made use of the first two factors. The results also clustered the three variables related to traditional media around the value 0.7, and the two variables related to online media around 0.5. This allowed us to group the variables into two simple "supervariables": the first including the legacy media – press, radio, and TV – and the second one, the online media, internet, and social media. The logistic regression shows that trust in the media is statistically correlated with trust in the European Union. As one can see, both distrust towards traditional media and online media are a predictor of anti-EU opinions, though the tendency is way more relevant among those which do not trust the legacy media: for the latter, the odds of

Table 2.5 Trust in the media and trust in the EU

Variables	*A. Model 1*		*B. Model 2*	
	Ordered logistic regression showing log odd coefficient (R^2=*0.99)*		*Ordered logistic regression showing odd ratios* (R^2=*0.99)*	
	Coefficient	*95% CI*	*Odds Ratio*	*95% CI*
Traditional media (Trust in traditional media)	1.5	(1.49, 1.61)***	4.7	(4.47, 5)***
2 (tend not to trust)				
New media (Trust in new media)	0.6	(0.59, 0.71)***	1.9	(1.8, 2.04)***
2 (tend not to trust)				
R" is the goodness of fit				
***P<0.001				

Source: Elaboration on EuroBarometer data

not trusting EU is 4.7 times greater, while it is 1.9 greater among those which do not trust the new media (or, what they perceive to be the new media).

It is necessary to remark that our results differ from those presented by Conti and Memoli, based on a similar exercise on the 2011–2014 Eurobarometer data. In that case, internet and social media users do not cluster together, as the latter are significantly more likely to embrace skeptical instances: citizens that "are most engaged in peer-to-peer communication by way of social networking" more commonly distrust the EU than the common "Internet users" (2016, pp. 77–81). We are not in the position of telling whether this discrepancy is due to the evolving situation we have observed, or to the different metrics used; it is a fact, in any case, that trust in the EU is way less diffused among the most active part of the audience (Ivi). Given the ambitions of this chapter, let us rather conclude by discussing the regional dimension of the problem under observation. There is a correlation, as already observed, between media trust and the state of information freedom in each country, as it results from the official reports and rankings. We may suppose, though, that something more important is at stake, as distrust in media brings with it a more frequent skepticism towards the institutions, and the European Union as well. Through the lens of media studies, we have observed here a profound fracture in European societies: the conflict between those which trust the official information, and those which move to the online sources, in search of alternative narratives.[21]

Which conclusions are to be drawn – not to mention the possible recommendations to policy-makers – is a very delicate argument. An overlooked problem with scientific literature on people's trust, in fact, is the same *normative* if not *judgmental* approach, that we had already detected in the comparative media framework. "If we no longer trust the media and turn away from them", Schranz, Schneider and Eisenegger emblematically write, "we lose our bearings to a significant degree", and "our trust in reasoned political decision-making is also lost and our willingness to accept political decisions declines" (2018, pp. 73–74). Analogous bias can be identified in the already cited study by Rodríguez-Pérez and Canel, aiming at individuating people's "resilience to misinformation" and compliance with official standards (2023, pp. 35–36); and to a variable extent, in a vast series of academic publications.

The attention devoted to whether, and to which degree, people believe in the news is an odd constant in recent media theory, and ad hoc investigations will be needed, for understanding what has really changed, in the academy – if the way we conceive our analytical field, or the way we see society at large. In the meantime, it suffices to remark upon the most bizarre intellectual evolution, certified by the undisputed centrality of such rudimentary notions as *trust*; or *fake*; or *truth*. This is the more paradoxical, in the end, when one reminds that the best of communication studies – from the limited effects to the cultural studies, from the Frankfurt School to McLuhan's narcosis, up to the critical internet theory – was all about *not* trusting the media.

3 Geo-blocking and its consequences

3.1 Geo-blocking in VOD markets

A key role in the regionalization of the European media landscape is played by the geo-blocking put in place by the commercial providers. Under this category are included all strategies for the releasing of works at the local or regional level, which prevent users from accessing a given set of contents – or services – based on their geographical position. Even though geo-blocking is a widely reported phenomenon, in this section I will focus on the distribution of movies in video-on-demand platforms, as the VOD offer is impacted in a very particular fashion. According to available estimates, cross-border availability of European contents accounts for 80% of the catalogues in the case of music downloads and 93% in the case of e-books, for instance, while VOD libraries overlap each other only by 30–50% of their titles (Broocks, Duch Brown, Gomez-Herrera, & Martens, 2020, p. 12). Generally speaking, the two most common types of blocking are of economic and legal nature – respectively due to "contractual agreements between right holders and" VOD providers, and to the "territoriality of copyright" itself (Zahrádka & Schmücker, 2022, p. 4). Given the empirical purposes of this paragraph, we will not provide an in-depth investigation on the scientific literature related to geo-blocking,[22] while accepting a basic framework. According to Ramon Lobato's work, we can state the following definition:

> Most major video platforms use geoblocking to filter international audiences. Geoblocking allows these platforms to customise their offerings according to territory, language, and advertising markets, and provides an automated mechanism to enforce territorial licensing arrangements with rights-holders. In this sense it is a form of access control enacted at the level of content and platform regulation, rather than network infrastructure. But geoblocking has more subtle effects as well. Like search localisation and algorithmic recommendation, geoblocking is a 'soft' form of cultural regulation. Its widespread adoption is changing the nature of the open internet by locating users within national cyberspaces and customising content based on certain ideas about territorial markets.
> (Lobato, 2016, p. 10)

That is why, in the run for the digital single market and in the framework of the Digital Single Market package (Hamuľák, Kiss, Gábriš, & Kocharyan, 2021, p. 176), the European Union promoted the Regulation 2018/302 (European Parliament and the Council of European Union, 2018), aiming at eliminating "unjustified geo-blocking and other forms of discrimination based, directly or indirectly, on the customers' nationality, place or residence or place of establishing" (Article 1). By amending the 2006 European Council

Regulation and the Directives 2017/2394 and 2009/22, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU therefore assert that

> a trader shall not, through the use of technological measures or otherwise, block or limit a customer's access to the trader's online interface for reasons related to the customer's nationality, place of residence or place of establishment.
>
> (Article 3)

To date, this notwithstanding, the outcomes of such intervention are far from satisfying. Even though Netflix made the commitment of ending the geo-blocking, no appreciable changes could be observed across the years: as if the overcoming of geographical restrictions was more a discourse strategy than a real industrial policy, as it has been observed (Elkins, 2021, pp. 194–198). As of February 2022, the European Parliament provided an assessment of the 2018 measures: though "the adoption and implementation of the Geo-blocking Regulation has been beneficial for consumers in facilitating cross-border purchases", in short, "certain obstacles persist, particularly in the provision of audiovisual service and content" (European Parliament, 2022). Truth being spoken, these recent improvements must not be overlooked, when one considers that in 2015 "cross-border availability of film titles" was still limited at 16.8% of the total catalogue (Alaveras, Gomez-Herrera, & Martens, 2015). More broadly speaking, in any case, despite such betterments as the simplification of the e-shopping transactions and the so-called portability, the VOD market is still affected by linguistic and territorial fragmentation. It has been argued, in this respect, that regulations also fall short due to the lack of an agreed-upon definition of geo-blocking: so that we stuck to the common-sense understanding of it, meant to be the impossibility for users to access some contents, due to geo-localized copyright lock (Mazur, 2019, pp. 99–100).

A first obstacle to Europeanization – as paradoxical as it may seem – can be detected at the very institutional level of the EU policies. In June 2017, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union had released the regulation 1128, with the aim of favoring the "cross-border portability of online content services in the internal markets" (European Parliament and the Council of EU, 2017). For this purpose, "providers of online contents" are explicitly forbidden to "subject their subscribers to any additional charges for the provision of cross-border portability of online content services in accordance with this Regulation" (Article 19). On the other hand, though, the directive clearly distinguishes between the *portability* of contents and the *access* to those contents:

> The concept of cross-border portability of online content services should be distinguished from that of cross-border access by consumers to online content services provided in a Member State other than their Member State of residence, which is not covered by this Regulation.
>
> (Article 12)

Table 2.6 European films released in European VOD platforms by country, May 2021

Country	*Number of films*	*Share*
France	3,629	22%
UK	1,967	12%
Germany	1,898	11%
Italy	1,627	10%
Spain	1,558	9%
Denmark	593	4%
Sweden	601	4%
Austria	421	3%
Czech Republic	507	3%
Netherlands	552	3%
Other 28 European countries	3,160	19%

Source: Elaboration on Grece, 2021

While the portability has notably improved the user's experience, consequently, at the *upstream* level of the supply chain the geo-blocking is still used as a customization tool, likely to reinforce national and regional markets rather than favoring the rise of a common, pan-European culture, as it was likely in the original goals. The data synthetized in Table 2.6 is not surprising, in this perspective, as it shows how the Big Five account for 74% of the European movies made available in VOD platforms.

A confirmation is provided by the following statistics (Table 2.7), according to which the quota of imported non-national movies, on the total of European movies, drops down in the strongest production countries: 53.2% in France, 56.4% in the United Kingdom, 64.9% in Italy, 66.6% in Germany, and 77.9% in Spain. In all the other nations, the percentage ranges from 81.3 to 99.4% (with the only exception of the Dutch 78%), in a way that basically confirms, in the VOD offer, the very same proportions of the theatrical movie market (see Miconi, 2020).

A more direct indication of the role of geo-blocking can be inferred from Table 2.8. On average, movies produced in the European Union are distributed in VOD platforms in 3.9 countries, compared to 5.4 countries for US movies, 4.9 for the rest of the world, and – more surprisingly – to 4.8 countries for non-EU European productions. In a similar vein, the VOD distribution of TV-shows produced in the European Union covers on average 2.7 countries, compared to 6.9 countries for those coming from the US and from the rest of the world, and to 3.4 for other European releases. As to video platformization and its externalities, the only encouraging aspect for the European common market is that the data reveals a slight improvement, with respect to the TV-on-demand market. As a matter of fact, though, movies and TV-shows produced within the European Union – based on data, I recall, which include the UK – have *the poorest distribution* in Europe, at least in the case of video-on-demand platforms.

Table 2.7 Non-national European movies available on VOD platforms by country (May 2021)

Country	*National movies*	*Non-national European movies*	*% of non-national on European movies*
Austria	1,003	14,983	93.7
Belgium	547	9,470	94.5
Czech Republic	1,242	5,423	81.3
Denmark	1,357	7,343	84.4
Estonia	27	4,849	99.4
Finland	363	7,023	95
Germany	5,543	11,062	66.6
Hungary	112	4,414	97.5
Spain	2,155	7,609	77.9
France	6,995	7,976	53.2
Ireland	285	10,601	97.3
Italy	3,282	6,254	64.9
Lithuania	68	5,051	98.6
Latvia	45	4,903	99
Netherlands	715	5,809	78
Poland	442	5,790	92.9
Portugal	277	5,272	95
Romania	198	3,100	93.9
Sweden	1,112	7,216	86.6
Slovakia	62	2,472	97.5
UK	7,345	9,532	56.4
Average	1,570	6,958	81.5

Source: Elaboration on Grece, 2021

Table 2.8 Circulation of movies and TV-shows by production country (number of countries covered on average)

	EU27	*Other European countries*	*USA*	*Other regions*
Movies in TVOD	2.7	5.2	7.3	4.9
Movies in SVOD	3.9	4.8	5.4	4.9
TV-shows in TVOD	1.5	1.9	2.6	1.5
TV-shows in SVOD	2.7	3.4	6.9	6.9

Source: Grece & Jiménez Pumares, 2021

An even clearer representation of how geo-blocking works is available in Table 2.9, with respect to fourteen VOD markets: ten belonging to the European Union (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden), Japan, Russia, Türkiye, and the US. The meso-regional dimension of movie market is quite evident, here: with German movies widely distributed in Austria; the French and the Dutch in Belgium; the Swedish in Denmark and Finland; and to a lower degree, the Belgian in the Netherlands, for instance, or the Austrian in Germany.

Table 2.9 Availability of movies on Netflix by country (June 2013–April 2015)

Origin/ Destination	*AT*	*BE*	*DE*	*DK*	*FI*	*FR*	*IE*	*NL*	*SE*	*UK*	*US*
Austria	2	6	8	2	2	4	5	9	3	4	12
Belgium	3	35	3	3	3	7	4	9	3	4	19
Denmark	6	7	6	33	22	4	15	5	23	15	25
France	61	113	66	56	57	171	59	59	58	58	189
Germany	93	25	102	29	28	11	31	24	29	31	95
Italy	12	13	15	13	12	14	16	10	10	14	15
Japan	23	15	24	12	10	24	37	11	11	35	116
Netherlands	4	22	1	1	1	4	4	53	1	4	24
Portugal	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	6
Russia	0	3	0	1	1	3	0	1	2	3	6
Spain	14	16	13	15	15	9	14	13	15	15	49
Sweden	6	10	7	21	21	4	6	10	22	6	18
Türkiye	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	4
USA	854	1,080	873	1,423	1,388	820	1,748	1,224	1,438	1,745	4,295

Source: Elaboration on Batikas, Gomez-Herrera, & Martens, 2015

We also have to notice how the figures reflect the huge disparities in terms of catalogue sizes, in the different countries. On a sample of 138 TVOD platforms, for instance, the size varies from 27 to 20,314 movies made available; on a sample of 420 SVOD catalogues, the size ranges from 12 to 27,262 titles, with distribution apparently following the power-law in both cases (see Grece & Jiménez Pumares, 2021).

3.2 How movies travel across Europe

In order to better measure the impact of geo-blocking on the European media landscape, we repeated these analyses on a bigger sample, by working on the full archive of the Lumière Video-on-Demand database[23]: more precisely, 90,510 movies, produced in 31 countries in the region. The considered countries are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and UK. In this case, we could only find aggregate data, with no distinction allowed among different video-on-demand platforms.

The Sankey plot in Chart 2.1 provides a meaningful picture of the video-on-demand market. That each country largely produces for itself – either locally or through the local branch of the global companies – will not come as a surprise, given the national embedding of online platforms, that we have discussed in the first chapter. Clear traces also emerge of meso-regional patterns; for instance, with Swedish titles being destined to Norway, and Austrian movies imported in Germany. On the whole, the influence of the

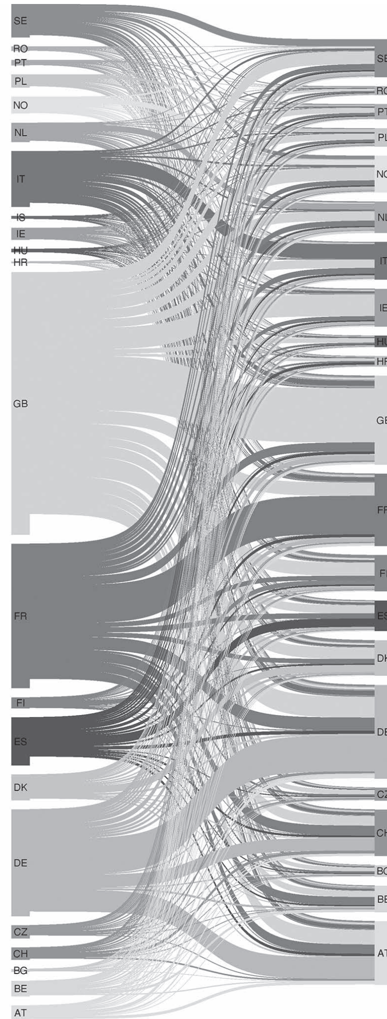

Chart 2.1 Distribution of European movies in VOD platforms, by nationality
(*Source:* Elaboration of Lumière VOD Database)

traditional big five – UK, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy – is confirmed, in clear continuity with the history of theatrical distribution. A more granular observation, on the other hand, allows to detect the specific the role played by French and British cinema, with the two countries taking the center of the stage, controlling a huge part of the exports, and importing a relatively low

number of titles from the rest of Europe. This is actually a familiar image, and similar to that already sketched by Franco Moretti:

> most European countries import from abroad a large portion of their novels (40, 50, 60, 80 percent, if not more), whereas France and Britain form a group to themselves, that imports very little from the rest of the European continent: a fact which has a very simple explanation: these two countries *produce* a lot of novels (and good novels, too), so they don't need to buy them abroad.
>
> (Moretti, 1997, p. 151, italics original)

Despite Moretti is talking about the golden age of the novel, in the 19th century, his words perfectly describe our chart, thus reminding us of the stability of the long duration geo-cultural patterns. The dissimilarity between the two hegemonic nations, Moretti argues, is in what would happen *after* the rise of the novel: with France increasing and even doubling its imports from other countries, and England remaining impermeable to literary transfers (1997, pp. 151–152). What is relevant, this is also a clear difference between the 19th century book market and contemporary movie market, as the United Kingdom *does* import many movies from Hollywood: and the reason behind the difference, as simple as that, is the ascent of the United States as the core of the Western world-system. What history tells us, though, is that the powerful part played the US is *in continuity* with the very rules of the modern world-system: so that the obstacle to cultural Europeanization is not only the hegemony of Hollywood – but also the *internal* hierarchization of European markets. This is the more relevant in light of Thomas Elsaesser's theory, according to which the very idea of European cinema has been traditionally built in opposition to Hollywood, "seen as the significant other" (2005, p. 41). This way "of asserting its identity", Elsaesser argues, has eventually proved to be obsolete, as Europe is becoming itself a "continent of immigrants" and diversity, somehow "like the United States one century ago" (2019, pp. 1–2): and therefore, a new *positive* legitimation is needed, to state what European cinema is, beyond the internal divisions and the consequent economic weakness (2019, pp. 84–85 and 164–167 in particular).

To a lower degree, German productions are quite influential, though they are mainly distributed in Switzerland and Austria, due to the linguistic barriers and the following geo-blocking. One may notice that Germany is also a very vital market, with significant import flows from both France and the UK. With respect to the abundant literature dedicated to the so-called Big Five, inversely, Italy and Spain appear to have a marginal role, and this is perhaps the most significant finding at all. The limited presence of Italian works, on the other hand, would confirm the results of previous research, based on VOD catalogues of both movies (Barra & Perrotta, 2020, p. 105) and TV-shows (Baschiera & Re, 2019, p. 12).

By definition, the world-system requires peripheral and semi-peripheral regions: and so does the world-system of cultural industries. The first indication of the chart, in fact, is that a vast majority of countries import movies from the *core* of the audiovisual production. On the other hand, Central and Eastern European productions are increasingly marginalized, as also proved by a study on the distribution of Romanian and Czech movies in European VODs. As a result, Central-Eastern Europe is put in fringe position, or *peripheralized*, in both quantitative and qualitative terms: due not only to the absolute amount of the available movies, but also to their proportion with the number of nationally produced titles, showing a "clear overrepresentation of French films in the catalogue and a clear underrepresentation of both Czech and Romanian" (Parvolesku & Hanzlík, 2021, p. 11). This disparity is also reflected in the composition of the catalogues, with the offer of French movies covering a variety of genres – including the most popular, the comedy – and Eastern and Central European offer striking for the "limited diversity of its output" (ibidem, pp. 18–19). More technically, though, the data confirms the existence of an intermediate level of medium-sized producers – in particular, Belgium, Poland, Sweden, and Denmark – as already observed by Szczepanik, Zahrádka, and Macek (2020). As we know, the establishing of semi-peripheries is the necessary condition to the hierarchization of the physical spaces, according to the world-system theory – in actuality, it is Immanuel Wallerstein's correction to the Marxist drastic opposition between the rich and the poor. As we can easily infer from the chart, in this intermediate layer of countries there are hardly the conditions for a wide-scale production, likely to generate wealth and revenues. We also know, though, that according to Wallerstein, the semi-peripheries have a *political*, more than an economic role: they simultaneously act as "exploiters and exploited", so as to stabilize the system by preventing the clash between the hegemonic and the subaltern areas (1974b, pp. 403–404).

In the end, we have detected three spaces in the video-on-demand market, which remind us of the core, periphery, and semi-periphery structure: and this would not be an original answer, after all. Still, that things have *not* been changing – at least at this level of observation, and at the current state of knowledge – may well be a finding, in the context of a process, the so-called platformization, which *was expected to change everything*. In the course of the events, Braudel writes in *La Méditerranée*, the actors which "make noise" are not necessarily the most relevant: as history is bound to the limits of what is possible and to the constraints of social structure, and is largely made of "silence", sameness, and repetition (1949, p. 738).

3.3 A focus on small markets

After discussing the role of the Big Five, let us put into focus that of the minor producing countries, as it has been repeatedly advocated by a few

scholars in recent years (see Trappel, 2014; Ibrus & Rohn, 2019). In particular, the analysis of VOD markets is a good occasion for doing that, as small-sized nations fall in a very specific position, due to their dependence on the importations from Hollywood, but also from the European Big Five: "with a handful of exceptions", in fact, "the production budgets for films led by and made in these countries were equivalent to a low budget film in one of the big five nations" (Higson, 2021, p. 215). As one can infer from our data, the international distribution of movies produced by small countries is still the exception to the rule, in the European market, in the age of video-on-demand and video sharing platforms.

I have noticed that from the standpoint of the European Union, and understandably so, geo-blocking restrictions are seen as a main threat to economic and cultural unification: addressed as a political priority already back in the 2014–2015 biennium (Trimble, 2016, p. 61), and even referred to as "potential barriers erected by companies to cross-border online trade in goods and services" (European Commission, 2015). On the very contrary, geographical restrictions are often advocated by video producers and distributors, as they would allow for the valorization of cultural diversities, rather than favoring the homologation of taste and movie consumption (Zahrádka & Schmücker, 2022, p. 14). There is little doubt that the major platforms are making this argument to surreptitiously defend their commercial interests, in response to a classical critique – which on the contrary was, against the backdrop of cultural imperialism, that of making the world too global and uniform, as in Farhad Manjoo's (2019) provocative definition of Netflix as "the most intoxicating portal". This being said, such an argument would deserve an honest and unbiased consideration. As we will see in Chapter 3, the very definition of Europeanization varies from region to region, taking on specific nuances in the core and in the periphery of the system; or in Eastern, Central-Western, and Southern Europe. In a similar vein, the outlook of each country or region on the common market may reflect the well-known disparities, and the huge imbalances between the Big Five and the minor producers. This is why, according to some scholars, the elimination of geo-blocking – if not mitigated by a range of interventions – would risk being detrimental to small countries, in favoring monopolization and exposing them to the competition with strong producers (Dabrovolskas, 2017, pp. 17 and 32 in particular). As noticed by Indrek Ibrus (2016, p. 17) about the Estonian case, "the peripheral country" is attracted, by definition, by globalization forces, but at the same time "it worries about media concentration in the single market and about the evolving market dominance of global players that could have a detrimental effect on the existence of its own national media system".

This premise is necessary in order to properly frame the discourse, and to give justice to the plurality of interests that are affected by the possible convergence towards a common digital market. The data we collected, concretely, are related to the movies first released in video platforms in 2021, and produced or co-produced in ten EU countries: Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia,

Table 2.10 VOD availability of movies released by minor producing countries, 2021

Country of origin/ Countries of availability	*Only the producing country*	*One country (not the producing country)*	*Two countries*	*Three to five countries*	*More than five countries*	*Total*
Austria	11	3	7	14	10	45
Croatia	6	2	0	0	3	11
Cyprus	0	0	0	0	3	3
Estonia	0	2	1	1	2	6
Ireland	1	5	6	7	11	30
Latvia	0	3	0	1	4	8
Lithuania	1	2	2	4	3	12
Malta	0	1	1	1	1	4
Slovakia	3	4	4	3	5	19
Slovenia	0	2	1	0	3	7

Source: Lumière VOD Database

Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia, and Slovenia (Table 2.10). We selected these countries not only based on their dimensions, but also due to the state of the audiovisual industry: in their respective Netflix catalogues, for instance, there are traditionally a few national productions, and in some years in "there were no local films available at all" (Lobato, 2018, p. 247).

By and large, what video platforms are generating is a new "sense of media regionalism", Steinberg and Li opine (2017, p. 173): and the Austrian case perfectly fits the definition, to start with, with 26 movies – out of 46 – only being available in German-speaking areas. In regard of differences, the Croatian production is rather oriented towards the internal market, with six movies only released in the homeland, out of a total of twelve. The regional or sub-regional dimension is relevant in the Slovakian case too, with half of the titles – ten out of twenty-one – only available in the former Czechoslovakia. Once again, this limitation is probably due to the linguistic barrier and to the use of local languages: especially when one considers that in Czech Republic and Slovakia – despite the small dimensions of both markets – the movies have been traditionally dubbed, with the subtitling only recently introduced (Demjanová, 2016, p. 10). What is rather surprising, is the limited number of collaborations with main producing countries, only six: whereas, if we look at recent history, it is a fact that the Slovakian studios "heavily rely on runaway productions to maintain their operation" (Iordanova, 2003, p. 26). The Slovenian case is different: though the small numbers prevent any conclusion about the state of the VOD movie market, the national industry seems to have little impact, both in terms of productions and distribution. This is probably caused by the lack of infrastructure and local entrepreneurship that, as noted by Meta Mazaj (2011, pp. 195–196), makes the Slovenian audiovisual sector dependent on the state contributions, through the Slovenian Film Fund.

The meso-regional stance of Baltic video industries is clearly shown by the data, with local collaborations accounting for almost 50% of the total co-productions released. In particular Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, also due to their small dimensions, have traditionally constituted an integrated market (see Mancini, 2015; Kõuts-Klemm, Rožukalne, & Jastramskis, 2022, pp. 545–546).[24] Such integration has led to the institution of the cooperation platform known as Baltic Films, active between 2005 and 2009, and it has been eventually ratified at the highest level with the 2015 agreement among the National Film Centre of Latvia, the Estonian Film Institute, and the Lithuanian Film Centre. The purpose of the accord is to provide a framework, "establish co-production fund for films and TV-productions between Baltic States", and to promote the "distribution of Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian films" in the three countries.[25]

The public funding of local works is particularly relevant in the Baltic case, due to a serious "concern for smaller markets is the availability of resources to support domestic content", Balčytiene and Harro-Loit write, "as opposed to less expensive but imported content" (2009, p. 518). With this respect, the penetration of global platforms in the Baltics may threaten the consolidated strength of the local production systems, as it questions "how much of the actual user spend reaches the local industries, especially in smaller countries" (Ibrus & Rohn, 2019, p. 55). If we move to Ireland, the state of the audiovisual production sector is very health, judging from the numbers cited earlier. In particular, the role of Netflix in favoring the circulation of Irish contents has been already remarked upon (Flynn & Tracy, 2019–2020, p. 303). As in the case of Baltic markets, though, it remains unclear to what extent the platformization process is beneficial to the local industry, as major players are likely collecting most of the revenues. More technically speaking, this probably comes as a consequence of national regulation, as the 2015 New Section 481 established the requirement for film companies to have an "Irish-based producer, co-producer or executive producer", while it is clearly stated that the rule does not apply to "Internet based VOD companies such as Netflix" (Murphy & O' Brien, 2015, p. 225).

In the case of Cyprus and Malta, finally, figures are too low to allow any statement or consideration – besides the general weakness of local audiovisual industries, and beyond the notable exception of *Luzzu*, a Maltese movie present in 19 different national catalogues. What is possible, rather, is to make a couple of considerations about the general state of small European markets. Firstly, national movies are included in the catalogues of each country, which makes a concrete difference with the previous situation, when this was not always the case (Lobato, 2018, p. 247). As it has been observed, it is probably in 2019 that the VOD providers adapted their distribution strategies:

> For example, Netflix territorial catalogs in Central and Eastern Europe, until 2019, included virtually no local titles (this changed in the second half of 2019, especially in Poland and the Czech Republic), while

> already in 2017 they offered between 3 and 4% of local content in the Netherlands, Denmark and Austria.
>
> (Szczepanik et al., 2020, p. 9)

This notwithstanding, we have to highlight some exceptions to the rule that prevents small countries from being competitive at the international level. Among the productions and co-productions which neither include Hollywood and the European Big Five, in fact, a few movies were widely distributed in European VODs. This is the case of fifteen recent releases, five of which come from Austria: *Beatrix* and *One Extraordinary Year*, both present in 27 national catalogues; *Parov Stelar: Voodoo Sonic*, distributed in 22 countries; *Luzifer*, available in 20 countries; and *Train Again*, available in 31 countries. We can add *Ciary* and *The Sailor*, two Slovakian releases accessible in 27 countries; *Rekonstrukce okupace*, a co-production between Czechia and Slovakia, available in 27 VOD catalogues; and *Gads pirms kara*, a co-production among Czechia, Lithuania, and Latvia, imported in 27 countries as well. Two Lithuanian movies also obtained an unexpected wide-scale distribution: *Piligrimai* and *Techno, Mama*, respectively accessible in 8 and 31 countries. As to the Irish cinema, the exceptions include *Imbolc*, accessible in 11 countries; *Let the Wrong In*, available in 13 countries; and *The Crafty Irish*, unusually distributed in VOD platforms in all the Big Five markets (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and UK). Finally, it has to be considered the already mentioned *Luzzu*, a Maltese movie available in 19 countries. The circulation of these 19 films would trigger a question: is there any pattern behind these anomalies to the rules of regional geo-blocking?

Needless to specify, there are no significant recurrences in terms of artistic traditions; not to mention the notoriety of directors and actors. As to cinematic genre, and based on the Internet Movie Data Base labels,[26] seven of them are *documentaries*: a movie type that is commonly valorized in alternative circuits, and destined to the niche, more than to the mainstream markets. In this sense, it makes sense to put to the test a strong hypothesis in contemporary film studies: the dominant role of festivals in shaping the European movie market. According to scientific literature, and particularly to the recently established *festival studies*, international movie competitions have an impact at different levels: directly, on theatrical admissions (see Mezias et al., 2008); indirectly, on the process of canonization (Vallejo, 2020); and finally on cinema historiography as well (Di Chiara & Re, 2011). As already noted, it is commonly stated that festivals play a peculiar role in the distribution of *European* cinema, due to its lack of geographical concentration and common structures (de Valck, 2007, pp. 104–108; Andrews, 2010, pp. 7–8). In this respect, festivals constitute a network scattered in the continent (Elsaesser, 2005, pp. 82–104; 2019, pp. 277–279), also sustained by the activity of the European Coordination of Film Festivals (ECFF), which takes together around 250 regional kermesses (Ewans, 2007).

By combining information from the MUBI and the IMDB databases, I controlled the festival screening of the 19 movies under observation.[27] As

expected, a majority of these movies has been presented in one or more than one festival: with the exceptions of *One Extraordinary Year*, *Parov Stelar: Voodo Sonic*, *Imbolc* and *The Crafty Irish*. At a closer look, though, it also appears that only six titles have been screened in big festivals (including Cannes, Toronto, Locarno, Rotterdam, Venezia, British Film Institute, and Sundance); and no more than three have been granted with relevant awards: the Cannes Director's Fortnight to *Train Again*; The Venice Orizzonti Award to *Piligrimai*; and the Sundance World Cinema Dramatic Jury Award, in this case for best acting, to *Luzzu*. In this sense, our findings are consistent with Christian Grece's (2021) analysis of the main drivers of VOD availability, which considered a wider set of indicators: perceived quality of the movies, based on IMDB rating and awards; age of production; commercial success in theatres; and country of production. As a result, on average European award-winning movies are more present in the VOD libraries than non-award-winning, but the difference (+3.5) is way smaller than that related to theatrical exhibitions (+7.4). To what extent the festival screening can be considered as a good practice in the promotion of European contents, in the end, is still under dispute, at both the theoretical and the practical level. Firstly, as Thomas Elsaesser observed, the "festival circuit" is not properly open to the world, as Europe and Hollywood "no longer confront each other", while each productive system works at the valorization – or even the "mise-en-abyme" – of its deep cultural specificities (Elsaesser, 2005, p. 104). Along with the risk of self-referentiality, it has to be considered that the externalities of festival networks are not clear, especially in the case of video-on-demand offer. As to the exceptions to the geo-blocking rules, apparently no pattern emerges, as proof of how little we know about the state of European cultural industries.

Notes

1 The relation between Eastern and Western media markets will be discussed in Chapter 4, as it directly affects the very definition of Europe, in the context of the world-system.

2 In a sense, in the field of media studies, these categories are also echoed in Tunstall's tripartition between the five bigger European countries, the small Western nations, and the post-Socialist region (2008, pp. 247–250). I will take into account the work of Jeremy Tunstall in the last chapter, as his idea of a Euro-American conglomerate requires a reflection on global markets and world-systems.

3 This is confirmed by the number of territorial units – respectively 1,242 and 1,166 – which fall under the categories NUTS 2 and NUTS 3. Even more significant, is that the regions are not identified based on their specificities – either cultural, economic, or physical – but in function of the regulation frame they are subject to: NUTS 2 are therefore the "basic regions for the application of regional policies"; and NUTS 3 are "small regions for specific diagnoses" (EUROSTAT, *NUTS-Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics*. Retrieved August 9, 2023, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background#:~:text=The%20current%20NUTS%202021%20classification,regions%20at%20NUTS%203%20level.

4 One may object that Hallin and Mancini's categories originally come from political science – and namely from Giovanni Sartori's analysis of the party systems (1976) – as the authors somehow reckon (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 63–65). Despite being imported and adapted, though, in a more general sense these dimensions are related to *the way the media work*, more than those commonly used in comparative European studies.

5 Among the most relevant studies, we recall here: Castro Herrero et al., 2017; Dobek-Ostrowska & Glowacki, 2015; Downey & Mihelj, 2012; Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008; Mihelj & Downey, 2012; Mihelj & Huxtable, 2018; Peruško, Vozab, & Čuvalo, 2021; Trappel, Meier, d'Haenens, Steemers, & Thomass, 2011. For a discussion around these contributions, see Miconi & Papathanassopoulos, 2023.

6 The research plan is completed by a survey on audience's "awareness" in the four countries, which nonetheless is used to assess people's competence and education, rather than to investigate their motivations and feelings (Curran, Iyengar, Lund & Salovaara-Moring, 2009, pp. 13–14).

7 In the volume edited by Hallin and Mancini, the convergence hypothesis has been partially sustained by Peri for Israel (2012, pp. 19–20), and basically rejected by Boguslawa Dobek-Ostrowska in the Polish case (2012, pp. 39–41), de Albuquerque for Brazilian media (2012, pp. 75–77), Vartanova for Russia (2012, pp. 140–141), Zhao for China (2012, p. 140), and Voltmer from a broader comparative perspective (2012, pp. 225–226). I will not pass in review these contributions, in this chapter, in order to prioritize the empirical approach to media systems.

8 On a marginal note, we can realize here how shortsighted was Karl Popper's idea (1995), which famously called for a mandatory patent for TV broadcasters. Far from being disrespectful, this plain evidence is actually a good news: it shows how even a great scholar – among the most relevant epistemologists ever lived – can make grotesque errors, when discussing problems that go beyond his field of competence.

9 I will limit myself to refer, in this sense, to Hannah Arendt's study on the totalitarian propaganda under the three regimes of the XX century (1951, pp. 341–352 in particular). For a similar synoptic analysis of the totalitarian forms, in the perspective of media history, see Wu, 2017, pp. 111–122.

10 For the interpretation of broadcasting upon the four models, see Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956, pp. 64–67; 84 and 91; 135–138.

11 The research has been conducted on the 23 countries covered by the European Social Survey: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK.

12 Source: RTL AdConnect-Médiamétrie, *Audience Trends 2021*.

13 For the detailed data, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable D1.2 – Patterns in media consumption: regional models, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

14 Rogers' popularity in our scientific field is quite surprising, as in his book the media are referred to as drivers for the diffusion of new ideas (i.e., Rogers, 1962, pp. 147, 160, 172, 183–185), rather than as *innovations themselves*, able to affect and reshape industrial societies.

15 Source: European Audiovisual Observatory Yearbook, 2019; percentage of the population aged 3+ or 4+. Data were available, respectively, for Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and UK; Greece, Ireland, Italy, and Portugal; Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia; and only for Bulgaria, Romania, and Türkiye, in the case of the last cluster.

16 Source: Standard EuroBarometer 94, winter 2020–2021. Data are related, respectively, to the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany,

Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Sweden; Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain; Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia; and finally, Bulgaria.

17 For the detailed data, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable D1.1 – Patterns in media production: regional models, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

18 For the detailed data, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable 1.1 – *Patterns in media production: regional models*, available at www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

19 Based on Standard Eurobarometer 94, winter 2020/2021. For the methodology and the following statistical elaboration, the credits go to Sara Cannizzaro, who worked for the IULM University team. We relied on the EuroBarometer data, as their use is largely accepted in academic work (see for instance, in this literature review, Rodríguez-Pérez & Canel, 2023). A discussion will have to be launched, though, as there is little doubt that the statistics service has been launched "to determine" but "at the same time influence" – in Delanty's words – "the degree to which Europeans were becoming European" (Delanty, 2013, p. 299). A clear demonstration of the resulting bias can be found in Claese de Vreese's "argument", also "supported by EuroBarometer data", that "higher levels of knowledge are associated with support for European integration" (2003, p. 7).

20 More technically, we used STATA for testing the Bartlett sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin adequacy. The resulting p-value (0.00) attested to an above 95% significance; and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin a mid-range value (0.69), therefore indicating an acceptable, though mediocre, adequacy.

21 We have to remark, here, upon the oddity of the axiological inversion induced in media studies by the last generation of research. The insistence on media trust and on-line disinformation, in fact, is the very opposite of the diffused optimism towards the democratization effects of the net, epitomized by Manuel Castells' last elaboration (2009, 2012). And in all cases, the hype of the academic discourse – either positive or negative – has paid a very bad service to our understanding of the network society.

22 For an assessment of scientific literature, see Broocks, Duch Brown, Gomez-Herrera, & Martens, 2020.

23 Data collection, analysis and visualization has been realized in cooperation Alessandro Galeazzi from Ca 'Foscari University of Venice. Data were gathered from the available API of the Lumière on-line dataset, in February 2023. For the methodological details, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable D3.4- Video Data Clustering Report, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

24 For the analysis of Baltic media in the framework of comparative media studies, see Castro Herrero et al., 2017; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015, 2019; Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008.

25 *Cooperation agreement between National Film Centre of Latvia, Estonian Film Institute and Lithuanian Film Centre*, 2015. Retrieved December 27, 2023, from www.lkc.lt/docs/Collaboration-Agreement-between-the-Baltic-Film-Institutions.pdf.

26 Detailed data are included in the EUMEPLAT deliverable D3.4- Catalogue of Best Practices and Main Obstacles to Europeanization, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

27 Detailed data are included in the EUMEPLAT deliverable 3.4- *Catalogue of Best Practices and Main Obstacles to Europeanization*, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

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3 Hypotheses on European media

1 European media as a contested notion

1.1 European culture, culture of the Europeans

The very idea of Europe, Gerard Delanty sustains, is the unstable product of a peculiar amalgamation between "nationalism and cosmopolitanism", that "are embroiled in each other in many ways" (2013, p. 322). A common identity would hardly take shape, therefore, if not in response to a perceived external threat, serving as a constitutive other (ibidem, pp. 134–135): either it is Islam, the Soviet Union, the American imperialism, or the immigrants. In other words,

> Europe is not, then, an alternative to nationalism but a confirmation of the hegemony of the nation-state. In fact Europe is a function of the nation-state, which has also fostered the nationalism of the region.
>
> (Delanty, 1995, p. 157)

Belonging is a multi-faceted category, Delanty argues: and Europeanness is on top of a series of layers, including individual, collective and societal identities as well (2013, pp. 323–325). In this respect, Delanty makes us of a pretty convenient formula – "unity in diversity" – which nevertheless helps understand the difficult path towards the cultural unification, as European heritage "should not be seen in terms of one Grand Narrative, but rather in terms of several competing ones" (Delanty, 2013, p. 407; 2018, p. 45).[1] Edgar Morin's view is not dissimilar to Delanty's, at least in this respect: Europe misses a proper foundational principle (Morin, 1990, p. 37), as it has been nurtured by the ideals coming from a polycentric territorial network (ibidem, p. 70), to the point that the European genius is not simply in "plurality and change", but in the "dialogue among the pluralities", able to loop back into the historical change (ibidem, p. 149). Morin is well aware, then, that the fragmentation of Europe may actually have an upside: the consequential fact that both national states and "provincial micro-cultures" have been capable of resisting to political hegemonies (ibidem, p. 76). As behold in the first chapter, this

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is also Todorov's reading, dealing with the compresence of similarly influential Nation-States; and Oscar Halecki had set forth a similar consideration, about Europe being impermeable to the rise of absolute, transnational powers (1950, p. 171). The intensifying decentralization of the modern ages, and the nostalgia for an overarching, universal narrative: on the one hand, the need of "a veritable encyclopedia of a society's own culture: a storehouse of its essence and basic knowledge", in Franco Moretti's words; and on the other hand, "modern Europe, which has subdivided and specialized the sphere of knowledge", thus rendering "any such ambition anachronistic and almost unreal" (1994/1996, p. 37). It appears we must resign to the idea of European history as "a coexistence of unconnected histories of people and states", for Europe itself "is dismembered into geographical fragments" – Ernst Robert Curtius wrote at the beginning of his poignant masterpiece (1949/1953, p. 6), before desperately trying to prove the opposite.

It would be of advantage to conceptualize the European media, or the European creative industries at large, against the backdrop of this historical fragmentation: the segmentation of the continent into a plurality of markets, ultimately legitimized – unlike the EU – by the existence of a common language (de Vreese, Boomgarden, Banducci & Semetko, 2009, pp. 47–52). It is no accident that the case for the identification of cross-European constants usually results in very general resemblances among the countries. At the technological level, as illustrated by Graham, Hjorth, and Ledhonvirta (2019, pp. 271–272), the whole Europe is part of the half of the world characterized by high level of media consumption, with this map symmetrically opposed to the geography of production. For what concerns the organization of media systems, scholars have gone as far as to contrast the European model with the American one, due to the relevance of public service media (Papathanassopoulos & Negrine, 2011, p. 17).[2] In the latter case, it is a fact the specific of Europe – as it was in Elsaesser's depiction of European cinema – is entrenched in the national dimension, somehow replicating the double bind between universalism and particularism observed by both Delanty and Wallerstein (Wallerstein, 2006, pp. 31–34), albeit in different perspectives. Identifying what is missing in this scenario, on the other hand, is way simpler: the mere absence of pan-European media, as synthetized by Manuel Castells (2018, pp. 183–184), if we accept the comparison with the American global industry, the wide Hispanophone Latin-American market, the Chinese and Indian empires, or the pan-Arabic networks based in the Persian Gulf.

As already signaled in the first chapter, Donald Sassoon has released the most comprehensive inquiry on the history of European creative and information industries, between 19th and 20th centuries. I will summarize the main findings of his comparative study, by focusing on the different sectors taken into account: press; music; cinema; and TV. In all cases, the straightforward evidence is the poor circulation of contents across the borders, so that the whole book may well be read as an account on the limits, if not the *lack*, of an appropriately pan-European culture. In the case of daily press,

two geo-cultural patterns are easy to identify: readership is mostly national, as it is constrained by the linguistic barriers; while production is global and ruled by the leading news agencies located in the US, France, Germany, and the UK (2006, p. 323). Sassoon also reflects on the diffusion of the novel, as a typical form of European modernity, by tracing the conflict between London and Paris for emerging as the Western cultural capital (ibidem, p. 755), and, after the *recentrage* of the system, with contemporary industry being subject to the unheard-of hegemony of American and British works (ibidem, pp. 1281–1287) – including Harry Potter, destined to be remembered as "the biggest-selling book ever" (ibidem, p. 1292). This centralization of the literary market has been also examined by Moretti (1997) and Casanova (1999/2004), whose analyses will be addressed in the fourth chapter, as they both rely on the world-system theory. Additionally, Sassoon comments, the comic strip is essentially an all-American genre, with Europe forced to the late imitation of its formats (2006, pp. 1071–1072).

Sassoon's scrutiny of live and recorded music starts with a great anomaly in the course of the industrialization of culture: the *opera*, a typical Italian form, rooting back to the florid era of the late Renaissance (ibidem, p. 254). In any case, in the 19th century Northern Italy positions itself at the center of the European stage, by imposing the dominance of Italian: which, despite being poorly spoken and even understood abroad, "was regarded as the international language of music" (ibidem, pp. 538–541). As a confirmation, there is historical proof of Queen Victoria personally asking Richard Wagner to translate the *Tannhäuser* in Italian, in 1855, for it to be performed in London (ibidem, p. 543). In this specific market, we may notice, there is no correspondence at all between the geography of arts and the economic spatialization, being the hegemony held by a form coming from a semi-peripheral country: not even the local financial crisis did impact the work of the Italian composers and singers, Sassoon explains, exactly because they could count on a global audience (ibidem, p. 549). This disjuncture between the economic and the cultural pattern, as I will debate in Chapter 4, tells something pertinent about the way the word-system works: the different fields do not abide to the same hierarchization rule, thus proving wrong the harsh theory of cultural imperialism; but still, each field *does* follow a pecking order of some sort,[3] which must be investigated case-by-case. Going back to the music sector, the rest of the story is far more familiar: with London ruling the industry for a while (ibidem, p. 515), and the American labels taking on the leadership from 1920s onwards (ibidem, p. 1111). Contemporary market, finally, is dominated by a few American rock and pop stars (ibidem, pp. 1351–1352), so that people in each country either listen to global or local voices, with very rare exchanges among European countries (ibidem, p. 1353). Though Sassoon in possibly underestimating the influence of British labels and groups, he usefully sketches a division of labor between cultural industries: the global companies take care of the universal language of music; and the national records produce the local songs, destined to those who prioritize the words over melody and lyrics.

The evolution of the cinema industry is more linear, and it notoriously started with the supremacy of European moviemakers and entrepreneurs: in 1907, for instance, only 400 national movies were screened, out of more of 1,200 titles distributed in the US (ibidem, p. 815). The rise of Hollywood as an autonomous compart has led to the American overtaking of the system, and this is a well-known story, with World War I also accelerating the transition (ibidem, p. 817). After that, Sassoon remarks, Europe will only play a defensive role, no longer being able to penetrate in the American market, and therefore to compete at the global scale (ibidem, p. 938): protectionist measures, as a consequence, have been implemented by several countries for limiting the diffusion of Hollywood movies (ibidem, pp. 958–959). After World War II, European markets are literally invaded by the American productions: in 1948, to cite an indicative statistic, 668 American movies were screened in Italy, compared to 55 nationally produced (ibidem, p. 999). The other paramount audiovisual sector followed a very different destiny, due to the limited number of TV networks and to the size of public service media companies. Sassoon is more interested in the circulation of cultural contents than he is in the regulation of creative industries, and therefore he zooms on the distribution of TV programs, which in its turn is controlled by the American industry. "Europeans are the most avid media importers", Jeremy Tunstall opines (2008, p. 9): and more precisely, Sassoon shows, each European country "imports more fiction from the USA than it does from any other in the world" (Sassoon, 2006, p. 1188). In this case, a twofold logic can be identified: it is also true, in fact, that state channels have played a pivotal role in Europe, and that in recent times – "after 1996" – each country has been producing its own soap-operas and TV-series (ibidem, p. 1199). "Clearly, Europeans prefer their own fiction" or the American one, Sassoon observes, while no other country could "export a sizeable percentage of its products outside its own linguistic area" (ibidem, p. 1193). According to Sassoon, this is in a nutshell the general rule of European culture, which we can picture as an ellipsis, moving around two foci: the *national* contents and the *American* contents, with a very few exchanges in place, in all fields, among the European countries. In synthesis,

> Europeans know a little about each other. They barely know the others' pop songs, bestseller, or TV shows. The only country any European citizen knows very well is the United States. Their movies, novels and song contribute to this.
>
> (Sassoon, 2019/2021, p. 208)

The evolution of TV industry has been more deeply inspected by Jérôme Bourdon, by identifying seven different steps, common to all countries – with the obvious differences between the Western and the Socialist order before 1989, the year that shook Europe to its foundations. The first period is marked by the most classical state monopoly (2011, pp. 35–36), subsequently modified

by the introduction of the advertising (ibidem, pp. 40–41). In the third stage, approximately around the mid-1960s, a few new channels are added to the offer of public TV (ibidem, pp. 42–43), with the aforementioned factors, along with the spreading social protest, contributing to the crisis of the public service media in the following period: which manifested itself "with the same scheme on the whole continent" (ibidem, p. 48), exactly as the deregulation of the sector (ibidem, pp. 48–55). The advent of private networks covers the fifth moment, between 1984 and 1989 (ibidem, pp. 54–56), while in the 1990s digital innovation would dramatically impact the system, familiarizing people with thematic channels and interactive services (ibidem 66–68). The seventh phase, according to Bourdon, is characterized by the stabilization of the duopoly and by the variable adjustments of the state televisions to the mutated economic, technological, and social context (ibidem, pp. 73–74). In this sense, the resilience of public service media is widely held as a typical European feature, even though the year 2013 – probably caused by the economic downfall – eventually "saw the unprecedented closure of two Southern-European public broadcasters": a national one in Greece, and a local one in the Valencian community (Nieminem, D'Arma, Padovani, & Sousa, 2015, p. 166). The final chapter of the story, then, is the "intimate Americanization" (Bourdon, 2011, pp. 173–175), emblematized by the diffusion of the reality TV: the third stage in the Americanization process, following the "discrete" rewriting of the programs aired in the United States, and the adaptation of the formats after the commercial transition (Bourdon, 2012, pp. 111–114). According to Bourdon, the reality TV is not properly an imported genre, however, as it stems from a combination of American and European formulas (ibidem, pp. 121–122): in fact, a sort of "confessional culture" would have emerged in the programming of Catholic countries, and namely in Italy, back in the 1970s (2011, p. 178). What is more significant here, is that in addressing the paramount question – "in which sense can we speak of a European television?" – Bourdon makes the methodological choice of putting it in parallel with the evolution of the American broadcasting (ibidem, p. 173). In Chapter 4, I will pick up on this and other issues related to the world dimension of the European media.

If we look at the big picture, Bourdon also spots a few elements to be considered distinctive of the European way to broadcasting – along with the paramount role of the state, that we have already scrutinized in respect to the comparative media model. Firstly, a common tendency to simultaneously include and mitigate the most commercial genres, to be integrated with "artistic and cultural contents" (2011, p. 40). Secondly, and for the same reason, the local domestication of the American formulas (ibidem, p. 114), with the figure of the anchorman/anchorwoman being generally rejected, so as to protect the "seriousness and neutrality of the news" from the logic of the stardom (ibidem, p. 123). As to the stylistic side of the discourse, Bourdon also points the finger on the variety as "the main European format", with its features inherited from the French and Italian *revue*, the popular theatre,

the *vaudeville*, and the cirque (ibidem, p. 148) – an aspect that might have deserved a deeper analysis. At the epilogue of the story, all the countries have been affected in the same period by the market deregulation and by digitization, and in a comparable way (ibidem, pp. 213–214): to such point, that in 2010 no less than 6,200 TV channels could be counted in Europe, ranging from the super-national, to the regional, to the local level (Bergés Saura, & Enli, 2011, p. 81).

Bourdon's investigation, though limited to broadcasting, also shares some insights with Sassoon's large-scale historical excursus. TV markets are more "international than European", as the proposition goes: in all countries the programming time is roughly split between the national productions and the US works, which are usually aired "in the prime time, where American fiction accounts from 25 to 49%" of the total (Bourdon, 2011, p. 112). Supernational European synergies and cooperation agreements are not a solution to that, Bourdon appends, as the audiovisual co-productions are inevitably ruled by the stronger country, with little space for the sharing of creative energies (ibidem, p. 113). As a result, we face once again a sort of division of labor among creative industries: in the routine situations the fiction is eminently national, with American movies being used "as a special resource" for festive and family moments (ibidem, p. 109). This alternated consumption of national and American forms reminds us of Sassoon's explanation of modern culture: with Europe somehow shrinking, lost as it is in the middle between the two poles. I will go back to this point– to the idea of European culture telescoping between the *very close* and the *very far*, between the local and the global – in the last chapter.

1.2 Searching for banal Europeanism

A point I have stressed in the first chapter, is that the endurance of national media cultures is made possible by the flagging of everyday life tokens and routines. It is therefore no surprise that, in seconding the unification process, attention has been placed to the corresponding option of a banal *Europeanism*. All in all, the thesis is that the oneness of the EU could be "best understood" as something that "is banal, contingent and contextual", and in which the implicit aspects are as decisive as "the explicit aspects of identification" (Patrikios, Cram, & Mitchell, 2011, p. 19). With a small stretch of optimism, it has been stated that European integration is successful exactly as it "has become ordinary", even without the aggregative force of hot nationalism (Trenz, 2004, pp. 9–11), and it has been capable of a "mundane" penetration in the close environment of people's life (Calligaro, 2013, p. 180). Set aside the personal opinions about the state of the EU integration, I will recall here that Billig's theory is principally about the *symbolic* facets of banal identification, to which we will turn our attention. In any case, this relation between people's dailyness, their media repertoires and European identity, in

the first place, had been observed already back in the 1970s, in the so-called Tindemans report:

> No one wants to see a technocratic Europe. European Union must be experiences by the citizen in his daily life. It must make itself felt in education and *culture*, *news and communications*, it must be manifest in the youth of our countries.
>
> (Tindemans, 1976, p. 12, italics added)

It was Laura Cram to first propose the retrieval of Billig's famous notion in this direction: "the fact that the EU is not a typical national state", she opines, "does not preclude the use of theories of nationalism and national" constructs (2001, p. 235). Cram sees the "sense of Europeanness" as being complementary to nationality and local citizenship, without any "pre-eminence of a European identity" being implied (ibidem, p. 238): and in this sense, the plain evidence that "a degree of *banal Europeanism* already exists within the EU seems undeniable" (ibidem, p. 240, italics original). More relevant to our discourse is that Cram, in listing out the markers of collective identification, predominantly refers to the media, along with the conventional examples of the EU flag and the "international summits". "National media coverage is frequently taken up with issues relating to the EU", the explanation goes, not to mention the role of "EU-level media sources", such as the *Economist*'s *European Voice* (ibidem, p. 241). It is a fact, though, that such assertion is not accompanied by an in-depth reflection on the actual media performances: either the real reaching of pan-European sources, to name one, or the specific framing operated by the news outlets. To some extent, Cram's thesis is paradigmatic of the uncertain role assigned to the media in this chessboard: and hence, the question arises as to whether the mere reference to Europe, as laid out by the media, can foster a common feeling of identity. To start with, we should not expect any mechanical correspondence between the coverage of EU events and its effects: as it would imply the same passive understanding of the audience that Billig was accused of, as talked through in the first chapter. In other words, that traditional media have contributed to the shaping of the banal nationalism, per se, does not bear that treating European affairs would produce comparable results (Szulc, 2017, p. 65). Even though we are addressing the Europeanization issue from the perspective of media studies, this is perhaps a more general problem with the application of Billig's model: the automatic translation of its concept into that of banal Europeanism, hinged "on an array of different tools", some of which with a "deliberate identarian connotation" – and namely "the European flag, the European anthem", or the Europe Day on the May 9 (Recchi, 2017, p. 136). The effectiveness of such tools is still to be verified, though: and again, that visual and mnemonic devices of this kind have helped the molding of national communities, is by no means proof that they will make the Europeans more European. As

to the calendar of ritual moments, by way of illustration, in the industrialized countries all the festivity days root back to *two*, and no more than two precise eras: the ancient ages of religious and mythological foundations, and the modern times of political independence (see Zerubavel, 2012). If we keep this in mind, it remains puzzling how the addition of new recurrences and celebrations to this scheme, or "time map", could modify cultural habits sedimented over the centuries.

Going back to the role of the media, Sarisakis, Kouku, and Winter undertook to detect the banal flagging of Europeanism, by means of a content analysis on 421 editorials, published by two "quality" newspapers per each of the considered countries: Austria, Germany, Greece, and the UK. The authors selected the dailies based on the variety of their political positions and on their impact – or "high circulation and nationwide readership" – and they focused on two critical periods for European events. In the first one, between May and June 2012, there were the second round of the presidential elections in France, the Greek consultations, and the discussion around the bailout in Spain; the second one, between late 2014 and the beginning of 2015, was defined by the new elections in Greece, by the Eurogroup's handling of the local crisis, and by the polemics around the so-called Grexit (2018, pp. 3459–3461). The results of the research are noteworthy in terms of framing, as they outline "rather homogenous narratives", and specifically "*the absence of citizenry* in the whole" coverage[4] (ibidem, p. 3465, italics original). In relation to Billig's original category, on the other hand, little evidence comes out. Not accidentally, the authors do not mention any proper form of *flagging*, and they reduce "banality" to "the phenomenon of "unnoticed", "taken for granted", underlying, and presumed basis of ways of thinking and action" (ibidem, p. 3456). In line with this, they state that the Europeans do share a "banal" perception of the Brussels administration as fragile and technocratic (ibidem, p. 3462): which may well be a finding, while being more related to everyday knowledge than to banal Europeanism.

In this direction, interesting insights are offered by a comparative assessment of the representation of European issues in Bulgarian and British media. Slavtcheva-Petkova performed a two-step study, with a content analysis of seven TV programs – three in Bulgaria and four in the UK, between November 2009 and February 2010 – followed by in-person interviews with 174 children living in both countries (2014, p. 49). References to Europe are three times more frequent in Bulgarian TV than in the British; and as to the EU flag, it is visualized in 12.7% of the 355 analyzed Bulgarian programs, and barely in 0.5% of the 202 UK programs (ibidem, p. 53). It remains a fact, nonetheless, that Bulgarian children, despite being more able to recognize the UE flag (ibidem, p. 56), are less likely to identify themselves as Europeans, and even less aware of the very existence of the Union (ivi). Similar argument is made by Foret, according to whom the visibility of the EU flag in the media would not have any reverberation on the audiences, without it also being used in the day-to-day experience and transactions (2009, p. 316). Picking

up on this point, and in discussing the news coverage of the EU, we cannot help but remark a step back in the understanding of how the media work: as if Europeanization could be fostered by the media "frequently tak[ing] up with issues relating to the EU", quoting Cram again (2001, p. 24o), "often expressing neither opposition or support, but simply reporting relevant information", and regardless of their narrative tone. For European values to be "internalized", we may object, it takes more than the simple repetition of a given set of keywords: something than can be only understood by monitoring the "quality", and knowing "not only what the media focus on but also what is missing" (Huertas Bailén, 2015, p. 42). To a large extent, it is the same mistake we are making in addressing the misinformation campaigns, besides the ideological implications of that: only caring about the *contents*, when the power of the media is all in the *framing* they operate, and in the emotional bind they establish, or do not establish, with the target audiences.

The discrepancies between the media agenda and children's perception, going back to Slavtcheva-Petkova's work, could be easily used as proof of an improper news coverage; or, alternatively, they may hint towards a broader analytical issue. I refer to the fact that the banal flagging is not necessarily a proxy for a more intense, or *hot* form of communitarian identity: and how divergent these dimensions may be is attested, possibly beyond the authors' intention, by the wide-scale research run by Foret and Trino (2022). The authors aggregated the data on representative samples of the population in eight European countries – France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, and the UK – in December 2020. All in all, they utter, EU symbols are "routinised and relatively taken for granted", which "suggest[s] the evidence of a kind of banal Europeanism" (ibidem, p. 3). Thought-provoking complications, nonetheless, are offered by the statistical breakdown by socio-demographic variables, on which I will focus. In short, old generations are more likely to be supportive of EU symbols than the youth, and women more than the men. Less predictably, "socio-economic status does not prove itself to be significant in terms of support for" European symbols – while *it does* in the case of national emblems – and the same for the education level (ibidem, pp. 14–16). The first and the last indications are overtly counter-intuitive, as young, college-educated, and wealthy citizens are generally in favor of the European Union, way more than the average population (see, for instance, Aicholzer, Kritzinger, & Plescia, 2021, pp. 303–307). Foret and Trino (2022, pp. 14–15) only sketch an explanation for the generational gap, pointing on "young Europeans" being "more positive about Europe only if they are more positive about immigration and globalization in general": so that a share of them would paradoxically perceive the EU symbols as "too identitarian and restricted". The argument makes sense, we reckon; and it may well be. As there is no elucidation about the socio-demographic pattern, nevertheless, an alternative interpretation is allowed. As a matter of fact, two studies of different kind – in-depth interviews with children; and a wide-scale European comparation – converge towards a common indication: that the banal flagging

of the European identity and the political adhesion to the EU *do not go hand in hand*. Well-educated citizens usually support the EU, as we saw, but not necessarily its symbols; and the Bulgarian kids more easily recognize the flag of the Union, without being attracted whatsoever, or calling themselves European. I need to highlight this notable difference in comparison to Billig's framework, as in his case the banal and the hot forms of nationalism are actually two "varieties" of the same species, and the author repeatedly clarifies that no opposition, and not even discontinuity, is in the place between the two (1995, p. 128).

A few considerations are necessary, here, as this last argument may cross the line between media markets and broader societal facts. As explained by Benedict Anderson (1983), the media have been playing a role in the strengthening of nationalism, and there is no doubt that digital platforms are invading people's dailyness in an unprecedented way. Having said that, the media are only a *small part of the story*, and nationalism – either hot or banal – is to be explained upon endless additional factors. Therefore, the clarification goes, a tight focus is needed on the flagging of European symbols in the legacy and online media: keeping in mind that no general inferences can be drawn, and no conclusions about the state of national and European identities. In dealing with the media operating in this regard – and accepting to narrow down the scope, and the ambition, of our study – some assumptions are nonetheless legitimate. Firstly, we clearly see that *speaking about Europe is not enough*, as made evident by the studies we have reviewed: increasing the dedicated time is no guarantee of a positive public understanding, to the point that doubts can be casted on the utility of wide-scale information campaigns. Indeed, there is evidence of consumers of "traditional media" being "more supportive of the EU, while Internet and social media" strong users are more likely to be critical (Lahusen, 2022, p. 319). As is frequent in public communication, though, we cannot rule out that the audiences and their sources are reciprocally bound to each other, and that the very reception of the messages is contingent to people already sharing pro-EU instances, and thereby planning their media diet.[5] Secondly, as the short discussion around the flagging of banal Europeanism suggests, showing the UE symbols in full display may not be effective, in its turn: in the end, the historical antecedent that we all have in mind – the virtuous circle between media routines and national identity – may be an exception to the rule, and not the rule.

As to the weakness of Europeanization resulting from the aforementioned arguments, it makes sense to add a couple of general comments. There are possibly two problems, which are common to almost all the analyses we have synthetically reviewed, and to the whole thinking about banal Europeanism. Firstly, as already noted, the signs of an overarching European narrative have been mostly searched in the statistical occurrences, and rarely in the peculiar framing of national and transnational topics, as operated by the media. Secondly, and more relevantly, attention has been exclusively placed to the news sector, with no interest at all in the variety of content, stories, and figures delivered by the cultural industries – whether movies, songs, TV series, etc. In

a way, Billig himself allows for this option, as his concept of banal nationalism does not draw on the specificity of any creative forms: rather, it is fueled by the daily penetration of the *same symbols* proper to hot nationalism, such as the flag, the Head of State portrait, and the similar. To put it shortly, *banal* is no synonym of *soft*, if by this word we refer to the whole corpus of cultural production: as the author's allusions to Arendt, and to her diagnosis of the monstruous implications of human banality, perfectly exemplifies (1995, p. 7). When it comes to the media, moreover, Billig only discusses the case of newspapers and information (ibidem, pp. 114–119), while his interest in sport competitions – which is the only entertainment sector touched upon – is explained by them directly metaphorizing the war, or the international conflicts among the states (ibidem, pp. 119–127). Here Billig's interpretation diverges from Bendedict Andreson's category of imagined community, which is similar to Billig's in many respects, while Anderson also makes space for the part played by the cultural industries in this story, and namely by the realist novel.

That the assessment of quantitative references to Europe will not go far enough, as we saw, has been pointed out by many scholars. In the case of the most institutional symbols, such as the twelve-star flag or the common currency, I also object that their repetition may even backfire, as it risks consolidating the image of the EU as a purely bureaucratic and *abstract* entity, far away from the dailyness of people's experience. This necessary shift from the *presence* of Europe in the media narrative to its *rhetorical construction*, we have to admit, is still to be interpreted, and it will require ad hoc investigations. For the time being, the closest concept we can think of is that of "marked Europeanness", independently suggested by both Marco Cucco (2015) and Milly Buonanno (2015), in application of Matte Hjort's original dyad of marked and unmarked *transnationalism*. To Hjort, who is speaking about the global movie industry, a distinction must be drawn between marked and unmarked "cinematic transnationalism": as in the first case, the international dimension is limited to the existence of cooperation agreements and distribution campaigns. Conversely, "a film might be said to count as an instance of marked transnationality", if and when their authors "intentionally direct the attention of viewers towards various transnational properties that encourage thinking about transnationality" (2010, pp. 13–14). In actuality, none of these authors put forward a suitable analytical model for addressing the media representation of Europe: so that "marked Europeanness", in the end, is characterized by the "unmistakable evidence of European presence" in the creative process (Buonanno, 2015, pp. 210–211). Needless to add, further research will be necessary in this direction as well.

Secondly, the studies on banal Europeanism, regardless of their methodology and geographic scope, have been emphasizing the importance of *information*: either by sampling contents from the dailies, the TV news, the talk shows, the media statements of public actors, and the like. That news and political debate have a paramount role in shaping the public sphere is simply a state of fact, which needs no bibliographical justification. What is to be proved, at the opposite, is that collective identification is *exclusively*,

or *predominantly* triggered by the logical pipeline connecting the information agenda, its understanding on the part of the audiences, and the rise of a rational doxa. "With the irruption of mass culture", Edgar Morin wrote in the early 1960s, information itself "develops a relation of projection-identification, which goes in the direction of romance, tragedy, and mythology" (1962/1975, p. 138). If no solid evidence of banal Europeanism pops out from the reviewed works, therefore, it is possible that we *have been searching in the wrong place*: looking at the media reporting and covering of EU affairs, rather than dealing with what the Europeans actually like. In this sense, Regina Weber (2021) originally reflected on the role of major sports, and football in particular, in making people familiar with, and aware of, their belonging to a broader transnational community. In her perspective, the Europeanisation of football takes many forms, in fact: most importantly, the organization of pan-European tournaments, but also a common job market, after the epochal Bosman sentence of the European Court of Justice, and needless to say, the TV airing of both national and international matches.

> Football, again, seems to provide a fertile ground to study such "banal" identifications with Europe in a lifeworld context. The Europeanisation of structures in football . . . provides fans with several "direct links" to or banal experiences of Europe throughout a football season: pan-European competitions, broadcast around the continent, and transnational transfers of players and managers, which create and construct a more casual exposure to Europe and thus arguably normalise it through a series of banal experiences.
>
> (Niemann, Weber, & Brand, 2021, p. 559)

So far, in the media studies at least, the attention to sport has been scarce and episodic, and the allusions to its impact on banal Europeanism usually remain at the stage of a preliminary observation (see, for instance, Lichtenstein & Nitsch, 2011, p. 14; Bondebjerg, 2016, p. 2; de Witte & Zglinski, 2021, p. 10). From my side, as illustrated in the first chapter, I have unexpectedly found that the non-national European Instagram accounts among the most popular in Europe are all about sportsmen – and more rarely, sportswomen – with football players getting the lion's share. There is no doubt that additional research is needed; and perhaps, a whole new generation of studies on Europeanization will be necessary, grounded on a more secular outlook to mass culture.

1.3 Between vertical and horizontal Europeanization

Claes de Vreese's approach to news framing will aptly introduce an additional aspect of the link between media coverage and Europeanization. To start with, de Vreese analyzed 10,790 news stories aired during the 1999 European elections period, by one public and one private broadcaster per each of the three considered countries – the UK, the Netherlands, and Denmark (2003, pp. 83–85).

The author opportunely distinguishes between "news dealing exclusively with EU affairs (such as summits, European elections, and European institutions) and domestic political news with a European dimension" (ibidem, p. 78, italics removed). I will not argue here about the occurrences of the investigated thematic frames – those of conflict, economy, and strategy (ibidem, p. 82) – while centering on the discourse around Europe. A difference is already visible in the political actors represented, that are mostly national in the UK, and in majority European in Denmark and in the Netherlands (ibidem, p. 99). As to the audience frames, people manifest little interest and knowledge of UE activities and prerogatives, and in all cases, they feel an enormous distance between their life and the work of the decision-makers in Brussels and Strasbourg (ibidem, pp. 65–67). In short, Europe is "hardly visible during routine events" and also "modestly visible during key events", with its image usually entrenched in bureaucracy, technocracy, and financial lobbying (ibidem, p. 116).

A national framing of the EU affairs has been also dissected by de Vreese, Peter and Semetko, in their work on the launch of the common currency, as represented in German, Danish, British, and Dutch media. More technically, the authors analyzed the two most watched evening TV news shows in each country – which in all cases "meant the news programs of one public broadcasting and one private network" – from December 31, 1998, to January 4, 1999 (2001, pp. 111–112). The main discovery is that the Euro was mostly framed in terms of economic aspects in Germany and Denmark, with "journalists in Britain and the Netherlands" also treating structural and political themes, and the power imbalances within the EU as well. An additional difference is that the Danish media coverage was all about the *macro*-economic repercussions of the Euro, while the German news programs also addressed the *micro*-economic impact on prices and on electronic payments (ibidem, pp. 116–118). Along the same line, Peter and de Vreese lately realized a content analysis of the representation of European politics in the TV news in Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK. The goal is to compare the coverage of routine periods with that of the European summits, between February and December 2000, on the part of the most popular private and public evening news programs (2004, p. 9). Both the reference to Europe and the presence of European actors were coded, in order to individuate the stories related to EU policies, events, institutions, and decision-making processes (ibidem, p. 10). In the routine periods, EU-related news covers no more than 5% of the total, with the share raising to 10–11% during the summits; in both cases, apart from the Danish TV (ibidem, pp. 13–14). That the attention towards Europe peaks in these particular circumstances is hardly surprising, while it strikes the fact that even when "EU stories" are told, the UE officials are "less visible than actors not working for the EU" (ibidem, pp. 14–15). Based on the regression analysis, finally, the presence of EU contents increases in relation to two factors of totally different nature: the happening and coverage of institutional summits, as stated; and an above-average level of satisfaction with the internal democracy in one's country (ibidem, p. 16).

The distinction between vertical and horizontal Europeanization, as laid out by Koopmans and Erbe (2003), will set a frame for the understanding of this problem. In that matter, the authors tell apart three possible forms of Europeanization: the "supranational public sphere", "constituted by the interaction" among European institutions, which is also at the basis of continental-wide media strategies; the "vertical Europeanization", linking each member state with the capital of the union; and the "horizontal Europeanization", implying a proper exchange of ideas and contents among the different nations. The vertical dimension comes into two variants, the top-down and the bottom-up, respectively when European representatives address national interlocutors or the internal issues of a member state, and when the same actors are called to action by local voices. The horizontal Europeanization, in its turn, can be *weak*, if the "media in one country" simply report the events in another "member state", or *strong*, when "actors or policies in another member state" are explicitly questioned (ibidem, pp. 102–103). It is hardly necessary to remind that the two categories have a purely ideal-typical nature, once again, and that the concrete cases can easily consist of various "mixtures of horizontal and vertical Europeanization", as specified by Koopmans and Statham (2010, p. 42).

At the empirical level, Koopmans and Erbe put the framework to the test of a thematic study – premised on the method they call "political claim analysis" – on four German newspapers: two national dailies, covering center-left and center-right positions, one regional, and one tabloid. The selected matters encompass monetary regulation, agriculture, troops deployment, and retirement policy (2003, p. 104). In all cases, it results that the involved protagonists are predominantly national: more drastically in the discourse about immigration (70%) and monetarist decisions (57%), and to a lower extent in the case of agriculture (45%), when EU norms inevitably come to play (ibidem, pp. 112–113). Koopmans and Erbe insist on the fact that different topics generate alternative media patterns, thus making unrealistic any general assumption about the state of the European public sphere (ibidem, pp. 115–116). Methodologically speaking, I totally agree on similar exhortations to more analytical investigations, when compared to the use of all-embracing categories: which are the more dangerous, when it gets to such a fuzzy category as public opinion. In the other way, Koopmans and Erbe are maybe optimistic in hypothesizing the rise of a supranational understanding of citizenship, "only one year after the introduction of the Euro" (ibidem, pp. 117–118): as the results betray a prevalence of the national framing, and they plainly suggest the predominance of the *vertical* over the horizontal form of Europeanization.

A longitudinal perspective is added by Peters and colleagues, which traced the evolution of vertical and horizontal Europeanization in the contents of five newspapers – *FAZ*, *Le Monde*, *The Times*, *Die Presse*, and *Politiken* – between 1982 and 2003, for a total of 3,059 articles (Peters, Sifft, Wimmel, Brüggemann, & Kleinin-Von Königlsöw, 2005, p. 145). In quantitative terms, the mentions of both foreign countries and EU institutions have

consistently augmented over time: and the time dedicated to European affairs has almost reached that occupied by the coverage of non-European international politics (ibidem, pp. 146–147). In this case too, though, it is not all about numbers: and in other way, the qualitative evidence of Europeanization processes is way harder to detect. In particular, the authors singled out the use of the formula "we", along with its derivate variants, as a marker of collective identity, on a total of 2,092 news stories: in this respect, the grammatic labels of European identity do "not reveal a general trend towards Europeanization", due to both the low absolute figures and a modest variation over time (ibidem, p. 148).

Machill, Beiler, and Fischer dealt with the same issue, in their meta-analysis of seventeen studies on vertical and horizontal Europeanization, covering twelve news outlets each on average (2006, pp. 182–183, p. 186). As far as the general results are concerned, the media more widely talk about the EU in Germany, Spain, and Denmark; slightly less space is dedicated to the EU in the Netherlands and in the UK; while in France the attention only grows in occasion of major political events (ibidem, pp. 188–189). Vertical reporting is more common in the UK, and less frequent in Germany, France, Spain, and Austria; Sweden stands out as the top country for the horizontal covering, which is also "moderately often" visible in Austria, Germany, and France, while data about Spain are inconsistent (ibidem, p. 190). As to horizontal news reporting, finally, it is inevitable to conclude that the biggest and most populated countries – the UK, Germany, and France – "are themselves most frequently the subject of report in the other EU" media (ibidem, p. 191).

The opposition between vertical and horizontal Europeanization clearly pops out in the study realized by Sifft and others on a sample of so-called quality newspapers in Germany (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), the UK (*The Times*), France (*Le Monde*), Austria (*Die Presse*), and Denmark (*Politiken*). Their content analysis aims at detecting both the monitoring of EU governance and the "discursive integration", or the exchange of information among countries (2007, pp. 132–133). In the first case, it is estimated that the references to the EU policies have been regularly increasing since the 1980s: more precisely, from 2% to 9% of the total news. As a term of comparison, it shows that the time dedicated to the monitoring of non-European institutions rather remained stable; while the visibility of the EU institutions has even doubled over the same period, in terms of programming minutes. This notwithstanding, the authors assert, "it is not just quantity that counts, but also quality": and in this respect, it remains evident that the EU policies are commonly interpreted as marginal topics, or thematized as "intervening factors" in local affairs (ibidem, pp. 136–137). The attention towards EU affairs, in this perspective, has little to do with the consolidation of a common public sphere, as the newspapers – with the exception of the Danish press, in this case too – mostly operate a national framing of the European issues (ibidem, p. 139). Even more significant in my view, the dimension of discursive integration "shows no trend whatsoever", with the share of European actors also stable at 17% of the total (ibidem pp. 142–143, italics removed): so

that no trace of horizontal Europeanization can be detected. In short, the findings go that the discussion of European topics has been growing in the internal debate of the five countries, whereas the sharing and exchange of information *among the countries* is still quite rare (2007, p. 143). In other words, newspapers have been offering more space to the relation between their own state and the union, without widening the horizon to the bilateral relations among Member States. It is correct to remind that the Danish case is an outlier in this respect; while according to other studies it is the Dutch TV to make an exception in the covering of cross-European stories. In any case, these micro-trends do not modify the big picture: so that "the lack of news regarding EU" can still be "thought to contribute to a lack of legitimacy, and to detract from the formation of a European identity" (de Vreese, 2008, pp. 136–140).

In this same perspective, the strongest argument in favor of the Europeanization of public spheres has been made by Trenz, in force of a quantitative content analysis of more than 2,500 newspapers articles (2004, p. 298) published in late 2002 in UK (*Guardian*; *The Times*); Italy (*La Stampa*; *La Repubblica*); France (*Le Monde*; *Libération*); Germany (*FAZ*; *SE*); Austria (*Der Standard*; *Die Presse*), and Spain (*El País*). At the analytical level, Trenz distinguishes among various nuances of transnationalism: "European articles, which are properly pan-European in scope"; "Europeanized articles", when national topics are put in the foreground, with residual space for their connection to EU issues, as it is common the UK; and "articles with a European referential frame", if only a rhetorical reference to Europe is made, as it happens in particular in Italy, Spain, and France (ibidem, pp. 296–297). "A public sphere is not visible at first sight", Trenz rightly notices, and therefore the purpose of his research is to empirically challenge the "assumptions that there is a deficit in public communication in Europe" (ibidem, p. 292). In quantitative terms, the results show that Europe is widely represented in the selected news outlets, based on the mere "density of European communication within the geographic area of the EU", peaking to a 55% of the total political articles in the case of *FAZ* (ibidem, pp. 296–297). The author thereby derives that it can be "demonstrated . . . the existence of a transnational resonance of political communication in Europe" (ibidem, p. 313): a statement which in my opinion is not sufficiently backed up by the data. Firstly, as Trenz himself partially recognizes (ibidem, p. 311), the so-called quality newspapers have a distinguishing interest for European affairs, which would be improper to generalize to the whole information ecosystem (and the same can be told for the *New York Times*, which is used as an external control variable). Secondly, at the qualitative level we still bear witness to the framing of EU issues – though the author prefers the concept of *agenda* – in local terms, with national governments being the actors more frequently called into question, and the European Parliament dramatically under-represented (ibidem, p. 300). A final finding is the "remarkable absence of non-institutional" subjects, either national or transnational: a proof of the

top-down tone of the European discourse, that we will talk through in the next section (ibidem, p. 300).

Consistent findings are presented in Brüggemann and Kleinen von Königslöw's analysis of the most read dailies in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, and UK, over the 1982–2003 timespan, sampled through two constructed weeks per year, and premised in the same distinction between vertical and horizontal Europeanization (2007, pp. 3–4). Indicators for vertical Europeanization are the visibility of the EU institutions and the media focus on the EU politics; while the horizontal is a measure of the attention placed to other EU countries, and of the explicit quotation of any actors from those countries (ibidem, p. 9). The authors furtherly articulate the framework, resulting in four possible combinations, which correspond to the quadrants of their logical matrix: "comprehensive Europeanization", when the media represent both vertical and horizontal integration; "segmented Europeanization", when only the vertical dimension is covered; "Europeanization aloof from the EU", if the reference is made to the horizontal integration or to other countries, without the European Union being mentioned; and "parochial public sphere", finally, when no Europeanization is admitted, either in vertical or horizonal terms (2007, pp. 4–10). Among the factors positively correlated with vertical Europeanization, the statistical regression indicates both the declared European mission of the newspapers, and – for different, if not opposite reasons – the quota of the "Euro-skeptical population" in the country. The horizontal Europeanization is rather favored by the frequency of the discussions about EU affairs, and by the number of correspondents from other countries: while the number of delegates in Brussels, and foreseeably so, is not associated with this dimension (ibidem, pp. 25–26). More importantly for us, at the diachronic level the only visible trend is the increasing level of *vertical* Europeanization, which is not matched by any expansion of the horizontal element (ibidem, pp. 10–11). Partial confirmations are provided by Kleinen von Königslöw's (2012) subsequent study on six quality newspapers in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, UK, and Poland, between 1992 and 2008. In this case, what is more, both horizontal and vertical Europeanization seem to lose ground in the media coverage, around 2008[6]: what remains clear, in all cases, is that the administrative unification is not accompanied by any increase in the sharing of news and ideas among the member states.

The discussion around the vertical and horizontal variants of media Europeanization, as we saw, sprang out of a paramount moment in the unification of the region, with the introduction of the Euro. We will now move to a few recent applications of the same conceptual dyad. Bee and Chrona made a particular choice, in their synoptic observation of the financial crisis in Greece and Italy, based on the analysis of 125 articles per each country, between September 2011 and July 2015 – respectively from *Kathimerini* and *To Vima*; and from *La Stampa* and *Corriere della Sera* (2020, pp. 873–874). The authors basically adopt the categories defined earlier, though in this case

the horizontal dimension is restricted in scope to the relations between the two selected countries (ibidem, pp. 871–872). As to the vertical Europeanization, and not shockingly, both the Italian and the Greek media predominantly refer to the impact of monetary policies "in domestic terms", with the EU itself being labeled in familiar way and accused of technocratic arrogance (ibidem, p. 875 and 882). What is more innovative, there is "evidence of both asymmetric and symmetric horizontal Europeanization taking place in the public sphere of both countries", with newspapers on the two sides making "functional references" to the effects of the crisis in the other country (ibidem pp. 881–882). There is little doubt that in this case, in comparison to the previous other studies, a stronger horizontal flow can be measured, with bilateral exchanges suddenly becoming habitual and ordinary, rather than exceptional. In all likelihood, this is due to the two countries being or perceiving to be in the same economic situation: in a sort of transitory "community of destiny", to quote Edgar Morin's take about European citizenship (1990, p. 20), which as such may say a little about the state of the overall integration. The same consideration can be turned upside down, nonetheless, as it may suggest that horizontal exchanges are not in place at the pan-European level – as the reviewed studies have largely proved – but *they might exist at the regional scale*.

Hänska and Bauchowitz studied the Twitter flow about the Greek bailout crisis, in July 2015, by scanning a total of 703,423 tweets (2019, pp. 4–5). Their operational breakdown of the main categories is in line with Koopmans and Erbe (2003), as they distinguish between top-down and bottom-up ways to vertical Europeanization; and between strong and weak forms of horizontal Europeanization (Hänska & Bauchowitz, 2019, p. 2). Needless to specify, the main research question hinges on whether the social media are offering a new space for the open discussion among the actors living in different European countries: as "it seems likely that national boundaries are more porous on Twitter than they are for broadcasting media" (ibidem, p. 8). The results seem to validate the hypothesis: while there is no difference between traditional and new platforms in terms of vertical Europeanization, cross-border exchanges are way more common on Twitter than in the legacy media, as "they account for over half of all interactions for all countries", with the exception of France (ivi). These findings are inconsistent with those that will be presented in the next section, collected through a comparative analysis of the social media debate in ten countries. A possible reason is that we purposedly used *national* keywords for gathering the data, while Hänska and Bauchowitz apparently did not filter out the posts: as they admit, the sample "serendipitously included many tweets using the hashtag #ThisIsACoup" (ibidem, p. 5), and therefore it was possibly biased towards the English-speaking and more global part of the Twitter population.

Von Nordheim and colleagues run a topic model analysis of the newspaper's coverage of the 2019 European elections in Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and the UK. Three dailies per nation were

chosen, in representation of the different market niches, for a total of 57,943 articles, published between May 1, 2018, and May 31, 2019; with the countries also organized according to the media system they belong to (2020, pp. 103–104). We cannot indulge here in discussing the descriptive results, and therefore we will jump to the main findings related to Europeanization. The two dimensions, the authors explain, largely vary depending on the area: as a general rule, "the countries with the highest approval ratings" of the EU, such us Germany and Portugal, show the highest quota of horizontal reporting (ibidem, p. 108). On the other hand, the countries with a low approval degree of the EU membership, Czech Republic and Italy, have a moderate level of both vertical and horizontal media reporting, and in short, their public sphere "can be described as *national* in the traditional sense" (ibidem, p. 108, italics original). The UK, Hungary, and Poland are characterized by an average approval rating, and they "show the highest difference between vertical and horizontal Europeanization", with the EU presented as a totally external entity, and little attention paid to the other member states (ivi). The 2019 European consultations are also at the core of the study released by Seddone, Bobba and Roncarolo, with respect to the Italian media, and by the use of the sub-categories already defined: top-down and bottom-up vertical Europeanization; and strong or weak horizontal Europeanization. Over a six-week observation period, between April and May, 2019, the authors collected 5,816 news stories: and precisely, 1,873 TV news items and 3,953 press articles (2019, pp. 77–78). For the purposes of our discourse, it is noticeable that the two media produce two "differentiated patterns", with TV being generally more critical towards both the EU and the considered "foreign political actors". In particular, TV programs use a negative tone in the stories dedicated to the top-down vertical Europeanization and to the strong horizontal Europeanization; and the dailies, exactly the opposite (ibidem, pp. 84–85).

As stated, the frame I am considering prescribes a sharp distinction between two patterns: the relation between each country and the European Union, and the circulation of contents *among* European countries. As a matter of fact, it makes sense to state that this is the media facet or a more general process. Vertical and horizontal Europeanization are also isolated as critical features in political sciences, respectively in terms of legal harmonization between a member state and the union (or imposition of the EU standards, from a critical perspective); and the transfer of best practices from one nation to another, without the European Commission providing any mediation (Statham, 2011, pp. 82–84; Schimmelfennig, Leuffen, & Rittberger, 2015, pp. 767–768). Not surprisingly, the same two dimensions are called to action in the field of media regulation, for assessing the level of implementation of the EU directive and policies (Radaelli, 2003, pp. 41–42). In social sciences and cultural studies, such dilemma would take the shape of vertical and horizontal *integration*, with the same two axes used for organizing the scheme. Heidenreich (2019) analyzed the horizontal ways to Europeanization by applying Bourdieu's

notion of social field, zooming in on a number of internationalization strands, ranging from the academic exchanges to internal migration flows, to the synchronization of administrative practices, to the diffusion of EU-related professions in all countries. What can be objected, is that these strands – despite evading the purely institutional domain of high-level decision-makers – are mostly beneficial *to the upper class*, remanding us, once again, of the deepening divide between the global and the local part of European societies.[7] A bridge between the different fields is thrown by Klásková and Císař, who, albeit limited to the Czech Republic, examined the allusions to vertical and horizontal Europeanization, as made by different actors in Public Service TV. The list of the actors includes think tanks; media and journalists; state and politicians; academy and students; civil society organizations; the general public; and immigrants and immigrant-run organizations (2020). By observing 2,374 "political claims" between April 2015 and May 2016, it turns out that the actors more prone to frame "the refugee crises as European" are the think-thanks, way more than any other organization. Interestingly enough, the "level of horizontal Europeanization" is generally very low, set apart the work of the journalists, which are the more likely, at least in Czech public TV, to insist on the dialogue among the countries and their respective institutional actors (2020, pp. 13–14).

In the specific case of media studies, we saw that the adoption of the vertical/horizontal dyad is backed up by some empirical evidence. A paramount indication is that, as research exhibits, people's feeling is still largely based on the state of *national* public opinion, with spoken language inevitably playing a main part in that (Machill, Beiller, & Fischer, 2006, pp. 177). By and large, it follows that in each country the audiences are interested in national news, with their attention being placed to European affairs only when they directly affect local interests – in such cases as debt and bailout debates, refugee crises, and the like. Similar results are presented by Barisione and Ceron (2017, pp. 92–99), about European problems being brought to people's attention only when they overlap with local instances, and they immediately affect national life: and the more so, when it goes down to the economic and social themes clustering around the *austerity* keyword. In all cases, the plain "synchronization of issues" is to be considered as a weak form of Europeanization, not incisively affecting the moral economy of the area (Machill et al., 2006, p. 200). To what extent the coverage of a few critical moments can heighten people's common understanding, in fact, is still to be demonstrated. A positive interpretation is envisioned by Barisione and Michailidou, which take this tendency for serious, thus hypothesizing the rise of a "public Europeanism", shaped by the "cosmopolitan" tendencies embedded in digital media (2017, p. 8). In section 2.2, I will put this idea to the test of a wide-scale comparative analysis on social media discussion in ten countries in the European region.

A lack of attention towards European themes has been individuated, and more surprisingly, also in an analysis of the media coverage of some historical events: the Budapest uprising in 1956; the building of Berlin Wall in 1961; the May 1968 mobilization in Paris; the Prague Spring in the same year; the

declaration of the state of war in Poland in 1981; the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989; and finally, the polemics around the publication of the caricatures of the prophet Mohammad, in 2006. Only the last issue, the authors conclude, has been addressed in a properly pan-European perspective – in all likelihood, due to the role played by the main constitutive other in contemporary debate, Islam. In all the other cases, the media operate once again a national framing of the stories, despite the international scope and the global relevance of the events taken into exam.

> In contrast to our expectations and hypotheses, the analysed textual material, derived from the national and international media coverage of our crisis events, provides a highly diversified set of "national" conceptualizations. Europe never comes to the foreground of the analysed media discourses and it is debated only "as a whole" in the reporting of the Mohammed cartoons in the European media in the early 2006.
> (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, & Wodak, 2009, p. 261)

We may notice that Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou, and Wodak's results go against a well-established antecedent in our academic field, the notion of *media event* as put forward by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz. In their findings, the media coverage of historical facts does have a super-national impact: ranging, in the case of Europe, from the pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II to Poland, which would be "a turning point" in the history of the Eastern countries (1992, p. 163); to the epochal transformative event ignited by the live broadcasting of the breaching of the Berlin Wall (ibidem, p. 127 and 163–164). This incongruence is probably due to the different methods and metrics utilized in the two cases, as Dayan and Katz do not conduct an in-depth textual analysis of media contents, while deliberately working on the traits that are common to all the examples, corresponding to the script of the ceremony (ibidem, pp. 167–168). In other words, the undoubtable super-national nature of the "festive viewing" – the exceptional case of audiences watching everywhere the same live images (ibidem, p. 1) – does not contradict the hypothesis that, at a different level of analysis, the media might interpret the event itself from a national standpoint.

2 Two ways to Europeanization: top-down, bottom-up

2.1 Rise and fall of the pan-European media

In the previous paragraph, I evoked that vertical Europeanization articulates itself into two possibilities, top-down and bottom-up strains: an aspect that requires a deeper understanding. The "EU-Europeanization of the communication field is also a two-way process", Stylianos Papathanassopoulos writes: the one from above is "orchestrated from Brussels", while the one from below can either be animated by the member states, or by "organizations or citizens" trying to speak out (2018, p. 121). I will consider these

elements in the following order: firstly, we will discuss a typical top-down strategy, the planning of a pan-European broadcasting offer. In section 2.2, I will propose first-hand data about the hypothesis of the Europeanization from below, by disclosing the results of a comparative analysis of social media debate in Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Türkiye.

As to the top-down media narratives, to start with, our focus on broadcasting is justified by the daily press remaining a national affair, as noted in the first chapter, and cross-European projects being rare and ineffective. This notwithstanding, "the relative success of the young Brussels-based pan-European media . . . , most of which were founded from 1995 onward", it has been advanced (Varga, 2011, p. 122), "demonstrates that a market for pan-European readers does exist and is growing". According to Varga, the only real obstacle to that would be the linguistic fragmentation of the region (ibidem, pp. 122–123): in any case, the story of cross-European journalism simply proved otherwise. We can limit ourselves to cite the case of *The European*, emphatically introduced as "the first national European newspaper" and run by the controversial British entrepreneur Robert Maxwell, which started on May 1990 and ended the publications in December 1998, without getting significant notoriety (see Bjurstedt, 2006). Pan-European TV, on the other hand, has a longer and more interesting story. Chalaby listed out seventeen "particularly prominent" channels, with a "strong distribution in at least five European countries": Arte, BBC Prime, BBC World, Bloomberg, Cartoon Network, CNBC, CNN International, Discovery, Euronews, Eurosport, Fox Kids, MTV, National Geographic, Sky News, TV5, Universal Studios Networks, and VH1 (2002, p. 186). The author groups these channels based on their features – namely, the existence of national programming and advertising windows, and the use of local languages (ibidem, p. 193) – while not distinguishing between properly European broadcasters, and the regional branches of the American networks. In a more useful way, at least for our objectives, Brüggemann and Schulz-Forberg built a taxonomy including four variants of cross-national broadcasting: national media "with a transnational mission"; "inter-national media", born from the cooperation between national channels; pan-regional media; and global media (2009, pp. 699–700). Pan-European media clearly belong to the third type, as "they are characterized by their specifically European focus", with their diffusion not limited to EU, the authors rightly point out, while "being closer to the geographical scope of the Council of Europe" (ibidem, p. 702). Euronews will immediately come to mind as the most ambitious and fortunate case, which made its debut in 1993, following the decision taken by the European Commission in mid-1980s, in response to the "disappointing turnout" registered at the 1984 European elections (ibidem, pp. 703–704). This original sin, so to speak, makes it evident from the beginning the top-down inspiration of Euronews, which we will discuss below in greater detail. Needless to recall, all the initiatives are premised in the celebrated *Television without Frontiers* directive, which in 1989 put forward two fundamental innovations. Article

2 prescribes that all "Member States shall ensure freedom of reception and shall not restrict retransmission on their territory" of TV channels from the other EU nations. Article 5, and this is the beginning of a long story, imposes the appointment of "at least 10% of the . . . programming budget" for European works, produced independently from the airing broadcasters (Council of the European Communities, 1989). As I do not have a direct expertise in media regulation, I will limit ourselves myself to a sharp observation: it is perhaps accidental, and still emblematic, that in the directive there is no reference – not even a mere lexical mention – to the *audiences*.

Both economic and ideological investments on pan-European TV, starting with the directive itself, appear to be linked to the cultural atmosphere of the 1980s and 1990s, during the ascending stage of the EU popularity. At the time, before the advent of global platforms, the most pressing problem – along with the aforementioned linguistic barriers – was the inhomogeneity of the infrastructural ecosystem, with Europe divided between areas with low and high diffusion of the cable, and also affected by a problematic switch-off to digital terrestrial TV (Franquet, Richeri, & Hibberd, 2020, p. 269). In more recent times, a comparable fragmentation has been in place as well, with satellite, cable, digital terrestrial and IPTV coexisting with variable market shares, depending on the region (Crusafon, 2015, p. 84; Higson, 2015, pp. 137–138). Jérôme Bourdon's analysis comes in handy, in this sense, for synthetizing the systematic failures of pan-European approaches to broadcasting and coming to terms with its reasons. Bourdon recalls how both the regulatory programs aiming at promoting cooperation, joint "distribution and multilingualism" – named MEDIA 2 and MEDIA 3 – and the experiments in pan-European broadcasting, such as Eurikon, fell short in matching audiences with contents they could be interest in (2007, pp. 270–271). The short-lived experiment known as Eurikon is telling, in this sense, as it was planned by a group of consultants on behalf of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in 1980, and implemented in 1982 (Collins, 1998, pp. 58). By and large, the idea was to take together five public service media companies and launch a joint TV schedule: precisely, the Dutch Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS); the British Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA); the German Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (ARD); the Italian Radio Televisione Italiana (RAI); and the Austrian Österreichischer Rundfun (ORF). It is symptomatic that the programming contents were decided in close-door meetings between the experts and the EBU, and released in a package that Robert Collins grouped into eleven genres (1998, pp. 69–70): news, documentary, drama, arts, sports, light entertainment, children's, adult education, feature films, religion, and "continuity", which was the Eurikon abstruse coding of whether reports (ibidem, p. 73). As to the local declinations of the pan-European schedule, all the networks prioritized the news, let apart the Dutch NOS, whose prevalent genre was the documentary. In this matter, the pedagogic approach behind the ideation of Eurikon is betrayed by the fact that, overall, the documentary was the *second* type of program in terms of

relevance, with 1,647 airing minutes, compared to 2,422 minutes for information, and just 630 for "feature films". Going back to the argument I have made earlier in this book, only 542 minutes were dedicated to sport, which results to be one of the less frequent genres, and the very last one in both Netherlands and Austria (ibidem, pp. 70–71). What is sure, is that the program did not pass the test of the audience panels, as it was perceived as incapable to provide contents "relevant to the local community", and balancing them with a pan-European perspective (Sterling, 2009, p. 552). The failure of the Eurikon attempt in 1982, and the competition brought by the diffusion of CNN, are at the basis of the successive experiment in cross-European broadcasting, plainly called "Europe TV". In this case, the consortium, led once again by the EBU, comprised of RAI, ARD, and NOS, which were already associated to Eurikon, and additionally of the Irish Radio Telefis Eireann (RTE) and the Portuguese Radiotelevisao Portuguesa (RTP). Apparently, the EBU did not learn from the previous downfall: as Papathanassopoulos observed in the first place, "from the very beginning the whole project could be seen as a political hot potato" (1990, p. 60), due to the impossible mediation between diverse technical standards and management policies. What is more, the offer was limited to a few originals, to second-hand shows from the partner companies and to low-cost programs ("whatever events it could pick up from Eurovision when prices dipped"), resulting in the difficulty of collecting advertisers' investments, and in the incapacity of attracting European viewers (ibidem, p. 59).

According to Bourdon, a perplexity can be also casted upon the case of the Eurovision Song Contest, which is sometimes considered as a best practice of European identity building (i.e., O'Neill, 2008, p. 474). Besides the random participation and withdrawal of a number of countries, the idea goes, the fact is that the music contest runs the risk of fostering the *national* feelings, fueled by the formula of the competition (Bourdon, 2007, p. 266). Closest analyses unravel, in this sense, a familiar two-level pattern, with artists – as in the case of the Serbian singer Milan Stanković – showing off nationalist costumes and symbols during the local try-outs, and more *European* and sober outfits during the final performance, in his case in Oslo (Markovic Khaze, 2019, p. 101). To some extent, this duplicity would respect the "double aim" of the Eurovision formula itself: representing a specific nation, and at the same time trying to appeal to an international audience (Strand, 2013, p. 139). Henceforth, Eurovision "can engender ambivalent feelings", as Mari Pajala noted:

> As a media spectacle. The contemporary ESC presents Europe in terms of material abundance, giving precedence to economically powerful countries. Although the contest provides a context for playing out tensions within Europe, at times it also creates utopian moments of European community.
>
> (2013, p. 91)

We cannot exclude, consequently, that the Eurovision contest would eventually reproduce the "historical divisions and tensions" within the area: if anything, because the format was a Western European original, only lately adapted to the wider scope of the whole continent (Pajala, 2012, pp. 5–6). On a marginal note, the European quality of Eurovision has been also questioned by Jeremy Tunstall, as the used video materials used to be mostly imported from Anglo-American companies: to the point that "Visnews alone was provided 25.5 per cent" of all visual contents, at least in 1973 (1977, p. 48). On the one hand, we may conclude that the undeniable success of the Eurovision contest has been probably underestimated by the authors taking a critical stand. On the other hand, the ESC experience can hardly function as a token of cultural unification, as its formula largely relies on national taste and identity structures. To some degree, we are back to the dilemma anticipated, in purely theoretical terms, by Raymond Wiliams: cosmopolitanism is so deeply intertwined with localism (1976, p. 214), that the support to Europe and to the nationality may happen to grow together and reinforce each other. As to the ESC, such duplicity is also made evident by Sandvoss' research, which detects its ability of providing a sense of Europeanness, and at the same time acknowledges the local embedding of the show, with "about half" of the airing time dedicated to the voting procedures internal to each broadcaster, and therefore to the national backstage and chronicle (2008, p. 199). To cite an emblematic data, 33% of the Italian TV audience followed the 1991 Eurovision contest, which was held in Rome, with the national share dramatically dropping down to 1% in the next edition, the 1992 happening in Malmö (Vuletic, 2018, p. 240). Analogous tendency has been unraveled by Bourdon, for what concerns another well-known European format, *Jeux sans frontières*: which in some cases – in "France, Germany, and Italy" – ended up being more popular *in the national version*s, in terms of audience response, than in the pan-European release (2011, p. 149).

As anticipated, the case of Euronews deserves a separate discussion, as it is traditionally held as the most successful experiment in pan-European broadcasting. Launched on January 1, 1993, by a consortium joined by twelve EBU members and backed up by the European Parliament, it originally aired programs in English, German, French, and Italian, and positioned itself as "a sort of counterpoint to CNN-style Anglo-American media influence in Europe" (Grieves, 2012, p. 32). Despite not reaching the goal of a common reporting style across the continent, the channel made its way to the top-ranked all-news channels in Europe (Ibidem, p. 23). In the second decade of its existence, Euronews would "nearly double" its world distribution, with a reaching of 121 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, made possible by the use of different technologies, among which cable, digital satellite and terrestrial (Brüggemann & Schulz-Forberg, 2009, p. 703 and 709, note 11). It would be excessive to see in such energic response to the CNN the rise of a common European approach to broadcasting, nonetheless: in

fact, in the 1990s they were launched both the international (Euronews and BBC World) and the *national* all-news channels: RaiNews in Italy, LCI and i<television> in France, ZDF:Infobox in Germany, Canal 24 Horas in Spain, and SVT 24 in Sweden (Baisnée & Marchetti, 2006, p. 102). What is more, in a number of countries – especially France, Spain, and Germany – the pay-tv, digital and all news channels operated in a condition of "total monopoly", therefore inheriting the major feature, and privilege, of the public service media (Richeri, 1993, pp. 134–135). Here again, the close relationship between European and national scope, that we have identify in Williams' reading, manifests itself in the most material fashion. It is also a historical fact that Euronews faced serious financial difficulties and economic losses, until the intervention of private capitals, with its acquisition on the part of a French tech-giant, Alcatel, and lately by the British ITN (Schlesinger, 1999, p. 275). Along with the endurable strength of local content, there is little doubt that the financial participation of national companies, in its turn, has contributed to weaken the pan-European potential of the all-news channel.

Valdeón authored the most complete study on the Euronews coverage, based on 85 short news items in six different languages: English, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, and German (2009, p. 149). The editing of the news, it results, is "heavily influenced" not only by the linguistic translations, but even more by the domestic perspectives on European and international topics, producing altered and differentiated stories (ibidem, pp. 149–150). Garcia-Blanco and Cushion come out with a similar attempt, albeit limited to the Euronews English-language version, by analyzing 222 stories in a four-week period between May and June 2008 (2010, pp. 396–397). Two findings are of particular interest, in our perspective. Firstly, the "most frequently mentioned country" in Euronews is, well, *the United States*; with China, Russia and Israel also making the top ten most referenced nations. As to Europe, on the other hand, the biggest countries – France, Spain, Italy, UK, and Germany – account for almost 30% of the total mentions, with the majority of the states being rarely cited (ibidem, pp. 400–401). The divergent paths of internationalization and Europeanization, that we have already remarked upon, are clearly identified by Garcia-Blanco and Cushion: "the lack of EU-related stories", they write, "raises important democratic questions about the ability Euronews has in engaging with representative politics at the European level" (ibidem, p. 402). Secondly, in most of the news items – "close to 17 of 20" – there is not mention of Europe at all; and among the news in which a member state is referred to, barely one third also mentions the EU (ibidem, p. 403). It is a fact that the actors called to question are mostly the national authorities: due to the fact that the local repacking of super-national news is in place, as "a practice necessary to reduce production costs", as simple as that (ibidem, p. 399). The latter conclusion is confirmed by the in-depth observation realized by Polonska-Kimunguyi and Kimunguyi, through a series of interviews with Euronews journalists and managers. It results that the headquarter in Lyon, ruled by an international board, is only responsible

for the selection of the news stories, with local correspondents and branches having a large autonomy in their framing and in their interpretation as well – whose "job is to write their *own* accounts", and not simply to translate one text into another (2012, p. 112, italics original). In the end, the final output will inevitably reflect the various journalistic cultures in place in Europe, and in all their elements: ranging from the language to be used, to the professional routines, to their background structure of values (ibidem, p. 106). These results are consistent with Richarsdon and Meinhof's position: when the national headlines are "transferred to Euronews", they write, they are simply attributed to their specific origins by the voice-over (e.g., "the German Conservative daily"), with no elaboration whatsoever, and no effort of constructing a pan-European narrative, able to evade superficial and stereotypical representations of the nations (1999, p. 79). Even more skeptical is Bourdon's take, according to which the Euronews newsrooms often re-use national materials, either for budget reasons or for promoting abroad their own country, thus jeopardizing the very idea of a pan-European view, by which the whole initiative was formally inspired (2011, p. 90). The most classical study on Euronews, released by Marcel Machill in 1998, frames the launch of the channel in the problem of the under-reporting of European events in national TVs (Machill, 1998, p. 430): but it also showcases the differences in the construction of the news stories among the different versions (ibidem, pp. 432–434), and the penetration of French cultural policy through the national funding we have already alluded to (ibidem, pp. 439–440).

Giuseppe Richeri has noted, back in the 1990s, that the obsession with the CNN, and the necessity of shielding the regional market from the strongest competitor, has become paramount for the management, therefore preventing Euronews from working in a more *constructive* way to the setting of a pan-European offer (cited in Casero, 2001, pp. 1–2); and eventually narrowing down its scope to a niche dimension, as it has been observed as well (Baisnée & Marchetti, 2006, p. 14). The contradictory aspects we have listed, however, did not prevent Euronews from getting some success, with a monthly claimed audience of 145 million people, and a better reaching in comparison to the competitor all-news global networks.[8] Truth being spoken, the European data about the audience is not totally consistent with the national: in France, for instance, Euronews is estimated to be less popular than France 24 news, Al Jazeera and even than CNBC (Kuhn, 2011, p. 159). What is sure, is that the *composition* of the audience – besides the raw statistical numbers – is a parameter to be carefully considered. Based on the Ipsos Affluent Europe Survey 2022, it results that Euronews is the most used channel on the part of rich and influential citizens: every month, in fact, "close to 1 in 4 Affluent European Europeans" watches its contents, either on TV or digital devices. If we break down the audience statistics, we discover that the channel is watched by 44% of "relevant opinion leaders", and by 35% of "business decision makers" every month.[9] The characteristics of the watchers, as laid out in the Euronews promotional website, are as follows:

60% are male, aged 46 on average; with a 42% of "influential opinion leaders reached monthly"; and a 67% of "international air travellers".[10] As is always the case, the profiling of the market for advertising purposes is contributing to the segregation of the audiences, by increasing the investments in the contents destinated to a supposedly high-level public, and somehow justifying the disinterest for the mass consumers (Baisnée & Marchetti, 2012, pp. 12–13). That Euronews is mostly used by "affluent" citizens – and well, that this aspect is shown in full display – is not to be underestimated, for the cultural and political implications it brings about. I already pointed to contemporary capitalism increasing the imbalances within industrial countries, while reducing those among countries, by favoring the rise of a transversal class of globalist consumers. As we saw, in this respect, Euronews even takes pride in presenting itself as a network for world travelers, influential people, and the wealthy. The project of a universal TV service for the Europeans, eventually turning into an all-news channel dedicated to the richest part of each national population: once again, it appears, the evolution of media systems is part of a broader story of societal changes.

2.2 *A research on the online discussion around Europe*

I declared that the consistency of a bottom-up Europeanization strain – or what Della Porta would define Europeanization "from below" – is still under dispute. At the empirical level, we challenged this issue by means of a comparative study on the social media discussion in ten countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, along with the only non-EU state, Türkiye.[11] We selected three sources – Facebook and Twitter posts, and comments on YouTube – in order to access publicly released data, extracted through the legally authorized APIs, over a three-month observation period, between September 1 and November 30, 2021. As is customary in European studies, and with all the doubts already confessed, we selected the more relevant topics based on the last available EuroBarometer report,[12] and namely: Europe and European integration; economic crisis and recovery; climate and environment; and health (this last argument, needless to say, is a new entry due to the Sars-Cov-2 epidemic, which basically took the place of migration as the single most polarizing issue in public debate). Per each dimension, we gathered the ten most impactful posts in terms of generated traffic, per month and per each platform, with an expected total of 720 posts per country (*n*= 7,220). In this section, given the objectives of the book, I will mostly narrow down the discourse to the topic *Europe* only.

As the different platforms use specific metrics for assessing their outreach, we had to calculate the overall relevance based on the most significant indicators per each case, based on the digital methods approach to the cross-platform analysis. As Richard Rogers explained, using as an indicator "the same hashtags" or the shared links to a given URL address would be advantageous in practical terms but scientifically improper – and "likely

fraught" – as each platform sets its own rules and conditions of use (2017, pp. 96–97). We therefore individuated the variables to be considered more relevant within the logic specific to each platform: the *total interactions* on Facebook, combining reactions, comments, and shares; the overall *reach* on Twitter; and the *relevance* on YouTube, calculated on the number of videos suggested in the replies to a given comment.[13] To collect the information, we built a thesaurus per each national case, composed by two lexical sub-sets: a list of up to 30 general keywords, common to all countries and usually in English (i.e., green, bailout, Brexit, Covid-19); and up to 30 nation-specific keywords, in the local language. In this way, we had the chance to investigate the social media discussion in Italian, Greek, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Turkish, Czech, Bulgarian, and in both Flemish and French in the Belgian case. Opting for the national languages was necessary, in our opinion, to make emerge the daily and ordinary discussion in any given country: whereas the samples built through the scraping of English texts can be easily biased towards a specific part of the population. This methodological option is also backed up by theoretical reasons, as we repeatedly denounced the divide between the global, world-traveler and English-speaking citizens, and the majority of those living in the so-called space of places. After that, in any case, the extracted posts were manually annotated by the researchers on the backdrop of a joint codebook, with a minimum 20% of double coding, and the inter-reliability test was run by all teams.[14] After the coding, and due to the inevitable imperfections of any research protocol, a number of contents resulted to be off-topic, with a final sample of 6,281 on-topic posts; 1,577 of which about *Europe* (see Table 3.1). Jumping to the results, I will touch on two major themes: the type of actors posting the most successful contents, and the dimensions of Europeanization discussed, in both the Europe sub-set and the whole dataset.

Table 3.1 On-topic posts about Europe

Country	*Posts*
Belgium (Flemish)	158
Belgium (French)	155
Bulgaria	152
Czech Republic	161
Germany	90
Greece	129
Italy	169
Portugal	179
Spain	110
Sweden	164
Türkiye	110
Total	1,577

As to the whole dataset, a first striking piece of data has to do with the posting actors. Out of a total of 3,081 authoring accounts, 1,252 are media agents (40%); 963 are political agents (31.2%); 481 are non-organizations or common users (15.6%); while 385 are some other types of organizations (12.4%). This distribution speaks against the existence of a diffused interest for European topics, while confirming the impression that the related discourse is animated by influential actors – what has been called the "Eurelitism" (Best, 2021, p. 230). The importance of this trend can hardly be exaggerated, when one recalls that we have worked on the posts that have generated more traffic in the ten countries: so that we cannot make inferences about the overall public discussion, in other terms, while having clear insights into the state of the *mainstream* debate. To be clear, it would be nonsense to deny that there is still space for diffused participation in social media: what we see, nonetheless, is that these bottom-up communications rarely make it to the level of most read and most influential posts, despite the celebrated scalability of digital networks. Such a finding is consistent with recent research, which has been discovering the *colonization* of the social media debate, to use a strong image, with the volume of the discussion peaking after the interventions of institutional players, either politicians or media professionals (see Table 3.2).[15]

As to the breakdown by platform, there are no relevant constants: with the partial exception of YouTube, where in all cases, regardless of the topic at stake, the most frequent author is a media agent. In the case of Twitter, media agents are predominant in the cases of Health, Climate and Economy, and political agents for Europe-related topics. On Facebook, media agents top the ranking for Health, and political agents for Climate, Economy, and Europe. Besides such more descriptive aspects, it stands out that the posts about Europe easily get some popularity *when they come from political actors*. Not surprisingly, this is more common in the case of right-wing representatives or leaders: in Belgium, Bart de Wever and Theo Framcken for N-V-A, or Tom Vandendriessche and Dries Van Langenhove for Vlaams-Belang; in Czech Republic, Tonio Okamura with his Freedom and Direct Democracy; in Germany, the nationalist Identity and Democracy; in Italy, if we endorse

Table 3.2 Actors posting top-ranked posts on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (whole dataset)

Dataset	*Posting agents*			
	Political actors	*Media actors*	*Other organizations*	*Common users*
Health	152	398	93	141
Climate	198	351	155	172
Economy	292	271	57	178
Europe	321	232	79	154

the accepted definitions, both Pino Cabras and the current Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni. The most recurrent actors can be politicians or media organizations – such as in Germany, Italy, and Czechia – and either way, there is little space left from the contributions of citizens and non-formal movements. We cannot help but notice that the only balance among different actors has been found *outside the EU*, and namely in the Turkish Facebook community: where the posts related to Europe – no matter how accidental or emblematic we consider it – are fairly divided among politicians, media actors and citizens.

In theoretical terms, it remains unclear how to combine this finding with the path of the Europeanization from below, as conceptualized by Donatella della Porta on the backdrop of the broader "globalization from below" (see della Porta, Andretta, Mosca, & Reiter, 2006). Della Porta and Caiani, in this sense, listed out the European-level activities of NGOs and grassroots organizations, also reflecting on whether, and how, these movements would need to address the EU (2007, pp. 11–13). It is my impression, though, that in Della Porta Europe is plainly used to set the stage for the international battles – as the Florence and Genoa global forums have basically done – without being addressed in its specificities. This is somehow confirmed by the steady overlapping between the European and the global context: "the construction of another Europe and another world is now urgent"; comparable protests spread in both Middle East and Europe; the "ATTAC is present in many European countries, North Africa, Latin America and Canada"; so that the goal, in the end, is to build "another Europe for another world" (della Porta et al., 2006, respectively, 7, 11, 33, and 77). In the article about Europeanization, it is similarly affirmed that the described "trends *are not only European*, *quite to the contrary*, the construction of Europe-wide networks and a European discourse has proceeded together with a wider trend towards a globalization from below" (Della Porta & Caiani, 2007, p. 16, italics added). In short, Della Porta is more interested in the spread of global antagonism, and legitimately so, than she is in the European declinations of the related instances; and additionally social media, as it is correct in her perspective, plays a merely instrumental role for people's self-organization. From my side, I can measure a different tendency: that these grassroots experiences are not able to reach the mainstream, at least in the considered countries, and not even by the use of many-to-many communication platforms.

At a more advanced level, we also planned to understand the qualitative connotations of the way Europe is represented in social media. For this purpose, we relied on the dimensions of Europeanization identified through an extended literature review, and by the use of a semantic map method. We framed the literature into a matrix principally organized along two axes: the opposition between essentialist and relativist ideas of Europe; and the continuum between the materialist and the discourse dimension. As we do not have the space for discussing this theoretical embedding in detail (see Carpentier, Hroch, Cannizzaro, Miconi, & Doudaki, 2023), I will shortly touch on the logical quadrants

we have come to identity. As to the first axis, Carpentier and Doudaki observe (2023, p. 175), many discourses about Europe are essentialist, as they are imbued with the ideal values related to "being European": at the opposite, a constructivist approach would trace back the very definition of Europe to the conflictual relations with its constitutive others. Secondly, the entangling between the discursive and the material dimensions of Europeanness – the "knot", in Nico Carpentier's words – affects all levels of social system, like Foucault's micro-physics, so that it "structures large-scale" apparatuses, while also penetrating people's daily life (Carpentier, 2017, p. 4). In short, nineteen major dimensions of Europeanization come out of scientific literature, diversely positioned in the logical matrix: European spirit, European values, European democratic models, European cultures, European community, European identities, European territories, European people, European interactions and dialogues, European (media) industries and capitalist economies, European public service media, European content, European audiences, European public sphere, European (political) institutions, European law, European new social movements, European citizen(ship), and representations of Europe (Carpentier et al., 2023, pp. 108–119). Table 3.3 below itemizes the dimensions with significant occurrences – ten, out of the original 19 – in the whole dataset that we have coded. The clarification is that we collected the posts including a specific narrative around Europe, with the exclusion of those in which there is a simple lexical reference (i.e., "one of the main airports in Europe").

All in all, both the material and the discourse dimensions are represented in our frequency tables, as well as the mentioned definitions may be related to both the essentialist (i.e., values) and the relativist (i.e., social movements) understanding of being Europeans. The main indication, as evident, is that Europe is mostly identified with its institutions: 4,400 mentions, or 46% of the total, to the point that we could split the category, when compared to the original taxonomy, by distinguishing *political* (i.e., European Commission)

Table 3.3 Dimensions of Europeanization in the social media debate

Dimension	*Occurrences*
European political institutions	3,102
European economic institutions	1,298
European law	1,239
European (media) industries and capitalist economies	764
European territories	738
European people	544
European public sphere	477
European democratic models	455
European values	437
European content	255
European new social movements	155
Total	9,464

and *economic* subjects (i.e., European Central Bank). If we add to this the dimension of *law*, it results that in no less than 5,639 cases – accounting for 59% of the total – is Europe thought of as a conglomerate of power, rather than as a living entity, or a community of people. The consequences of that for the Europeanization process do not require to be highlighted.

One may object that the institutions are over-represented, in our outputs, as they are always identified with the same, univocal marker (i.e., the ECB), while other forms of being European can be phrased in a multiplicity of ways. What would come to play, here, is the distinction between the levels of the *signifier*, the *signified*, and the *meaning*, as explained by François Rastier in his critique of conventional content analysis. "The word takes on meaning in the syntagm, the syntagm in the period, the period in the text", Rastier and Niemer note, "and the text in the social practice" surrounding it, so that the plain recurrences of a given signifier may say a little about the culture it belongs to (Rastier, 2015, pp. 492) – and we totally agree on that. As a matter of fact, this is the reason we opted for the *manual* coding of the posts, with two researchers taking care of the pre-test in each country, and we set a maximum of 60 keywords for individuating the trending topics. I think that these methodological adjustments speak in favor of the reliability of the results: even though we acknowledge that the findings cannot be generalized to the overall state of online public opinion. It is also indicative that such data – the high frequency of posts dedicated to the institutional dimensions of the EU – is consistent across all the analyzed EU countries, despite being built on 50% of language-specific keywords. Even more astonishing is that the only outlier can be found outside the EU, once again. What makes the Turkish case interesting, in my take, is that this time it is Europe to be used as a *constitutive other*, either as a positive or negative term of comparison:

> Many countries in the world, especially in Europe, are covering their highways with solar panels. Thus, the installation of the facility is provided in a very economical and environmentally friendly manner. However, Türkiye's solar potential is almost three times that of the EU, but solar energy investments in Türkiye are prevented (Twitter post, month 2, political agent).[16]
>
> While the countries that emit the most carbon in the world are China, USA, India, Russia, Japan and EU countries, when we look at the injustice in obligations and the practices of developed countries based on double standards, it is not possible for us to accept the Paris Climate Agreement in its current form.
>
> (Twitter post, month 2, political agent)[17]

Whatever the reason, in the Turkish debate some alternative dimensions are commonly evoked, along with the usual markers related to the EU "institutions": and namely "interactions and dialogue", and especially "industries

and capitalist economies", with the *economic* frame – father than the *institutional* one – being the most used. As to the EU countries, finally, we can list a few relevant constants. First and foremost, Europe is associated with its establishment, with rare traces of Europeanization from below: either in terms of political claims (*social movements*), or banal reference to its inhabitants and daily life (*people*). This exclusion of people's *agency* from the discourse is in line with the view of Europe as depicted by social, political, and cultural studies: with its identity, in short, "constructed and formed by political elites, the mass media, and the institutions" (Kuhn, 2019, p. 1216). In that matter, we also register a lack of interest for cultural works coming from Europe (that we coded as *contents*): something that would recall Bourdon's and Sassoon's diagnoses on the condition of the European audiences, with people mostly consuming local and American products. A final aspect can be cited, which has to do with the all-material dimension of the *territories*, which, interestingly enough, are only mentioned in respect to immigration, and to the areas that are more exposed to the incoming flows. In the specific observation period, almost the totality of the posts was about the crisis at the Polish-Belarus frontier, and the controversy sparked by the proposal of erecting a wall at the EU border. Based on the literature review, I already talked about a purely *defensive* conception of Europe, built in opposition to its constitutive others: and, at the empirical level, this is what we found in social media discussion as well.

Notes

1 Besides the explicit reference to Lyotard's notion of metanarrative, that cannot be discussed here, it remains unclear – at least from a sociological standpoint – whether the compresence of alternative stories is a typical constituent of Europe. As a matter of fact, modern society is in itself *polytheistic*, and driven by the conflict among different groups of interest: only totalitarian regimes have imposed over it a single narrative – and not accidentally, they are intrinsically reactionary in nature and ambitions. To rephrase Delanty's statement, the real point is rather that Nation-States *were way more successful* in moderating these divergent trends, in comparison to the EU.

2 On a marginal note, it is singular that the authors largely draw on Jeremy Tunstall's approach, without addressing a main aspect of his thought, which is the idea of an industrial synergy, rather than an ideal-typical opposition, between Western European and Northern American media. I will discuss this aspect in the last chapter.

3 Nowhere is this pattern clear as in Bourdieu, with the "field of power" and the "literary field" being separated by social and urban barriers, and still, both organizing themselves around a symmetrical hierarchization principle (1992, pp. 33–59 in particular). This being said, Bourdieu is talking about the social struggle in the XIX Century Paris, and how to apply his model to the wide scale of cultural systems, as I will debate in the fourth chapter, is still under question.

4 This "absence of citizenry" will also come out of our analysis of the on-line discussion on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in ten countries, that will be described in the next section of this chapter.

5 I need to denounce, here, an evident shortcoming of the academic debate, in which the radicalization process is only associated to right-wing, nationalist, and populist fringes (see, for an emblematic example, Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018, p. 300). The socio-technical features of the bubbles, though, are not to be mistaken with the contingent political contents they are inspired by: as a mater o fact, the pro-EU or left-wing discourse may well be the product of the same process of selective exposure, confirmation bias, ad polarization.

6 It is undeniable that the consequences of the financial crisis have also impacted the moral economy of the European Union, and that the year 2008 may well be considered a turning point in the story of the EU integration. For different perspectives on this point, see Castells, Caraça & Cardoso, 2012; Castells et al., 2018.

7 This is somehow implicit in Heindereinch's insightful claim that horizontal Europeanization is by definition a "field-specific" Europeanization (2019, p. 18) – in other words, and beyond the author's intentions, it would impact only some selected parts of any society.

8 Euronews, *About Us*. Retrieved August 24, 2023, from www.euronews.com/about.

9 Euronews, *Euronews, #1 international news channel across the key European markets*, June 9, 2022. Retrieved August 24, 2023, from www.euronews.com/press-office/press-releases/euronews-1-international-news-channel-across-the-key-european-markets.

10 Euronews, *Our audience*. Retrieved August 24, 2023, from www.euronews.com/commercial/advertising/our-audience/.

11 ISCTE-IUL Lisbon led the research task and the whole work-package, with the methodological plan and the aggregated analysis being released by Gustavo Cardoso, Cláudia Álvares. José Moreno, Rita Sepúlveda, Miguel Crespo, Caterina Foà, Mehment Ali Uzelgun, and Sofia Ferro Santos. For the data coding, elaboration and analysis at the national level: for Belgium, Femke De Sutter, Daniël Biltereyst, and Sofie Van Bauwel; for Bulgaria, Evelina Christova Dessislava Boshnakova, Boryana Gigova. Desislava Dankova, Justine Toms, and Stoyko Petkov; for Czech Republic, Vaia Doudaki, Miloš Hroch, and Nico Carpentier; for Germany, Volker Grassmuck and Barbara Thomass; for Greece, Stylianos Papathanassopoulos. Ioanna Archontaki. Iliana Giannouli, and Achilleas Karadimitriou; for Italy, Sara Cannizzaro, Andrea Miconi, and Elisabetta Risi; for Portugal, António Vasconcelos, Marta Carvalho, Sofia Santos Matos, Rita Sepúlveda, and José Moreno; for Spain, Valentina Latronico, Jim Ingebretsen Carlson, and Francisco Lupiañez-Villanueva; for Sweden, Thomas Andersson and Qammar Abbas; for Türkiye, Lutz Peschke and Yasemin Gümüş Ağca.

12 Precisely, the 2020 edition, Standard Eurobarometer 93, retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2262.

13 For a complete explanation of the methodology, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable D2.1- Framework and Methodological Protocol, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

14 The table here synthetizes the average results of the interreliability tests for the 55 coded variables. In three cases – Germany, Spain, and Türkiye – the first datasets did not pass the Krippendorff's test and therefore they were discarded; so that, for these countries, we covered a two-month period, from October 1 to November 30, 2021. In force of the researchers' training, Krippendorff's value is in all cases above 0.66, and in a few cases above 0.90. For the extended description of the methodology, see the EUMEPLAT deliverables 2.1- Framework and Methodological Protocol, and 2.2- Platformization of News in Ten Countries. Retrieved from www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

Country	*Percentage of agreement (average)*	*Krippendorff's Alpha (average)*
Belgium (Flemish)	99.77	0.9876
Belgium (French)	99.77	0.9446
Bulgaria	98.41	0.9380
Czech Republic	98.96	0.9292
Germany	98.12	0.8097
Spain	98.91	0.9919
Greece	96.45	0.7063
Italy	97.86	0.8779
Portugal	95.54	0.6813
Sweden	97.81	0.9271
Türkiye	97.29	0.8832

15 In the last years, different studies have independently pointed to this tendency, which was hardly visible in the first mappings of the social media mobilization. Welbers and Opgenhaffen measured the reposts of the news media Facebook accounts, which play a decisive part in the visibility of the contents, acting as gatekeepers of a new kind (2018, pp. 4742–4743 in particular). Sacco and others detected a similar pattern in analyzing the discussion around the Sars-Cov-2 epidemic, hegemonized by the social media profiles of the legacy media (Sacco et al., 2021, pp. 6–7). The same trend has been observed on Twitter, in respect to the Italian 2018 elections, and based on a sample of 402,000 tweets (Bracciale, Martella, & Visentin, 2018, pp. 373–374); and, at the cross-platform level, by Pilati in a survey on the polarization of Italian debate (Pilati, 2020, pp. 84–90). Consistent indications, about the Twitter debate being triggered by the top-down interventions of journalists and influential figures, in our research on the case of the Italian Green Pass (Pilati & Miconi, 2022). To some extent, this is purely empirical evidence still in search of a theory, and there is no doubt that a serious reflection will be needed, in the years to come.

16 "Avrupa başta olmak üzere dünyanın birçok ülkesi otoyollarının üzerini güneş panelleriyle kaplıyor.Böylece tesis kurulumu çok ekonomik ve çevreci olarak sağlanıyor.Oysa Türkiye'nin güneş potansiyeli neredeyse AB'nin üç katı ancak Türkiye'de güneş enerjisi yatırımları engelleniyor" (English translation by Lutz Peschke and Yasemin Gümüş Ağca).

17 "Dünya'da en fazla karbon salınımı yapan ülkeler Çin, ABD, Hindistan, Rusya, Japonya ve AB ülkeleriyken, yükümlülüklerdeki adaletsizliklere, gelişmiş ülkelerin çifte standarda dayalı uygulamalarına baktığımızda mevcut haliyle Paris İklim Anlaşması'nı kabul etmemiz mümkün değildir" (English translation by Lutz Peschke and Yasemin Gümüş Ağca).

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4 Europe in the world-system

1 Is it East versus West?

1.1 A kind of Orientalism

If taken strictly, the divide between Eastern and Western media systems would rely on the regional pattern: and in fact, we saw different traces of it in the literature reviewed in the second chapter. There is a reason to face this theoretical knot here, nevertheless, as it puts into question the very delimitations of Europe, its relationship with the *other*, and in my approach, its position in the world-system. As Fernand Braudel states in a posthumous work, "moving away from this narrow continent" holds the key to mastering its secrets, inasmuch as "it is necessary to look at Europe from some distance" (1987, p. 244). In the matter of the Eastern area, Tanya Lokot discerns about the Ukrainian case, "Europe's borders have shifted and transformed throughout its history", in a complicated assemblage of different trends: the transformation of political geography, the "expansion of the Europe of institutions", and the "European imagery" too, as perceived by the people (2021, p. 440). It is my belief, to start with, that the very definition of Eastern European media is afflicted by a sort of Orientalism: the kind of representation, as Edward Said notoriously expounded, that a culture imagines in "opposition to a region of the world it considered alien to its own" (1979, p. 328).[1] Yes, there is a solid historical reason, behind that: the Eastern countries were annexed to the Socialist and Communist empires, which vested the role of constitutive others for the European identity as built after World War II (Delanty, 2013, pp. 280–284).[2] To make order, I will consider two facets of this problem, intertwined with each other: the unitary definition of Eastern market as a monolithic category; and once again, the normative view entailed by its juxtaposition with the Western or the liberal systems. The two aspects are intertwined, I said: for generalizing about the existence of a single Eastern media system, as is always the case, is key to a biased interpretation of it.

The implicit conceptualization of a self-consistent Eastern media market has been partially caused, practically speaking, by Eastern Europe not being addressed by Hallin and Mancini – unlike in Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's

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original comparative model – which has been largely debated (Voltmer, 2012, p. 241; Hallin & Mancini, 2010, pp. 55–56; Hallin & Mancini, 2013, pp. 21–22). In this respect, the addition of a post-Socialist region to the three-space pattern is hardly useful, as it lacks any analytical rigor, like any definition merely shaped in *negative* terms (Mihelj & Downey, 2012, p. 5). As a confirmation of how misleading this binary opposition may be, it is emblematic that the most singular specificity of post-Socialist and post-Communist media industries – the role of the state – is also an elective characteristic of continental Europe at large, according to the same theorical framework. It is therefore no accident that closer investigations have revealed a more nuanced picture, with Eastern media markets variously differing from each other, depending on the picked variables. This is particularly clear in the work made by Castro Herrero and colleagues, which put in application the comparative method to Central and Eastern European countries, by investigating four dimensions: political parallelism, state of public broadcasting, freedom of press, and foreign ownership of local outlets. Three empirical clusters pop out (Castro Herrero et al., 2017, p. 4808), which the authors code as *Eastern*, with high parallelism and foreign ownership, weakness of public service media and limited freedom (Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania); *Central*, with strong PSM, above-average freedom, and limited foreign investments and parallelism (Croatia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovenia); and *Northern*, with notable freedom and frequent foreign property, modest parallelism, and relatively weak public media (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia). The latter type confirms the specific nature of the Baltic media, which have been traditionally closer to the Scandinavian system than to the Soviet (Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008, p. 20); and in fact, they are frequently grouped, based on empirical evidence, in the Central European cluster (see also Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015, 2019; Peruško, 2021).

In force of both data clustering and historical analyses, Dobek-Ostrowska identifies four different types of Eastern European media systems: Hybrid Liberal, Politicized, Media in (permanent) Transition, and Authoritarian (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2015, pp. 24–35; see also Dobek-Ostrowska, 2023). The Hybrid Liberal pattern is the most stable, and it is "typical for the West Slavonic and the Baltic States", with a medium position in the free press indexes and a notable incidence of foreign companies. The system is marked by an unresolved balance between the relatively florid state of the economy and the condition of "flawed democracy": Poland, for instance, might have recently moved to the authoritarian cluster (see also Polońska, 2019, pp. 248–249; the remaining nations are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Czechia). In comparison, the Politicized Media system is affected by "lower democratic standards" and by a strong political control over public-owned information channels, and it encompasses Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Serbia. The uncertainty of media and political pathways is typical of the Media in (permanent) Transition cluster of countries, weakened by the poor economic viability, limited freedom of press, very strong

politicization of the news, and low levels of education and adoption of digital services (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Ukraine, and Moldova). An Authoritarian management of the media is still in place in Russia and Belarus, finally, "30 years after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc", with Poland possibly joining the group, due to the de-democratization process it has allegedly undergone (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2023, pp. 18–20). Also the level of media politicization varies from country to country, based on Dobek-Ostrowska's research: ranging from *light* (Estonia, Slovakia, Czechia, Latvia), to *medium* (Lithuania, Slovenia, Romania), *medium-strong* (Poland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia, Albania), *strong* (Moldova, Kosovo, Ukraine, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Macedonia), to *very strong*, precisely in Russia and Belarus (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2019, pp. 264–265).

While Bajomi-Lázár also includes Hungary in the authoritarian type (2015, pp. 60–62), Jakubowicz and Sükösd delved into the Eastern countries by making use of the conventional indicators of freedom of speech and information. As a result, properly *democratic* media emerge in the Baltics and in the East-Central Europe, with Belarus standing out as the only *dictatorial* system. The *authoritarian* model would split into three variants: the "etatist" in Russia; the "paternalistic" in Kazakhstan; and the "depressed" in Moldova and Southern Caucasus (2008, p. 31). Balčytienė and Juraitė (2015) opted for a different methodological choice, taking into account people's perceptions of the state of media and democracy, with Eastern Europe consequently organized into three regions. In Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Lithuania, people show a medium consumption of TV political news, a medium degree of trust in politics and satisfaction with democracy, and low standards of activism. In Poland, Estonia, and Slovenia a modest interest for political news is accompanied by medium levels of political trust, electoral participation and satisfaction with democracy, and low levels of activism as well. Bulgaria stands alone, finally, with people apparently more engaged in mediated than direct forms of politics: with high consumption of political news and high electoral turnout coupled by low trust in politics, no accustomedness to activism, and limited appreciation for the level of the internal democracy (ibidem, pp. 35–38 in particular).

Peruško, Vozab and Čuvalo's work gives justice to the complexity of the media patterns we are inspecting in this section. In a first analysis, aiming at empirically testing the comparative model, the authors collected data on 23 countries, by mostly operationalizing the state of inclusiveness and globalization; the development of the ICT sector and creative economy; and the concentration in the TV market. At this level of scale, Eastern European countries do cluster together, as they are characterized by low inclusiveness and moderate degree of globalization; less developed ICT and creative economy; and high TV concentration. This is the case of Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia; and in the same group we can also find Greece and Portugal. A second cluster includes Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the

UK: due to high inclusiveness and globalization, an open creative economy, a moderate to high development of digital market, and low TV concentration. The countries of the third type – Denmark, Finland, and Sweden – have high inclusiveness and globalization scores and a very developed digital market, with low TV concentration, and an only moderately open creative economy. Israel, finally, eschews any categorization as the peculiar case of a country with developed digital sector, but low inclusiveness and globalization, and the highest degree of TV concentration (Peruško, Vozab, & Čuvalo, 2015, pp. 351–353). Having said that, a more granular observation would reveal differences among the countries, which may not be caught at first glance. This is the case of Peruško, Vozab, and Čuvalo's study on former Yugoslavian media systems, which combine the more common indicators – media freedom, diffusion of digital services, and political parallelism – with the evidence related to the evolution of the countries in a *long durée* perspective: namely, the development of the press in the modern era, and the condition of the markets under the Socialist order (2021, pp. 224–231 and 238–240 in particular). According to these variables, two variants are clearly identifiable. Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia have in common the traditional strength of the press, a high professionalization of journalism in the 20th century, and a strong media market in the Socialist era: though Serbia betrays a peculiar level of political parallelism, and a less advanced digital transition, in comparison to the other two nations. On the other hand, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia suffer a historical delay in the evolution of press, journalism, and mass communication in general, resulting in a marked political parallelism, and in a likewise weak digital market (2021, pp. 233–237). There is little doubt that the importance of Peruško's work attains to its advanced methodology: based on which a single country – Croatia, more specifically – can be inherent to different clusters, according to the factors taken into exam (Peruško, 2023, p. 101).

In light of these insights, the very existence of an Eastern media system can actually be questioned: if anything, due to the dissimilarities between the post-Socialist and post-Communist cases, and to the variable pace and linearity of the historical changes conditioning them (Dobek-Ostrowska & Kleut, 2023, pp. 5–6). At a broader theoretical level, this would remind us of Jack Goody's reflection on the juxtaposition between the East and the West, which is built – also in the academy – on biased assumptions, and rarely allows for a comparison between *homogeneous* variables: the rational discourse in both the East and the West, for example; or the mystic discourse in the East and in the West; and so forth. *The Theft of History*:

> world history has been dominated by categories like "feudalism" and "capitalism" that have been proposed by historians, professional and amateur, with Europe in mind. That is, a "progressive" periodization has been elaborated for internal use against the backdrop of Europe's particular trajectory. There is therefore no difficulty in showing that feudalism is essentially European, (. . .) always starting from and

> returning to their western European base. This is not how comparison should work sociologically. As I have suggested, *one should start with features such as dependent land tenure and construct a grid of the characteristics of various types*.
>
> (Goody, 2012, pp. 6–7, emphasis added)

A move, to modestly rephrase Goody' statement, from the comfortable answer offered by the all-embracing classifications to their breakdown into analytical variables and granular dimensions, which is what the mentioned authors have done, through the lens of media history. It is hardly necessary to recall how much work is still needed, in that direction, and the studies we passed in review may constitute a good basis to build on. It is also evident how the opposition contested by Goody would imply a highly normative view, which is the second aspect to be dealt with. In our case, the prejudice alluded to by Goody is made visible by the constant reference to the *transition* towards the Western model, which is one with considering the Eastern media as less advanced than their term of comparison. Gross, for instance, hypothesizes three moments: the "transition" in the strict sense, after the fall of the Berlin Wall; the "consolidation" of media professionalism; and finally – in an apparently teleological fashion – the "adoption" of Western European methods and protocols (2004, pp. 127–128). The association of Eastern media systems to the Mediterranean – which has been put forward by several authors, framed in Hallin and Mancini's categories[3] – simply reinforces this prejudice, as the Polarized Pluralist model is itself defined by its backwardness and historical delay.

1.2 Again on the normative dimension of media studies

Mihelj and Huxtable's reconstruction of Socialist TV systems comes in handy, here, as it provides evidence of what the authors call the traditional "transnational entanglement" of the Eastern European media (2018, p. 60). Not only were regular exchanges and collaborations in place between Socialist Europe and Nordic European countries – especially Sweden and Finland (ibidem, p. 110) – but the very organization of the media industries was somehow transversal to the political blocks as lined up after World War II. As a case in point, the Finnish TV was part of both the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and the International Radio and Television Organization (OIRT), the association taking together the Socialist and Communist countries; while Yugoslavia was rather affiliated to EBU, probably for distancing itself from the Soviet Union (ibidem, p. 62). Cooperation between the two entities, the OIRT and the EBU, has been highlighted by Lundgren (2015, p. 241), also in respect to their common use of the formats and standards coming from the British BBC, before the dismantling of the OIRT and the annexing of all Eastern countries to the EBU, in the first half of the 1990s (Splichal, 1994, p. 40). Beutelschmidt and Ohemig, in a similar way, traced the exchange of TV contents – "mainly top-class films and high-quality

series" from Western to Eastern Germany, whose state television, from the 1970s onwards, had "intensive direct contacts" with both the ARD and the ZDF (2014, pp. 65–66).

In addition, Mihelj and Huxtable deconstruct a well-known commonplace, the idea of Western media contents igniting the people's mobilization against their closed political regimes (which has been echoed, one generation later, by the claims about the so-called Twitter revolutions in North Africa). Besides the lack of systematic data, on no possible reading of the available information can that be stated that watching Western programs was correlated with developing anti-Communist ideas – which, as a matter of fact, were not particularly popular in the countries targeted by cross-border broadcasting (ibidem, p. 192). Despite being limited to the specific case of *Dallas*, Liebes and Katz's seminal study on audience reception supplies a confirmation: in fact, watching the soap in East Germany had nothing to do with the adoption of Western ideologies or habits – rather, the authors detected the domestication of the product and even a sort of "socialist reading of Dallas" (1990, p. 89), as paradoxically as it may seem. If anything, and once again, all these findings require breaking away from the agreed-upon interpretations of Central and Eastern European media culture.

Christine Evans' work on state TV in the USSR can be read in the same perspective, as it deals with the long-lasting "Soviet television enthusiasm" and with the political mission of broadcasting (2016, p. 23), without overlooking its relative openness to cross-border contaminations. It is particularly the case of *Time* (*Vremia*), a news show which was launched in 1969 and inspired at the "speed and style" of the Western programming, in which both the media managers and the Central Committee officers saw a strong potential for mass persuasion (ibidem, p. 117). Similarities with the Western standards take form, in respect to the marketing strategies and to the use of the surveys, which were "very similar" to those provided by Nielsen for the American broadcasters (ibidem, pp. 59–61). The programming schedule, in its turn, was comparable to the Western, and so was the balance between the contents planned for the general public and those for the specific audiences, segmented on the basis of gender, age, education, profession, or cultural interests (ibidem, p. 69). Across its history, Soviet TV also adopted non-national models – in such cases as quiz, game shows, and mini-series – also coming from capitalist countries (ibidem, pp. 153–154 and 203). No international exchange comes without complications, as we know: while the game shows easily made their way to public airing – in Communist Germany even before than in the USSR (ibidem, p. 203) – the TV-series required a longer and more thorough adaptation to the local standards, especially for transforming them in "socialist miniseries", likely to engage the "viewers in order to better instruct" them (ibidem, p. 183, italics removed). All this is not to deny that the Soviet TV was different from Western European TV, to be clear – at the end of the story *it was*, and in many respects. These differences, this notwithstanding, should not be thought of as a token of *backwardness*: and the very few available studies are precious, in this sense, as they add some

degree of shading in our palette of black and white. More than likely, in this respect we register a delay of the media studies, when compared to other scientific fields, where it is rather registered a "growing literature on economic, cultural, and political inter-penetration between East and West during the Cold War" (Péteri, 2004, p. 114). Just the same, such studies are fundamental in providing a less rudimental interpretation of Eastern European history, compared to the plain juxtaposition with the West: and in media field, to put into question the "naïve" and judgmental category that we have inherited from Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, as it has been drastically noted (Lundgren, 2015, pp. 238–239).

The available data and the literature I could review, in sum, do not allow for any conclusion about the connections between Eastern and Western systems; and it is undoubted that additional research investments in that direction will be necessary.[4] All in all, nonetheless, these arguments are strong enough to cast some perplexity on the way we have represented the history of Eastern European media. In particular, it seems evident that the category of *transition* – which has been abused to the point of becoming undistinguishable from its "caricature" (Sparks, 2000, p. 44) – is more accurate for the first decade of the post-Socialist era, than it is for more recent developments of the media markets. A more precise indication is that proposed by Peruško, Vozab, and Čuvalo (2021, pp. 151–153), which split up the general notion of transition into three specific processes: delinking between state control and media management; overall growth of audiences and media markets; and possible "harmonization" at the European level. As confirmed by Beata Klimkiewicz, the post-1989 moment was indeed characterized by common trends: the liberalization of the press sector, coupled, in a different vein, with a stronger state intervention in the regulation of radio and TV; the crisis of public service media broadcasting; and the arrival of foreign owners and investors (2009, pp. 48–51). Clearly enough, we are talking about the period in which the political balance had begun to shift towards privatization and internationalization: it is no coincidence that the decrease in state funding of the media has gone hand in hand, in Eastern Europe at large, with the lowering of the public service media revenues and with the dropping level of people's trust in their independence and trustworthiness (Saurwein, Eberwein & Karmasin, 2019, pp. 297–298). The historical concomitance of the two historical facts – the technological evolution and the institutional turnaround – is not to be underestimated, as pointed out by Auksė Balčytiene. In this sense, Balčytiene makes the case that the effects of digitization and platformization have been particularly violent as – unlike in Western Europe – they have not impacted on a stable structure, while taking place during an era of radical social and economic changeovers. As a main result, the move from the widening of the information arena to what she calls the "institutionalization of free choice" has somehow backfired, generating negative externalities in terms of people's skepticism and cynicism (2021, pp. 81–84). That the new media ecosystem has not been accompanied by the rise of a solid and rational

debate has been alluded to by many scholars, albeit with different explanations. Some point to the absence of an active public opinion, also proved by the rarity of alternative media projects and grassroots initiatives (Gross, 2002, p. 130); other observe, contrariwise, that in Eastern Europe the civil society has evolved way more than the state (Splichal, 1994, p. 31), and that it is the turn to "illiberal democracy" to have hindered the rise of a digital public sphere (Surowiec & Štětka, 2020, p. 2). Katrin Voltmer takes an intermediate position, as in her view "Eastern Europe" brings together "elements of political domination and an independent public sphere", which would set it apart from any other institutional assemblage (2015, p. 311).

To sum up, three major indications must be listed out. Firstly, the historical evidence that we have summarily appraised goes against the stereotypical idea of Eastern European media as being insulated and disconnected from the international market. Additionally, in comparison to the conventional juxtaposition between the East and the East, we would state that there is no such a thing as *the* Eastern media pattern, as even during the Communist era different models were actually in place. According to Mihelj and Huxtable, more precisely, it is three types of media systems: the "market state socialist" in Yugoslavia; the "reformist state socialist", in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland; and the "hard line state socialist" in Albania, Bulgaria, East Germany, Romania, and the Soviet Union (2018, pp. 84–87). Finally, we mentioned that the progressive adoption of Western models might have come to an end at some point – and in fact, as we saw in the second chapter, Hallin and Mancini's hypothesis about the convergence between the different media systems has been largely rebutted. All this would leave us with a paramount question: what if, in the end, the media evolution in Eastern Europe is *not* heading towards Europeanization?

1.3 A historical disjuncture

Only after World War II, Shane Weller opines, historical evidence arose that Europe is not only made of its Western component: and "ironically" enough, such evidence was derived from the political division of the continent (2021, p. 220). It is here that the problem of the unity in diversity, that we have presented so far in theoretical terms, takes on a very material connotation. On the one hand, Europe should be thought of as a whole, something to which the *topos* of the "enlargement" cannot give justice: as if, Massimo Cacciari wrote, "as if Europe were already itself without Warsaw and Budapest, Prague, Zagreb, or Belgrade", or even Moscow (1994, p. 9). Greiner, Pichler and Vermeiren only apparently disagree with Cacciari, when stating that the enlargement process has been beneficial to European identity, in revealing the coexistence of multifaceted and divergent realities (2022, pp. 5–6). In the other way, in fact, a deep historical divide is evident between East and West: either the political, due to the Socialist curtain and its long-term consequences; or the economic, with Eastern Europe serving as a sort of

internal semi periphery, whose resources have been appropriated by Western countries, favored by the territorial proximity (Turnock, 1989, p. 7).

For what concerns the evolution of media systems, as advanced in the previous section, a question arises as to whether the post-1989 transition towards capitalist information markets is aligned with the broader course of Europeanization. At first glance, two different strands of Westernization can be observed. The culture produced in the democratic European countries has been popular and attractive until the 1970s; while from the 1980s onwards, American contents have literally invaded the former Socialist region (Sükösd, 1990, p. 54; Splichal, 1994, p. 107). A main role has been played, here and elsewhere, by Hollywood, which set in motion an arsenal of tailored strategies for occupying the local markets, among which the classical joint releases; the so-called "runaway productions", taking advantage of the on-site and less expensive sets and crews; and the related marketization of the movie locations (see Wasko, 1991; Stachowiak & Stryjakiewicz, 2018, pp. 231–233; Sayfo, 2020, pp. 48–50).

Václav Štětka has analyzed with specific attention what we could define the progressive *delinking* between Eastern and Western European media. To start with, Štětka's findings confirm the previous indications about Western contents being available in Socialist Europe; in particular, such TV series as *Dallas* and *Columbo* (2012a, pp. 110–111). Needless to say, since the fall of the Berlin Wall the system has undergone a drastic process of restructuration, with "a steep increase of in imported products" in the 1990s (ibidem, p. 116), and the wide diffusion of foreign productions at the beginning of the new century (ibidem, pp. 111–112). As is often the case, this internationalization process was far from uniform, and affected the Central and Eastern European countries in variable ways (2012b, pp. 436–437): Poland, for instance, took advantage of its tradition in the publishing of dailies and gazettes for building a strong national offer also in the TV market (Kostandinova, 2015, p. 457), and put into effect concrete policy for limiting the foreign control on the local outlets (Klimkiewicz, 2022, pp. 16–17). In any case, it can be stated that Western industry has been generally dominant between the 1990 and the 2000s, both in terms of economic investments and content exportation (Kostadinova, 2015, p. 456; Štětka, 2012b, p. 438–439).

What Štětka's study shows, is that such trend towards Europeanization or Westernization has turned down, approximately in correspondence with the 2008 financial shock. More precisely, he puts to the foreground the changes in media ownership in "the countries that have joined the European Union since 2004" – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia – by means of both the reading of corporate materials and interviews with 272 experts and media managers in the region (2012b, p. 435). In terms of delinking, Štětka argues, it all begun, if we need a symbolic date, in 2006, when the British conglomerate Mecom Group sold its Lithuanian dailies – *Kauno Diena* and *Vilnius Diena* – to the

local equity fund Hermis Capital. One year later, the German Verlagsgruppe Handelsvlatt liquidated half of its media assets in Bulgaria to a Bulgarian company, and later on conducted the same operation in Czech Republic and Slovenia (2012b, p. 49). At the end of the story, in all Central-Eastern European countries, with the exception of Hungary, no more than one foreign-owned newspaper is included in the list of the top five in terms of reaching (Štětka, 2015, p. 88). As Štětka describes in great detail this cascade of disinvestment, I will focus here on the explanation of this undertaking, and on its broader geo-cultural repercussions.

According to Štětka, the reason for Western European capitals to leave the Eastern countries is the continuous loss of revenues, and then the general recession sparkled by the 2008 mortgage crisis (2015, p. 87). This favored, and actually made possible the rise of a new kind of moguls, the local tycoons, which have taken over the markets in the last fifteen years – a figure that Štětka refers to as "media oligarchs", common to all the considered countries (2015, p. 86). The feature of this new form of ownership are as follows: the national origin of capitals and magnates as well; the clientelist management of information and media, and their use for influencing public opinion and setting the political agenda (2012b, pp. 446–448); and, except for Estonian and Slovenian oligarchs, the ability of extending the action to the regional level (2015, pp. 89–91). Based on Štětka's interviews, in fact, media operators make a constant reference to the "unfavorable business climate", also determined by the "widespread abuse of power" on the part of local owners (2012b, p. 441). It is exactly the economic contraction, which caused Western European capitals to flight, to explain the rise of the oligarchs, which are united by a "relative lack of emphasis on profit" (2015, p. 93): as their core business is always in *other* industrial sectors, and not in the media market, they make use of news outlets for the purposes of lobbying and influencing the decision-makers, while Western investors were obsessed by the revenues, or the lack thereof (ibidem, p. 94). In line with Štětka's analysis, albeit limited to national cases, also the diagnoses of the clientelist management of the Hungarian (Bajomi-Lázár, 2021) and the Romanian media (Gross, 2023, pp. 68–78 in particular).

This being said, there is an aspect that Štětka's work, as precious as it is, has probably underestimated: the disruption of the market on the part of global platforms, which has reached its final stage in the very same time span. In fact, Štětka only refers once to the platformization process as "weakening the print media" (2015, p. 86), without assessing its overall impact on the media ecosystem. That platforms eroded the market shares of previous services, and particularly the TV thematic channels, has been observed in a cross-European perspective (Papathanassopoulos, Giannouli, Archontaki, & Karadimitriou, 2023, pp. 47–48); and two implications are relevant to our discourse. Firstly, the platforms are mostly controlled by US companies – despite such notable exceptions as Spotify – which results in a replacement of the Western European presence with the American. Secondly, and more

significantly, online platforms make possible the uploading, production, or circulation of *national* contents, so that once again Europe would be lost in the middle, between the local and the global. The process is not dissimilar, in cultural terms, from that made familiar by the TV formats, to which Štětka refers exactly as they allow for the merging between a super-national infrastructure, and the local contents and formulas (Štětka, 2012, p. 114).

While it is not my intention to diminish the importance of the *material* setting of the media markets, we also state that the *discursive* dimensions of the process (see Carpentier, Hroch, Cannizzaro, Miconi, & Doudaki, 2023) should not fall off of the agenda either. It has been argued, in this direction, that after the post-1989 wave of enthusias, the very idea of Europeanization has lost part of its appeal:

> In the first decade after the fall of communism, the ideas of the "West" and "Europe" that featured most prominently in Eastern European political and cultural discourse can be summed up in the popular expression of the time of "returning to Europe" or "catching up with the West". . . . These phrases are used more rarely today, either because it is assumed that what was advocated happened – Eastern Europe catching up with the West; or because the goal lost some of its attractiveness.
> (Mazierska, 2015, p. 151)

For Mazierska as well, two periods can be set apart: the decade following the disaggregation of the Socialist and Communist regimes, when "catching up with the West" was widely advocated for in all Eastern Europe; and the more recent years, with this rhetoric fading almost everywhere. In her conclusion, it is not clear whether that happened due to the goal already being achieved, or as "it had rather lost some of its attractiveness" in the eyes of the people. Bajomi-Lázár, Balčytiene, Dobreva and Klimkiewicz take a more assertive stand in this matter, in their analysis of the transitions of media industries in Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, and Poland (2020). The period between the late 1980s and the early 1990s, they state, has come to be remembered as "a golden age of media freedom", while the "broadcasters have eventually failed to live up to a strong public service ethos". The causes explaining this failure are the strong journalism partisanship; the laws limiting freedom of speech, where put in place; and – differently from Štětka's conclusions – the excessive commercialization of the media sector (ibidem, p. 294). "It is important to note", Bajomi-Lázár wrote, "that the consolidation of media freedom is not an irreversible process", and on the contrary, it is and open-ended, controversial, and even "potentially never ending one" (2009, p. 78). For what is of our interest, Europeanization and democratization may be reversible as well, as showed by Eva Polońska's analysis of the "U-turn" in the evolution of public service media in Poland, which relies in its turn on the discontinuity between the two post-1989 decades and the more recent trends (2019, p. 230).

1.4 Europeanization or de-Europeanization?

If taken together, all these studies showcase that there is no clear convergence tendency between the media regimes from the Eastern and Western regions. And still, it is also a fact that the reference to the Europeanization process – actually, the very keyword *Europeanizaton* – has become way more frequent in scientific literature and public debate, in the same period, from the late 1990s onwards, as it has been measured in quantitative terms (Greiner, Pichler, & Vermeiren, 2022, pp. 5–6). Numerical occurrences do not tell everything, though, and the hypothesis they cannot rule out, in this case, is that the concept is used as an empty signifier, with variable meanings attributed to the very same word, so that the massive use of the Europeanization formula enshrines disparate positions, views, and sets of values (Gehler, 2021, p. 35). Or perhaps, as Cacciari would drastically phrase it, there is much talking about Europeanization exactly *because of* the lack of any agreement on its nature; so that the notion of Europe only exists as a fragile, unresolved, and problematic one (2009, pp. 53–54). The disjunction between the vertical and horizontal strands, that we have drawn on in the third chapter, is a first example of how the notion of Europeanization can split into very different instances – in that case, the clash between a bureaucratic path to the unification, and the spontaneous sharing of ideas among the regions. Rooke set forth an alternative distinction, that between the public and the private way to media Europeanization, as both sectors are involved in the process, resulting in an irregular, rather than linear historical trend (2013, p. 88). If we go beyond the field of media studies, however, this contraposition is even more relevant, as it shows that the unification of the continent can come at the price of limiting people's participation to the constituency: or, how Delanty put it, that integration has not necessarily to do with the democraticness of its procedures (2013, p. 329). More ambitiously, Harmsen and Wilson identified no less than eight definitions of Europeanization (2000, pp. 14–18). The first version is the idea of an emerging European *governance*, with attention placed to the national policies aiming at reaching the stage of EU integration. By *national adaptation*, they refer to the more indirect forms of Europeanization, triggered by mutual inspiration and imitation. *Policy isomorphism*, thirdly, results from the combination between EU and national frameworks, and from the synchronization of regulation. Europeanization can be intended as both a *problem and opportunity for local political classes*, then, when it is considered as the annexing of peripheral nations to the core. In the other way, it is *about joining Europe*, when it focuses on the adoption of EU or Western standards by new members or candidates. Europeanization as *modernization* calls to action the transition towards a new stage in the evolution of social body; while the approaches based on the *reconstruction of identities* prioritize the reshaping and "relativization" of national narratives in favor of the emerging imagined community. Finally, Europeanization as *transnationalism and cultural integration* relies on the interactions and

exchanges among different national cultures – something close to what we have labeled as the horizontal strand.

Michael Gehler came out with a similar and yet slightly different exercise, by putting the different versions of Europeanization in a diachronic perspective, resulting in nine definitions. The first one is Europeanization by means of the policy orientation "towards Brussels", with national strategies converging towards a post-national integration. The second one, symmetrically, is the adoption of a "common body of law" and its implementation within the social structure of any member state. The third one is Europeanization as the modernization of the national systems, either political, industrial, or social. A variant of the latter is the defensive way to Europeanization, or the neighborhood policies put in place in the search for "security guarantees". A fifth case is the Europeanization by means of communication and public sphere, expected to also involve civil society, along with the institutional decision-makers. The "opening up" of Eastern Europe would set a new stage, with the expansion of the EU to new territories. The seventh form is the "Europeanization by means of the acculturation of the EU", which would imply the sharing of a common culture that we have been largely investigating in this book. Economic Europeanization, on the other hand, is based on the idea that economy is the main driver of the unification across the continent. The "Europeanization of everyday life", finally, should be based on the reference to common objects and symbols, and it is the closest to the hypothesis of banal Europeanism, that we have discussed in the second chapter (Gehler, 2021, pp. 31–37). A simplified version has been proposed by Marciacq, in the form of a tripartition between Europeanization as a result of a proper integration process; as the product of EU-driven politics; or as the "Westphalian" extension of the prerogatives of the state in the international arena (2012, pp. 60–62). Olsen (2002, pp. 923–924) itemized five approaches to Europeanization, respectively oriented towards the resettling of the material and administrative boundaries; the building of a pan-European governance; the implementation of the EU regulation in the member states; the political unification of the area; and the imposition of European parameters beyond the EU. The latter argument, which cannot be treated in this book, echoes Wallerstein's distinction between the "European universalism", as the biased assumption about the universal nature of European principles, and the "universal universalism", which "refuses essentialist characterizations of social reality, historicizes both the universal and the particular, reunifies the so-called scientific and humanistic into a single epistemology", and go beyond the limits of Western way of thinking (2006, p. 79).

For our interests, an option for coming to terms with the "Europeanization" issue is to assume that the category itself would take on different meanings, according to one's specific perspective – and also, more relevantly, on one's geographical rootedness. In fact, social forces operating in different regions may look at the integration process in a different perspective, and this is also the case of the Eastern European countries in relation to media

Europeanization. For what concerns the European Union itself, for instance, Europeanisation is a matter of *legitimacy*: how the EU is perceived from the citizens in all member states, and to which extent people feel to be represented by their representatives in Brussels – what we would prefer to refer to as EU-ization (Papatahanassopoulos, Miconi, & Cannizzaro, 2023, pp. 394–395). In this respect, we can say that the offer largely exceeds the demand, as a lack of interest for the institutional existence of EU as such has been already documented, as a matter of fact, in a number of scientific fields (Rose, 2015, p. 3). Rose also makes the argument that the markers of Europe *per se* (the "EU as a whole") are less popular than those related to its affiliated institutions – the Parliament, the Commission, and more surprisingly, even the Central Bank – which, when confirmed, would raise interesting and unforeseen questions (ibidem, p. 26).

From the standpoint of the European Community as a whole, as stated, it is all about integration and legal harmonization. A main difference emerges in the case of Central Europe, where the pan-European project is perceived by the ruling classes, based on the analysis of institutional public discourse, as being in line with the expansion and the empowering of the state, and not without a "elite-masses gap" (Best, 2021, p. 213). In such a way, Europeanization is to be perceived as an actual *realization of the ultimate national values*, more than a form of post-national integration, like it is in Western European countries (Tsuladze, 2021, p. 175). As debated, in Eastern Europe Europeanization is one with the *modernization* and Westernization process (Splichal, 1994, p. 107), it being regarded as the right occasion for getting rid of old habits, social roles, and the more. As it has been indicated in respect to the Albanian case, Europeanization was about making space for the EU rules, but also about reducing the harm due to "political polarization, clutching market economy", parochial capitalism, and the alleged backwardness of social structure (Pengili, 2021, p. 250). In this specific circumstance, a similarity can be found with some analyses of the Italian, Greek and Turkish cases, and therefore with the Mediterranean media system – the resemblance between the two systems being a traditional theme, as discussed in the second chapter, in comparative media studies. The mere difference between the standpoint of the elite and that of the majority, additionally, points the finger toward a major issue that we will have to discuss: the deepening divide, either economic or cultural, which is internal to any European society.

The unfulfilled pathway of media Europeanization is certainly the result of conspicuous difficulties, such as the complex amalgamation of the various regional standards and instances; or, in Indrek Ibrus' words, the impossible mission of building a single digital market (Ibrus, 2016). Yet, we also see that there is a deep cultural reason beneath these difficulties, and namely, the different value that Europeanization itself takes in on, based on the geographical standing: as a *legitimacy problem* for the EU; as a *post-national transition* in the Western countries; as the realization *of national values* in Central Europe; as a *modernization process* in Eastern and, in a different version, in Southern

Europe. As the limitations of the reasoning are to be clearly laid out, two main doubts come to mind. The first one is related to a major incongruency in the way we address the media systems cited earlier; and the second one to a broader methodological reflection.

The incongruency, to start with, is that the changes in Western and Southern media regimes are commonly explained in support of their endogenous evolution, while the pressure of external powers and actors only come to play in the case of Eastern Europe. In different ways, many of the reviewed studies on post-Socialist markets center on the importation of cultural contents and on the impact of foreign ownership: when it gets to the other geographical quadrants, nonetheless, reference is made to their own structural variables, ranging from political parallelism, strength of public service media, and the similar. As stated, it is necessary to avoid the risk of any Orientalist bias, which is almost implicit in the *Eastern* category itself. Only in the case of Eastern Europe, it seems, *exogenous* factors have been widely taken into account, while it is reasonable – and it is also laid out in the classical Robert Ladrech's work (1994, p. 71) – that they come to play a main role in explaining the different ways to Europeanization, in any context.

The second risk is that of coming out with an overarching explanation – precisely, that the Westernization process has been interrupted at some point – which would reproduce the same vice of the all-embracing statements on post-Socialist media, that we were contesting before. To make a point, that all countries are to some extent under a similar pressure, exercised by populist and authoritarian tendencies, does not result in the same consequences. Based on network analysis, for instance, the concentration of media assets is way higher in some cases, such as Hungary, than in others, like Slovenia (Schnyder et al., 2023, pp. 13–14). The media markets also show different degrees of illiberal management of the media and polarization of the debate (Tóth, Mihelj, Štětka, & Kondor, 2023, pp. 889–890), and that the audiences' media repertoires, based on a quali-quantitative survey, also vary: in Czechia the people use a more balanced set of sources; in Serbia the pro-governments outlets are prominent; and in Poland and Hungary, finally, the liberal anti-establishment voices are particularly successful (ibidem, pp. 895–896). As is often the case, to wrap things up, the lessons from history are not simply an academic affair, while bearing significant consequences at the broader level of cultural and political thought: failing in the comprehension of what Europe has been, in fact, is one with being wrong in our expectations about the Europeanization processes to come.

2 The media are American again?

2.1 The Euro-American connection

According to Jeremy Tunstall, there are four types of media, depending on the geographical scope they are grounded on: the *national*, based in a county's

major city and using the national language; the *regional*; the *local*; and the *foreign*, frequently coming from a "neighboring nation-state" (2008, p. 10, italics removed). Though this book is pivoted on geo-cultural patterns of a different scale, there is no doubt that Tunstall's work has provided a useful basis for studying the internationalization of communication flows. His classical position, as we know, can be epitomized in the formula *the media are American*, that is the title of his 1977 book. In Tunstall's reading, the American hegemony over the world did not take shape overnight, while being conquered step by step: with the dawn of the movie industry in the 1920s–1930s (ibidem, p. 49); with the diffusion of American music in Europe, after the end of World War II (ibidem, p. 91); with the importation of US content into British TV, from 1955 onwards (ibidem, p. 101); and with the launch of telecommunication satellites in the 1960s (ibidem, p. 39) – to the point that the very definition of the media formats has been, first of all, an American affair (ibidem, pp. 75–76). Despite the collected evidence, Tunstall is well aware that the cultural imperialism thesis does not stand up to the historical facts, as it explains the rise of global powers, without accounting for the case of regional hegemonies (ibidem, p. 62) – something that we have discussed in the second chapter. It is pretty surprising, in any case, that three decades later Tunstall would reverse his interpretation, suggesting a transition from the Anglo-American cartel to a sort of Euro-American complex.

The contact point between the two alternative statements is the idea of American supremacy peaking in the 1950s, presented in both studies: with the undisputed dominance of the US media from 1943 to 1953 (Tunstall, 1977, p. 137), challenged at the end of the decade by the European takeover of the news agencies market (Tunstall, 2008, pp. 99–100). The vanishing of American power, Tunstall opines, would be caused by both the consolidation of alternative global conglomerates – especially those based in China and India (ibidem, pp. 139–231) – and by the fusion of American and European media in a single integrated industry (ibidem, p. 14). In this respect, Tunstall adapted to the media field a bifocal view common in political studies: with the American crisis being attributed to both endogenous reasons, or *absolute* decline, and to the ascent of Asian competitors, or *relative* decline (see Nye, 2015).

According to Tunstall, the weakening of American power is made evident by some adaptations and changes of the media systems, and in particular by public service media surviving to deregulation almost everywhere and giving rise to public-private hybrid TV markets (2008, p. 259); or, as we saw in the second chapter, by the failure of the convergence tendencies individuated by Hallin and Mancini as the main feature of the new century. Among the factors at stake, going back to Tunstall, we can also mention the concurrence of Latin American countries in the production of "cheap" TV series (2008, p. 11); the role of the European Big Five in the audiovisual industry (ibidem, p. 262); the upheaval of American cable and satellite TV services (ibidem, p. 274); and the co-productions between European companies and

Hollywood (ibidem, p. 282) – and here Tunstall probably underestimates the dominant role played by the American partners in the joint movie releases. At the end of his half-serious comparison between the different segments of media industry, Tunstall presents a balanced proportion, as "the United States beats Europe 10 to 6, or 5 to 3" (ibidem, p. 281). More importantly, his conclusion is that Unites States is still leading the entertainment sector, with Europe being stronger in the field of news and information (ibidem, p. 247). This would result from a bizarre inversion of the historical cycle: firstly, the French-British information duopoly over a whole century, between 1830 and 1930; then the US hegemony, which lasted "fifty years", approximately from 1930 to 1980; and European countries eventually regaining their leadership (Tunstall, 2011, p. 263).

Tunstall's discourse is in line with a typical post-1990s vulgate, claiming the crisis of the American empire: something close to what Huntington had previously defined the *declinism*, or the rhetoric of the US downfall (1988–89, pp. 76 and 95). Such hypothesis has been contested and somehow overcome in the debate among historians, making space for less radical interpretations (see Cox, 2011; Nye, 2015). In any case, Tunstall is certainly right in questioning the American hegemony, in face of the evidence of new global players taking the center of the stage, either they come from China, India, or the Persian Gulf. His diagnosis of European media, in other way, is probably optimistic; and in any case, the platformization process would bear with it a new, and unprecedented hegemony of American players.

That online platforms are mostly owned by American capitals, with a few exceptions, is simply a state of fact, as it is the relative downgrading of European companies (Mansell, 2012, p. 136). Not surprisingly, this new media regime has been labeled as *platform imperialism*, with market monopoly and architecture design cooperating in reinforcing the hegemony of American services over the world, and especially over the Global South (Kwet, 2019, pp. 6–8). In short, it would be about American imperialism being "renewed with platforms", as an additional tool along with those based on "politics, economy, and military, as well as culture" (Yong Jin, 2015, p. 69). For what concerns the video-on-demand sector, that we will deal with in this chapter, similar explanations have been put forward about the "Netflix imperialism": a branch of the American empire, taking advantage of both the usability of the interface and the vertical integration, made possible by the realization of the so-called originals (Davis, 2023, pp. 1145–1146). By collecting first-hand information and interviews with local professionals, Park, Kim and Lee assessed the disruptive effect of Netflix on the Korean market: with the increasing dependence of the industry on the investments of the US-based platform (2023, p. 79), predictably, but also with the changes to the "conventional grammar" of TV dramas, reorganized around the schedule and the timing imposed by the advertising slots (ibidem, p. 81). The commercial VODs actually play a twofold part in favor of the American system: exporting its products at an unprecedented level of scale, and granularity of diffusion;

while also giving new impulse to the internal circulation of its contents and to the actual recognizability of its own culture (Yong Jin, 2017, p. 3887). In this respect, the deep connection between the health of the national market and the global success of American works seems to be confirmed, which is a constant of modern media industries.

Once again, we argue that the shortcoming of the cultural imperialism theory is not in overestimating the impact of the American media, while in the conceptual frame adopted for explaining such undeniable impact. There are three reasons, in synthesis, that would lead us to privilege an alternative model. The first aspect, exemplified by the Korean me case we shortly alluded to, is the fact that American hegemony does not only impact peripheral areas, while also investing other core regions of global capitalism: which, as delineated by Immanuel Wallerstein (1980, p. 39), is a typical feature of the world-system pattern. Secondly, the insistence on the American empire risks to overlook the power of other regional hegemonic forces, which can be analyzed in their turn in terms of platform colonialism – which is naturally the case of Chinese companies (Davis & Xiao, 2021, pp. 104–105 in particular).

A third and more complex argument has to do with the combination between the American origins of the platforms, and their global ramifications. It is hardly necessary to recall that digital platforms "were not born in the void", while being rooted in US capitals and laws (Bannermann, 2022, p. 8). Still, if we consider the actual role of the platforms, as it is legitimized and exercised, doubts can be casted about them being an extension of the Nation-State they originated from – which would justify the *imperialist* thesis.[5] That we bear witness to something different than the classical imperialist hegemony, is also proved by the fact that many platforms favor the spread of national contents, as we saw in the first chapter – and still, they keep exercising a global power of *infrastructural* nature (see Van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018, pp. 12–16). Benjamin Bratton possibly made the biggest and more ambitious step in this direction, in conceptualizing the rise of a megamachine, likely to take control of the Earth ecosystem. For what is of our interest, Bratton sees in these platforms – or the layers of the "stack" to come – a new form of governmentality, which cannot be reduced to their material control of the market, nor to the formal authority of the state, while resulting from the encounter and the amalgamation between the two (2015, p. 341). In this respect, the two authorities would become continuous and eventually indistinguishable from each other (ibidem, p. 120), affirming an unprecedented combination of legal and infrastructural powers (ibidem, p. 21).

While it is not possible to discuss here all facets of Bratton's theory, let us focus on a single aspect: the idea that digital platforms, like Frankenstein's creature, might eventually escape the control of the national system of their origin. This aspect, when proved, might be held as a proof of the total novelty of contemporary techno-economic assemblage, which is clearly Bratton's intention. From our perspective, and on the very contrary, we will frame this assemblage between the national and the global *in continuity* with the

rules of the world-system. As Arrighi and Silver noted, American capitalism largely depends on the protection and the investments assured by the Nation-State: in actuality, way more than other capitalist regimes. At the same time, though, what is typical of American capital is to cyclically rebel against its origin, and questioning the role of the state, usually after reaching the peak of its ascending wave (1999, p. 135 and 73). This is an aspect of the fusion between public powers and private money, that Arrighi considers specific to the Western way to international capitalism (1994, pp. 10–12).

As we know, a serious question for Arrighi is whether recent trends would lead to a radical *recentrage* of the global system, with strategic flows no longer being controlled by Western capitals (1994, p. 354). Even the rise of the Asian giants, in this sense, may well be considered as an unexpected externality of the delocalization of American industrial and credit assets, based on Arrighi's idea that any financial expansion, in the long run, is destined to weaken the core of the system (2009, p. 162). This is due to two different, albeit related factors: the allocation of wealth and technological knowledge in the global networks, which stimulates the competition of the emerging countries; and the internal social conflict, due to the inequalities augmented by the same process (ibidem, pp. 170–171). To wrap it up, it is interesting how the alleged novelty induced by the platformization – the rise of a *meta-territorial* stack, vested with its own powers – is actually in line with the long-duration constants analyzed by Arrighi. As we will discuss again in the last section, these elements – hegemony being exercised over core-regions as well; the coexistence of global and regional powers; and the transition between national and international – all lead towards a specific framework, that of the world-system theory.

2.2 *What people watch on VOD platforms*

The US financial control over VOD services that I alluded to in the previous paragraph inevitably results in a generalized availability of American contents (Batikas, Gomez-Herrera, & Martens, 2015, p. 8), which, by definition, poses a main threat to cultural Europeanization. According to the data collected by Grece and Jiménez Pumares (2021), American movies are the most diffused in Europe, though the proportion is higher in TV-on-demand catalogues than it is in VOD services (Table 4.1).

Even though granular data always unravel a more nuanced pattern, Table 4.2 substantially confirms the same scenario. European movies are more easily distributed in one country: 60% of the total, compared to the 40% of American titles. Conversely, American movies are more frequently distributed in two countries (25.3%, compared to 22.4%), and significantly more in three, four, five or six countries. It is rather interesting that a properly wide-scale distribution – in eight or more markets – is in the end *occasional* for Hollywood movies, as it is for the European. Well beyond the much talked-about level of the blockbusters – which, by definition, are *rare* – it

Table 4.1 Share of European movies in TVOD and SVOD services

	EU27	*Other European countries*	*USA*	*Other regions*
TVOD	156,006 [22%]	74,921 [10%]	415,095 [57%]	78,569 [11%]
SVOD	116,327 [24%]	53,061 [11%]	218,968 [44%]	105,060 [21%]
Total	264,299 [23%]	112,542 [10%]	614,377 [52%]	171,384 [15%]

Source: Grece & Jiménez Pumares, 2021

Table 4.2 Availability index of VOD platforms movies

Number of countries in which the movie is available	*All movies*		*EU movies*		*USA movies*		*Other countries*	
	Total	*%*	*%*	*%*	*Total*	*%*	*Total*	*%*
1	11,351	51.9	6,319	60.3	3,096	40,5	1,936	51.7
2	5,289	24.2	2,345	22.4	1,936	25.3	1,008	26.9
3	2,316	10.6	870	8.3	1,040	13.6	406	10.8
4	1,366	6.2	477	4.6	678	8.9	211	5.6
5	750	3.4	251	2.4	398	5.2	101	2.7
6	473	2.2	129	1.2	291	3.8	53	1.4
7	245	1.1	61	0.6	163	2.1	21	0.6
8	64	0.3	20	0.2	35	0.5	9	0.2
9	18	0.1	6	0.1	9	0.1	3	0.1
10	2	0.0	2	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

Source: Alaveras, Gomez-Herrera, & Martens, 2015

seems that the break threshold is set at a different level: and what is decisive and crucial, in the majority of cases, is whether a movie is distributed in *one* country, or a in *a few* countries.

To test this initial impression, we zoomed into the movies produced or co-produced in the United States, and first released in European video platforms during the year 2021. We relied on the Lumière VOD database, which only provides aggregated data about all the online providers, and we itemized a total of 137 titles.[6] In terms of geo-cultural patterns, the American hegemony apparently reveals a three-level strategy: the *global*; the *regional*; and, less significantly, the *local*. The global level is that of the main productions, expected to hit the box-office: in particular, 28 movies are made simultaneously available in no less than 30 countries. Fourteen other movies are present in 20 or more countries, and eight of them in 15–20 European

markets, with a total of 50 properly cross-European titles. The most common formula, in this case, is the US-UK cooperation, which accounts for 52 out of the 137 movies overall; and for 15 of the 28 large-scale releases cited earlier. Once again, we can indulge on the ambivalent status of British cinema, which on the one hand partakes in the hegemonic role of English-language productions; while, in the other way, revealing its subordination to the power of Hollywood companies (Wayne, 2006). As to the geo-blocking rule that we examined in Chapter 2, it clearly does not apply to the US products, as simple as that, as a confirmation of the infrastructural power of the platforms.

The regional pattern is premised, once again, on the linguistic fragmentation of the continent, and it brings us the closest to the classical geo-blocking strategies. In this cluster, we can group the movies only available in the United Kingdom (*We Are Living Things*; *Why?*; *Upon Her Lips: Heartbeats*; *A Feature Film About Life*; *A Fine Pavement*); or in UK and Ireland, as in the case of *Pure Grit*; *The Wimbledon Kidnapping*; and *512 Hours*. In some cases, movies are also distributed in other countries, on the condition that English is largely spoken: for instance, *Conductor* (available in UK, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden); or *Dashcam* and *Father of Flies* (both present in the UK, Ireland, and the Netherlands).

At the local level, what is at stake is probably the exploitation of national markets by means of *super*-national arrangements: as it was originally established with the runaway productions, the method invented by the Hollywood majors to put under control the other cultural industries, by taking advantage of the geographical setting and, at the same time, pre-selling the final product to on-site distribution companies (Scott, 2005, p. 49; Elmer & Gasher, 2015, p. 15). In this perspective we can interpret the launch of *Farrucas*, which is an American-Spanish co-production only available in Spain; *End of the Line: The Women of Standing*, a Finnish-American venture released in Finland; *Camping at the End of the World*, a Swedish-American one, only present in Sweden; while *Eat Your Catfish*, only distributed in Türkiye, results from an industrial cooperation among Türkiye, the US, and Spain.

All in all, the American predominance in European video markets seems to be unquestionable, at least if we analyze the catalogues of the available movies. The same indication can be inferred, for instance, from a comparative analysis of Netflix libraries in 11 countries, whose results are synthetized in Table 4.3 (Batikas, Gomez-Herrera, & Martens, 2015, p. 15). With no relevant differences among nations, the quota of American movies varies from 60 to 69% of the overall catalogue – with France standing out, once more, as the *less colonized* county, arguably due to its traditional protectionist policies.

In our first-hand study, we also focused on the weekly top-watched movies and TV-shows over a four-month period, from November 1, 2021, to February 28, 2022, in the ten countries under observation: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Türkiye.[7] In all cases, we selected the three most used video-on-demand services,

Table 4.3 American movies available in VOD services in 11 countries

Country	*US movies*	*Total movies**	*Percentage of US movies*
Austria	854	1391	61.39
Belgium	1080	1652	65.37
Denmark	1423	2067	68.84
France	820	1353	60.60
Finland	1388	2015	68.83
Germany	873	1447	60.33
Ireland	1748	2728	64.07
Luxembourg	981	1451	67.60
Netherlands	1224	1793	68.26
Sweden	1438	2071	69.43
UK	1745	2620	66.60
USA	4295	6636	64.72

Note: (*) Movies "of uncertain origin" are not included
(*Source:* Batikas et al., 2021)

for a total of six platforms – Amazon Prime, Disney+, Google Play, HBO, iTunes, and Netflix – though some of them are not available in the whole macro-region (HBO Max, in particular, is more diffused in Eastern Europe than it is in the Western). The focus on the top-watched contents clearly showcases the limitations of this research, which does not deal with the long tail of digital distribution. We would observe, though, that the alleged exceptionality of the long tail, likely to give space to endless minor forms, is still to be proved, despite being commonly stated and advocated for. In the case of the VODs, as already noticed, an analysis of a typical niche market, the documentaries available in Belgian platforms, revealed a prevalence of a few works at the expenses of the majority of titles, and therefore the same pattern of the mass market, albeit at a different scale (Iordache & Livémont, 2018, pp. 4623–4624).[8] Table 4.4 synthetizes the VOD box-office in the considered period, with aggregated data being related to all the ten countries.

The predominance of the English language, and of what Tunstall defined the British-American conglomerate, is made evident by the fact that the UK always ranks second in the statistics of the top-watched works; and Canada ranks third in the cases of HBO, iTunes, and Google Play. In relative terms at least, Netflix is for some reason the less American platform (see Table 4.5) – something that led *The Economist* to argue, in hazardous way, that Netflix was creating "a common European culture", nothing less.[9]

While I already hinted to the media imperialism thesis not being totally convincing, we should recognize that the culturalist interpretation of the US hegemony falls short in its turn. North American products, the elucidation goes, would better fit the complexity of the global landscape as they are ideated and created from the start for a variegated audience, due to the multiethnic composition of the US society. This argument has been leveraged by

Table 4.4 American titles among the top-watched movies in VODs

Platform	*American productions and co-productions*	*Total top-watched movies*	*Percentage of American titles*
Amazon Prime	116	256	45.31%
Disney+	183	242	75.93%
Google Play	67	104	64.42%
HBO	209	394	53%
iTunes	206	390	52.82%
Netflix	626	1362	46%

Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data

Table 4.5 American productions among the top-watched TV shows in VODs

Platform	*American productions and co-productions*	*Total top-watched movies*	*Percentage of American titles*
Amazon Prime	39	67	58.21%
Disney+	139	151	92%
HBO	92	118	77.97%
iTunes	45	78	57.69%
Netflix	360	635	56.7%

Source: Elaboration on FlixPatrol data

both Donald Sassoon (2006, p. 821; 2019, p. 214) and Joseph Nye, the main theorist of soft power (Nye, 2004, p. 41), and it seems to be largely accepted (i.e., Hoskins, McFayden, & Finn, 2004, p. 44; Martel, 2010, pp. 188–189). As it has been objected, though, this would not explain why other multi-ethnic countries are not capable of exporting their culture (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, pp. 214–2145); nor it untangles, reciprocally, why not all US entertainment forms are equally popular abroad, and some of their undertones are almost impossible to adapt to the taste of other audiences.

Either way, it appears that the platformization process has not damaged the US movie and TV shows business; rather, it has taken it to a whole new level. An analysis on the ten major VOD providers available in the US – Netflix, Prime, Google TV, HBO, Disney+, Fandango, iTunes, Hulu, Vudu – also indicates that the streaming infrastructure has been reinforcing the diffusion and success of American and English-American movies at the national box office (Demont-Heinrich, 2022, pp. 12–14), thus confirming the deep connection between the strength of a country in the global competition and the numbers of its internal market. As to Europe, the wide-scale adoption of US video platforms is engendering a cascade of cultural and economic repercussions. By quoting what Thomas Guback observed back in the 1970s,

"the American presence" in the movie field has not only a direct impact "on the way specific films are made", with its consequences also involving the "industry's structure and viability" at large, and its ability "to be the be judge of its own interests" (Guback, 1974, p. 5) – which is, in the end, a definition of how *hegemony* works. As we have discussed through Elsaesser's film theory, the very definition of European culture would be affected by the haunting comparison with the American industry, with little space left for the blooming of cross-European forms. The unification of our continent requires a common identity, as Giacomo Tagiuri put it, and in its turn "identity needs contents" (2014, p. 157): novels, movies, TV-series, songs, you name it – and such European cultural contents are yet to come, despite the almost universal availability of new devices.

3 Europe in the world-system

3.1 Media powers and media domains

The most notable version of the cultural imperialism thesis is probably that of Herbert Schiller, which has inspired regulatory interventions at the highest institutional levels. Schillers' theory, to sum up, hinges on two major assumptions. Firstly, the international and the local dimensions go hand in hand, so that the global power of American media results from the health of the national market (1969, p. 4). Secondly, the media compart is no longer a secondary segment or an epiphenomenal manifestation of the American dominance – as in the vulgar idea of *superstructure* – while being annexed to the *core* of the economic system: due to its connection with administration, bureaucracy, computational statistics, and data collection, and to the cross-company ownership merging it with other industrial conglomerates (1978, pp. 272–273). What Schiller is right about, is the elective affinity between the control of the internal market and the predominance in the international system, that we mentioned before – a sort of *materialist* correction of the culturalist thesis we have touched on in the previous section.

In replying to his critics, Schiller beholds that the imperial power of the American media has even scaled up in the age of globalization, on account to a series of factors: the inclusion of former Socialist countries in the market; the long-lasting influence of English language; and the increase in scope of cultural and creative industries at large. The action of the media is to be considered, therefore, in its connections with a number of other assets: global brands, commercial franchises, shopping malls, professional sports, and the more (1991/2003, pp. 83–85). The sole objection to the cultural imperialism theory largely discussed by Schiller, we may notice, is the usual one related to people's resistance and audience practices (ibidem, pp. 95–96). In other words, Schiller takes distance from the hypothesis that American media may not be too powerful; while not considering alternative frameworks *for explaining that power*.

The world-system theory is imbued with critical interpretations of the international imbalances as well, while putting forward different historical and theoretical concepts, when compared to the cultural imperialism approach. In Immanuel Wallerstein's words,

> the exchange of products containing unequal amounts of social labor we may call the core/periphery relationship. This is pervasive, continuing, and constant. There tend to be geographical localizations of productive activities such that core-like production activities and periphery-like production activities can be spatially grouped together.
>
> (1984, p. 15)

The world-system theory seems to better explicate a number of details in comparison to the cultural imperialism paradigm. Firstly, Wallerstein's reading allows for understanding how hegemonic forces may exercise their influence also, if not especially, over other core-regions (1980, p. 39): which would account, for instance, for the massive importation of American cultural contents in Japan, Western Europe, Canada, or Australia. Secondly, as already observed through Jeremy Tunstall's words, the imperialist thesis hardly explains the presence of a grey area of *regional*, rather than global hegemonies. Thirdly, the sharp opposition between center and satellites overlooks the role played by those regions, the semi-peripheries, which during transition periods may expand at the expenses of both the core and the periphery, therefore equipping the system with the necessary flexibility (Wallerstein, 1979, p. 99), generally and in Europe as well (ibidem, p. 38). While "the central zone holds no mysteries", Braudel wrote in the book which would also provide the basis for Wallerstein's modelization,

> Detailed identification is more difficult though when it comes to regions outside this central zone, which may border on it, are inferior to it but perhaps only slightly: seeking to join in, they put pressure on it from all directions, and there is more movement here than anywhere else.
>
> (Braudel, 1979a, p. 39)

The world-system and the media history: per se the idea is not necessarily new, albeit it usually comes as a terminological adjustment, more than as a straight application of the original categories (i.e., Hugill, 1999; Mattelart, 1991). In the passage, in fact, Braudel comments on the semi-peripheries being an *active* part of the story rather than a space taken under control by the core forces – "there is more movement here than anywhere else". This feature, along with the fact that these areas "are inferior" to the core, but "only slightly", clearly separates the world-system approach from the cultural imperialism literature – and still, an act of carefulness is necessary. The three-area spatialization certainly explains the configuration of the economic markets and the technological transfer among the regions, in the media field

too: ranging from the delocalization of hardware manufacturing to the dumping of movie productions in the semi-peripheries, to the e-waste disposal in the peripheries. Still, what we know at least from Raymond Williams – and probably already from Marshall McLuhan – is that the media are imperfectly made by two different halves, respectively a material configuration and a set of meanings: they are, as the canonical definition goes, both technologies and cultural forms (Williams, 1976, pp. 2–3). There is no doubt that the technological dimensions of media markets can be explained upon the core-periphery model, not to mention the allocation of the wealth they produce – but is it the same, for the *cultural* contents that they shape and deliver?

Between the 1920s and the 1930s, Valery Larbaud released a strange and fascinating work, titled *Ce vici impuni, la lecture*, for proposing to frame the literary market in terms of geo-cultural systems, or "domaines". It is in the volume about the English domain, to be specific, that Larbaud notices how different the literary map is from the political, the economic, and even the linguistic map of the world (1936, pp. 32–33). The "intellectual politics", Larbaud dares to state, "has little to no relation with the economic politics", and it is also relatively autonomous from the linguistic domain, as it is organized around its own specific rules, according to which it is the quantity and pace of literary exchanges that makes the difference. In force of this, Larbaud disentangles the concept of cultural space from its classical connotations, arguing that the imperialist thesis cannot explain the existence of a plurality of core-regions (ibidem, pp. 32–34). More likely, this proliferation of fields would result in a two-space pattern, with three major core industries – the French, the German, and the Italian – and a plethora of semi peripheral producers ("une ceinture des domaines extérieurs"), encompassing the Slavic, the Scandinavian, the Greek, and more relevantly, the Spanish (ibidem, p. 34). Ernst Robert Curtius, who did not make a mystery of his admiration for Larbaud, adopted the same pattern: a tripartite central domain, and a series of satellites orbiting around it (1949/1953, pp. 271–272). Larbaud's work is also at the basis of Pascale Casanova's investigation on the international literary market, notoriously leading to the identification of Paris as the "Greenwich meridian" of the world-system (Casanova, 1999/2004, pp. 127–128 in particular). "The literary and intellectual map", Casanova opines, "cannot be superimposed upon the political map"; and in fact, France obtained its hegemonic position while England was positioning itself as the center of the economic world-system (ibidem, p. 39). Even though Casanova does not always make this framework explicit, her theory results from the combination between two notions: Bourdieu's idea of society as being made of semi-autonomous fields, to which Larbaud's *domain* is pretty close; and Braudel's and Wallerstein's core-periphery model.

Two questions need to be addressed, at this point. Firstly, that the literary market is not aligned with the economic and political spatializations does not bear that *other media markets* will follow the same rule – if anything, the very notion of field would imply otherwise. Where technological innovation plays a major role, and entry costs to the market are the highest, it

may be suggested, the industry will end up organizing around a more brutal juxtaposition between the core and the periphery. There is little doubt that in the last thirty years we have witnessed the rise of new conglomerates and the financial takeover of the system: something close to the centralization of power constantly evoked by the Frankfurt School, or "the unification of intellectual functions" under the same rationality (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/1972, p. 36).[10]

A second doubt about the whole theorem has been casted by Jérôme David and Franco Moretti – precisely, with David's critique to Moretti and the following reply – which can be synthetized as follows (Moretti, 2013). Peripheries and semi-peripheries have a neat role in economic history, the idea goes, as they provide both raw materials and cheap labor force for the core region – the "exchange of products containing unequal amounts of social labor", in Wallerstein's crystal-clear phrasing. The core would hardly thrive without exploiting the peripheries, in short: which is both a legacy of Braudel's lesson, and the application of the class dialectic to the geopolitical relations, as set forth by Wallerstein. The observation made by David and then by Moretti, somehow in recanting his passion for the world-system theory, is that this strict dependency does not fit the case of the literary field. At the economic level, in fact, the core power cannot let its satellites leave the system – or, when "the sepoys of the East India Company rose up in arms, Britain went immediately at war", for restoring its control of the area. In a different way, Moretti adds, if the world had "closed the doors to British novels, however, the history of the English novel would have remained exactly the same" (ibidem, p. 108). The last aspect makes sense when one considers that, in Moretti's theory, innovations rarely come from the margins of the system, so that literary morphology can be explained under a *temporal*, rather than a spatial pattern: namely, the alternance between long periods of normality and rare paradigm shifts.[11] Truth being spoken, this would be even more appropriate for contemporary media formats, which are so dependent on innovation milieux and venture capitals, to be inevitably a product of the core regions.

It is in the economic interest of the central regions to establish a stratified spatial order, as stated, whereas it is unclear why the literary and cultural cores would need any similar hierarchization – or at that, a hierarchization of any sort. We will propose two amendments to this relevant debate. Firstly, what David and Moretti do not consider, and legitimately so from their perspective, is that peripheries and semi peripheries are also markets to be exploited: either it is about theatrical movies, VOD releases, online platforms, or the same book trade, as we saw through Donald Sassoon's analysis. Still, when it comes down to the cultural form *per se*, which is the object of their reflection, David and Moretti make a point: artistic production is actually possible without the appropriation of the resources from the rest of the world, *unlike* the production of commodities, as the core countries are autonomous enough to take care of themselves. Here, by the way, we face evidence that we have already observed: the correlation between the health of

the *internal* market and the position in the world-system, which is a historical constant, from the British and French novels to the UK-USA television conglomerate, to Hollywood movies, up to K-pop and all digital services. This might also explain the latency of a properly European culture, as no European country can count on an internal market *big enough* to consolidate itself as a world exporter. In any case, what appears so far is that the leading regions only need the peripheries for selling their works: which is a serious difference when compared to the overall scheme of the world-system theory. For coming to terms with this issue, as a second remark, we would therefore suggest reversing the research question: maybe the core does not need the periphery that much – *but do the peripheries need a core region*?

As a matter of fact, the reason for subaltern areas not breaking the international order is inevitably a main dilemma in the world-system macro-text. Some factors are more obvious than others, in Wallerstein: for instance, the military power held by the core regions, and the control they exercise on the ideology legitimizing the accumulation regime (1980, p. 189). In addition, the action of the ruling classes of non-core areas is to be considered, which are attracted by the gravitational force of the center and share commercial interests with its actors. Therefore, for the system to be balanced, the *internal fragmentation* of these societies is of paramount importance, and here comes the relevance of the third space interposed between the two conventional areas, the core and the periphery. "This semi-periphery is then assigned as if it were a specific economic role", Wallerstein notes, "but the reason is less economic than political".

> That is to say, one might make a good case that the world-economy as an economy would function every bit as well without a semi-periphery. But it would be far less politically stable, for it would mean a polarized world-system. The existence of the third category means precisely that the upper stratum is not faced with the unified opposition of all the others *because the middle stratum is both exploited and exploiter*. It follows that the specific economic role is not all that important, and has thus changed through the various historical stages of the modern world-system.
>
> (Wallerstein, 1974, p. 405, italics added)

I will zoom in on one aspect that I already anticipated: the historical bond between the internal segmentation of a region and its role in the international assemblage. We advance that the upper classes of the peripheral and semi peripheral areas perform, in the cultural field, the same function as in the economic sector: being connected to the core capitals for their own trade or financial interests, which in Wallerstein contributes to blend the stability of the system, as we saw. Needless to say, in the creative industries something different is at stake: no longer the material wealth, as in the first case; but more than likely, the cultural *legitimacy* aspired to by authors and readers –

or watchers – taking pride in showing the same habits as in Paris, New York, or Lagos. We remind here that, according to Braudel, peripheries are subject to an internal stratification in their turn – for instance, in Palermo one article "costed 50% more" than in Naples (1979a, p. 45) – and along with the semi-peripheries they pay a service to the core of the system: that "mutual tensions would not always cancel each other so that the central power should not be threatened" (ibidem, p. 47). In Pascale Casanova's reading, this is what makes the literary world-system different from the global market: as, in comparison to the latter, it is less a one-sided process than a competitive arena, with many players fighting "to attain the same goal: literary legitimacy" (Casanova, 1999/2004, p. 40) – and the same for movies, or TV-series, or Instagram influencers. The flow of importations, adaptations and even parodies of the works produced in the core regions, as traced by Donald Sassoon (2006, p. 380), is a clear-cut confirmation of this phenomenon; even though Sassoon, to be honest, has never endorsed the world-system model. In our case, we can argue that it is the activity of the social groups running after the core models – and based on this internal stratification of any area – to explain the *active* role played by both peripheries and semi-peripheries.

The core-periphery system also explains the historical trajectory of the European power, since the internal divisions and the world-scale ambitions are deeply intertwined, albeit in unexpected and counterintuitive ways. As explained by Wallerstein, the small dimensions of the modern states, in comparison to the gigantic dictatorships common in Asia, helped the European countries to build their supernational empires (1974a/2011, pp. 348–349). In other words, it was the "political fragmentation", in fact, to enable "the European entrepreneurs to develop trade relations and build an international world economy" (Terlouw, 2002, p. 15). If the territorial fragmentation may well have been an advantage between the 17th and the 19th centuries, however, it would become dysfunctional in the contemporary era: the wider the geographical scope of the world trade, and the larger the core-nation is destined to be, from the Protestant commercial cities, to England, to the United States and to China (Arrighi, 2009, pp. 239–240). In a nutshell, this is the original sin of the European media landscape – being *too big* for the people to perceive it as an imagined community; and *too small* for aspiring the status of a global power. Joseph Nye's reflection on soft power would stress a similar point: no single European state can compare with the United States, the explanation goes, while if taken as a whole, Europe can count on a market of equivalent if not bigger size, and therefore can potentially compete at the global level (2004, p. 77).

There are three relevant aspects that, in my reading, justify the application of the core-periphery model to the international cultural and media systems. The first one is the establishing of alternative core regions in different markets – the *French* novel, the *Italian* opera, the *American* movies, the *British* news – which would recall Bourdieu's lesson on social fields being interconnected but relatively autonomous and revolving around their own axes. Secondly, as repeatedly observed, the core powers come to exercise their hegemony not

only over the less influential areas but also in the other central regions, which comes as a confirmation of the world-system hypothesis. The third argument is the peculiar role of the semi peripheries, which are at the same time *exploiters* and *exploited*, in Wallerstein's words, and interpose themselves between the center and the remote margins, therefore preventing a possible clash between the two. We insisted enough on the compresence of global and regional dominances, for instance in the VOD movies distribution: with some countries being strong enough to export their works in the border markets, but still depending on Hollywood – or on Google, at that – at a bigger level of scale. This intermediated position in the international hierarchies aligns with the cultural function of the semi-peripheries, as recounted by Wallerstein: that of being at the same time exploited and exploiters, therefore equipping the system with the necessary fluidity and flexibility.

These instances are relevant, but hardly conclusive; and the last one even bears additional complications. That a region can at the same time exploit some territories and being exploited by other powers can make sense, indeed, at one condition only: that the social forces behind the two patterns are or can be different – or, that those *who exploit* someone are not necessarily the same who *are exploited* by someone else. The internal stratification of a given market, and cultural industry as well, is in fact a main acquisition of this theoretical model: under the pressure or world capitalism, countries will end up being inhomogeneous, and particularly so in the peripheries and semi peripheries. As we will debate in the last section, exactly the internal imbalance in the European societies is possibly the most overlooked facet of the four-decades process that, according to the perspective, we have variously referred to as digitization, globalization, platformization, or EU-ization.

3.2 Staring imbalance in the face

The notion of *differences*, as consubstantial to European culture, has been with us for the whole book. "The multiplicity of States", Federico Chabod wrote in his history of the idea of Europe, expresses the need of defending the ultimate value of "plurality to save the European freedom", as opposed to the Asian tyranny (1943–1944/1961, p. 57). The very conscience of Europe, therefore, originates in this differentiation of Europe as "a political and moral entity", from any other existing entity (ibidem, p. 15). From Morin to Delanty and to Todorov, the most credited answers to the sobering question of European identity all take in this understanding: that the plurality of European culture is a form of "deep diversity", which is not to be reduced to any synthesis (Karolewski, 2010, p. 49). According to Todorov and Bracher, in a similar vein, *plurality* is key to understanding the very nature of Europe: "plurality of cultures and forms of their coexistence" (2008, p. 3); "of national and regional traditions" (ibidem, p. 6 and 7); of "identity" (ibidem, p. 10); of "heritage" (ibidem, pp. 10–11). From my side, this being said, I cannot say if this insistence on unity in diversity is totally appropriate and justified. Fernand Braudel, interestingly enough, shed lights on a counter-intuitive

proportion between the material and the discursive dimensions of Europe. "Economic links have long bound Europe together", to start with, though the regions, and even the sub-regions of the core, have not evolved at the same pace: "a line could be drawn from Lubeck or Hamburg, through Prague and Vienna as far as the Adriatic, to divide the economically advanced Western part of Europe from the backward area". On the other hand, Braudel notices some continuity of cultural life throughout the continent: "not one but many Europe", whose civilizations "never stop exchanging their goods, looking for an agreement . . . like the musicians at the beginning of a concert" (Braudel, 1987, p. 211).

> Does that mean that all the nations of Europe have exactly the same culture? Certainly not. But any movement that begins in one part of Europe tends to spread throughout it. Tends only: a cultural phenomenon may very well face resistance or rejection in one part of Europe or another – or, conversely, it may be so successful that, as often happens, it goes beyond Europe's frontiers, ceases to be 'European', and begins to belong to humanity in general. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, Europe is a fairly coherent cultural whole, and has long acted as such vis-à-vis the rest of the world.
>
> (Braudel, 1963/1993, p. 533)

It is probably unnecessary to remind that Braudel is talking about the long-duration constants and the spread of wide cultural tendencies, from artistic currents to religions, and the like; and that – "broadly speaking" – he is confronting Europe with bigger regions in the "rest of the world". Whatever the position that one takes concerning the European *unity* or *diversity*, though, an additional element is relevant for our interests: that this gradient, unlike in Braudel, is commonly measured in terms of *between-country* differences. The comparative media model, in its turn, is all based on the confrontation among the nations, and such assumption has not been questioned so far: differently from the appropriateness of the *system* as the unit of the analysis, for instance (Rantanen, 2013, p. 257); or from the prioritizing of the homologies over the asynchronies (Kleinsteuber, 2004, p. 70), which comes as a consequence of the previous methodological choice. The argument I put forward in this conclusive section is that the differences *internal* to any European society are as relevant as those between the countries, and they have been generally sidelined in our debate. In this respect, we may say that media and cultural theories did not catch up with social and economic studies, which have been highlighting, approximately in the last 15 years, the increasing imbalances in terms of revenues distribution and allocation of wealth, along with the consequences in terms of class tensions and societal polarization. This is clearly not the way we use to picture Europe, which is thought of as a most privileged area of the world, were welfare state is in place, labor rights are guaranteed, and the economic inequality is lowered to its minimum. The 2008 crisis is probably a watershed in this story,

as in coincidence with the financial downturn the restructuration process that the European area has been undergoing has become visible. Between 2005 and 2013, concretely speaking, the Gini coefficient in Europe rose from 29.3 to 30.6 (Diamond, Liddle, & Sage, 2015, p. 24): though some countries were less affected than others, as usual, overall such change could not come without a cultural shock. If the Europeans were accustomed to take "pride themselves on the low . . . levels of economic inequality", in fact, they eventually had to accept a brutally different reality (ibidem, pp. 24–26). In Jürgen Habermas' ruthless synthesis,

> to date, European unification has been a project pursued by the elites above the heads of populations. This went well as long as everyone benefited from it. The switchover to a project that is not merely tolerated, but is also supported, by the national populations must clear the high hurdle of founding cross-border solidarity among the citizens of Europe.
>
> (2013/2015, p. 66)

Europeanization could and did work, Habermas points out, "as long as everybody benefited from it" – that is to say, before the impact of the economic downturn on large stratums of any society. Thomas Piketty's work, beyond a crucial theoretical drawback that cannot be discussed here,[12] is precious in describing the new wave of wealth polarization, under the pressure of contemporary capitalism, starting in the 1970s and peaking after the 2008 general crisis. His idea is that economic evolution unfolds from two tendencies, antagonist to each other: the *divergence* trends, which express the natural propension of capital to maximize the imbalances; and the *convergence* trends, mostly due to non-market factors, such as the wars, the implementation of social welfare, and technological innovation reducing the entry costs to a given service or commodity (2013/2015, pp. 55–57). The current state of the global system, in Piketty, is characterized by a specific feature: capital has become more productive than revenue, caused by the demographic recession of highly industrialized zones, by the drop in production rates (ibidem, p. 262), and by the neoliberal policies put in place in a number of leading countries (ibidem pp. 500–532). Due to the following financialization and to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the oldest generations, the "future is eaten up by the past", to quote his vivid metaphor: the social elevator no longer works, and in people's life the heritage becomes more decisive than merit, cultural capital, or labor skills (ibidem, pp. 600–601).[13] In force of a wide-scale collection and reading of available statistics, Piketty sorts out how only the first decile of the first percentile – therefore, an incredibly limited part of the population – took profit of this new regime (ibidem, p. 443), and that European countries are not exception to such merciless rule (ibidem pp. 188–189). Since the 1990s onwards, in fact, economic imbalances in Europe have been aligning with the very same statistical curve as in the rest of the world, both in terms of general data and relative advantages benefited

by the first centile (2019, pp. 494–495). Albeit it is widely claimed that the unification has played a main part in this shifting of Europe towards a more inequal setting, Piketty roots backs the process back in the 1980s, when the divergent forces grow stronger in Eastern Europe (2019, p. 741). It is not certain, therefore, that it all begun with the enlargement of the European Union and with the "increased competition and common regulation": and in any case, based on macro-economic data, this twofold process of "declining between-state inequality and increasing within-state inequality" continued also in the following years, thus becoming a constant of contemporary capitalism (Heidenreich, Broschinski, & Pohlig, 2019, pp. 89–90). In the end, those are the lineages of the new world order: that the European elite ended up supporting, in Piketty's words, by "naturalizing the market forces and the resulting inequalities" (Piketty, 2019, p. 745).

In my perspective, Piketty's main merit is to open the eyes, in force of the statistical exercise described earlier, about an apparently contradictory outcome: the differences *between* countries are lowering, while at the same time, those *internal* to any society are increasing.

> Today the reality is that the inequalities of capital are way more domestic than international: it opposes the rich and the poor within each country rather than the countries against each other.
>
> (Piketty, 2013, p. 80)

With a stretch of exaggeration, Piketty writes that the competition is no longer among states: it is among the "oligarchs" controlling the financial assets in each country, even regardless of the public or private management of the business (ibidem, pp. 740–741). David Harvey's Marxist approach is the farthest from Piketty's, while converging towards the same ending point: that contemporary capitalism evolves in a schizoid way, by reducing the imbalances among the countries, and augmenting those internal to each country. Caused by this double movement, the lowering of between-country disparities is coupled by the "dramatic increase in income and wealth disparities among individuals and social groups in almost every country of the world" (Harvey, 2014, p. 171).[14] In Harvey, this is the consequence of the post-Fordist transition, which has allocated wealth in the global networks of finance and Big-Tech, thus favoring the rise of a new sovereign class of global kind: as the network itself, as a form, would take together powerful actors at the super-national level, and at the same time destroy social solidarity in the area of proximity (Harvey, 2010, p. 246). By evoking a familiar image, we can say that the upper stratums are becoming more like each other, and perfectly interconnected – while, additionally, the majority of the population is condemned to low-waged jobs and strong identity-embedding structures. In the internet studies, as remarked upon in the first chapter, this is what we know as the fracture between the space of flows and the space of places: the elite are *cosmopolitan* and the people are *local*, in Castells' reading of the

class struggle in the network society (1996, p. 415). Besides some limitations of Castells' category, we would draw attention to the fact that the two trends are so deeply intertwined, such that they actually form parts of the *same process*:

> A general rule seems to be that in a wider transformation field or space, the unequal distribution of resources and the associated social inequalities between the countries decline to the increased competition and common regulation, while inequalities increase within the countries in question.
>
> (Heidenreich, 2019, p. 28)

I stated before that the enlargement of the EU administrative perimeter has modified the perception of Europe; and the same can be said about its material structure. As noted by Heidenreich, if we take Europe *as a whole*, the economic imbalances will prove to be unexpectedly high, and the annexing of new countries in 2004 would do nothing but make this more evident. "The average performance per capita of the most prosperous European (subnational) regions will be three times as high as in the poorest regions", to the point that, as a matter of fact, the disparities are "larger than in the USA" (2003, p. 315). It is not different from saying that Europe is becoming *more like the world*, in the matter of economic imbalances and class frictions: and if Piketty and Harvey's arguments stand to reason, doubts can be casted on the understanding of the nation as a homogenous entity, and therefore on its use as *the* unit of analysis for comparative media scholarship. This is not to affirm that the state has lost its centrality, as it was claimed by the 1990s theorists of post-national constellations, whose ideas have been gradually set aside. At the opposite, as we have scrutinized in the first chapter, the national dimension is still very relevant in the age of digital platforms, and in some cases – for instance, the part of local influencers on YouTube and TikTok – may well be more relevant than it was two decades ago, during a previous stage in the evolution of the internet ecosystem. It is not that the state no longer influences the surrounding society: it is rather that national societies have become too polarized to be taken as an organic whole, and to be singled out, methodologically speaking, as a category for comparative studies.

At the present state of scientific research, it is not easy to assess the impact of this new allocation of wealth on the various fields of media, culture, and communication. If we accept the evidence that European societies are no longer equalitarian as they used to be, however, what seems undeniable is that the concepts built on the previous assumption need to be questioned and reviewed. In a way, it was Thomas Elsaesser to make a move in this direction, while highlighting, as seen, that Europe is eventually becoming a continent of immigrants and fractures, like the Northern-American society has traditionally been. In his perspective, the consequence is that European cinema can no longer proclaim itself as *European*, in the same way it used to:

the more Europe is comparable to the United States, in other words, and less the US itself will serve as a constitutive other. This would engender a deficit of legitimization, and therefore the urgent need of new creative energies for the definition of an alternative canon: a "philosophical turn", nothing less, able of using the European "performative self-contradiction" as a cultural and political response the new state of "servitude" (Elsaesser, 2019, p. 297), after the decline of any "heroic narrative of self-identity" (ibidem, p. 10). If we go beyond the specific focus on films as "thought experiments", in fact, Elsaesser is cogitating about the "new marginality" of Europe (ibidem, p. 9), which in his view has been partially caused by the unification itself (ibidem, p. 168). The waning of European influence, its asymmetrical relation with the alleged European universalism, the accustomedness to the traumas (ibidem, p. 254), and the need to cope with new internal others and with an unprecedented degree of ethnic fragmentation (ibidem, p. 127): all these aspects, for Elsaesser, hold the key to the understanding of Europe as a fading star.

3.3 From the semi-periphery of the empire

The new marginality of Europe: in the context, we add from our side, of the world-system scenario. In this sense the mass spread of TikTok is, synthetized in Table 4.6, is a strong demonstration of the *recentrage* described in broader terms by Arrighi and Wallerstein: with European countries being invaded, for the very first time, by a media platform coming from the People's Republic of China. Indeed, TikTok is a very peculiar asset, when compared to the so-called BAT – the acronym for Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent, in opposition to the Western MAGNAF – whose services are more commonly used in homeland China (Massa & Anzera, 2023, p. 44). It is also notable that, as seen in the first chapter, TikTok shares the same model of an American counterpart, YouTube: imposing a form of infrastructural control and yet making space for the success of national influencers and contents. We admit that in the case of TikTok, research reports usually do not include systematic statistics, and therefore we had to rely on commercial data on the advertising reaching – which, nonetheless, are expected to be quite reliable, exactly due to their economic relevance. In absolute values, in no case TikTok ranks as the most diffused social media platform; while in term of daily use, UK, Germany, and France are the only European countries above the global average of 19.6 monthly hours, with respectively 27.3, 23.6 and 21.1 hours per person per month, with Türkiye slightly under the average, with 18.8 hours.[15] As synthetized in Table 4.6, and how is inevitable, there are some differences among the European countries: the diffusion of TikTok is particularly high in France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, and the UK, all above 30%. In the opposite way, the diffusion is the lowest in Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, and especially in the Czech Republic: which, we recall from the previous chapters, is also an exception for what concerns the relatively high consumption of European movies in VOD platforms.

Table 4.6 TikTok Reach in the European area, 2022, third quarter

Country	*Total Reach [18+ citizens]*	*Web Users Reach [18+ citizens]*
Austria	22.1%	23.8%
Belgium	27.1%	28.8%
Czechia	16.2%	18%
Denmark	21.8%	22%
Finland	24.9%	25.6%
France	30.5%	32.8%
Germany	23.1%	24.8%
Greece	29.4%	35.7%
Hungary	24.4%	27.7%
Ireland	40.6%	41%
Italy	27.6%	32%
Netherlands	31.9%	33.2%
Norway	28.9%	29.2%
Poland	22.9%	26.4%
Portugal	30.1%	35.6%
Romania	34.7%	39.4%
Russia	38.9%	43.7%
Spain	33%	35.1%
Sweden	30.4%	31.3%
Switzerland	22.3%	22.7%
Türkiye	36.1%	44%
Ukraine	26.8%	33.6%
UK	35.3%	36%

Source: Aggregation of DataReportal and WeAreSocial data

In geopolitical terms, intense lobbying activities have been traced, which have connected the TikTok European headquarter with "Brussels-based institutions" (Jia & Liang, 2021, p. 285), and, in the course of the Sars-Cov-2 outbreak, with eleven health ministries and national governments in the area (ibidem, p. 284). I will not embrace here the political and legal implications of this sort, which according to some scholars would require protectionist-like measures for safeguarding European data and values (i.e., Van Dijck, 2020): especially because this book does not deal with media regulation and policies. I well rather set forth two final considerations, respectively about the impact of the new international division on labor on the European media landscape; and about the broader geo-cultural clash between Europe itself and the emerging forms of platform governmentality.

A new social frame taking shape, firstly, is what comes to mind while reading the data summed up in Table 4.7, related to the share of social media users by age group and gender, in 24 European countries. The data is aggregated and therefore they do it does not tell anything about which specific platforms are used here and there; but they are relevant for another reason. Besides a few outliers, in fact, the data varies in all cases within a very small range: social media users aged 18–24, for instance, span from a

Table 4.7 Social media market share by gender and class age, 2021

Country/ Class Age	*18–24*		*25–34*		*35–44*		*45–54*		*55–64*		*65+*	
	F	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*	*F*	*M*
AT	10.3	10.7	13.4	14	9.9	9.5	7.4	7	4.5	4.3	2.3	2.3
BE	9.3	8.8	11.5	11.6	9.2	9	7.8	7.2	6.2	5.2	4.8	4.2
BU	8.7	8.4	11.4	12.3	10	10	8.4	8	6.6	4.6	4.3	3
CZ	10.3	9.7	12.8	13.3	10.7	9.8	7.6	6.7	4.2	3.1	3.3	2.7
DE	9.9	11	13.7	14.8	9.6	9.6	6.9	6.7	4.5	4.3	2.1	2.2
DK	8.4	8	10.2	10.4	8.4	7.6	8.6	7.6	6.9	5.6	6.7	5.2
EE	10.1	8.9	12.6	12.6	11	9.4	8.4	6	6.2	3.3	4.4	2.1
ES	7.9	6.7	13.2	13.5	11.1	9.7	9.4	8.2	6.2	4.7	3.5	2.9
FI	9.5	9	11.2	11.2	10.4	8.7	8.2	6.3	6.3	4.4	5.3	3.8
FR	9.8	10.1	12.7	12.9	9.2	9.0	7.4	6.6	5.5	4.2	4.6	3.5
GR	9.1	8.7	11.4	12.1	10.1	9.5	8.8	7.5	6.1	4	5.3	3.6
IE	9.9	9.1	12.7	12.4	12.1	9.9	8.3	6.6	5	3.6	3.6	2.7
IT	7.8	7.8	11.1	12.1	9.2	9.2	9.5	8.5	6.4	6.2	4.0	4.5
LT	9.4	8.9	12.8	12.8	9.9	8.9	8.4	6.4	7.9	4.1	4.5	2.1
LV	9.2	9.2	13.4	12.6	10.9	9.2	8.4	6	6.7	3.4	3.9	1.8
NL	9.3	9.3	12.4	12.4	9.3	7.7	8.5	7	6.3	5	5.3	4.4
PL	11.3	10.9	13.1	12.7	11.3	9.5	6.3	5	4.4	2.8	3	2.2
PT	8.9	8.3	11.7	12	10.6	9.7	9	8	6.2	4.8	4.2	3.9
RO	9.8	9.8	12.2	12.2	9.8	9.8	8.9	8	5.2	3.9	3.3	2.5
SE	8.3	8	11.2	11.8	8.8	8.2	8.2	7.1	6.5	5.1	6.7	5.2
SI	8.8	9.6	12	13.5	11.2	10.4	7.6	7.4	5	4.4	3.2	3
SK	9.9	9.9	13.8	14.1	10.8	10.2	7.5	6	5.1	3.3	3	2.3
TR	7.3	13	13.5	20.3	8.1	11.8	4.6	7.3	2.5	4.1	1.2	2
UK	9.1	8.9	12.8	12.4	9.3	9.1	7.9	6.6	5.8	4.4	5	3.9

Source: Elaboration on We Are Social, StatCounter and DataReportal data

minimum of 6.7 to a maximum of 13%; and so on. Set apart the statistical exceptions – the 25–34-year-old in Türkiye, in all evidence – the data is very homogenous; or at least, way more homogenous than any other possible indicator of media performance, including the overall diffusion of the internet.

If we focus on the junctures – the intersections among the five age classes (18–24; 25–34; 45–54; 55–64; 65+), the two genders, and the 24 considered countries – we see that the internal variance is very low, within any sub-cluster. What the data suggests, is that the internal composition of the social media population is very similar in all nations: which comes as a surprise, considering all the differences we have been listing and discussing so far, and which at this level of scale seem to disappear. An explanation might be, that digital innovation *is not beneficial to society as a whole*, while affecting *in the same way those who are impacted*. The differences within any country have become more drastic than those between countries, as Harvey and Pikletty argue, and these data sketches a similar pattern, with age cohorts following the same trend, regardless of the geographical location. What brings the

people together in the space of flows, nonetheless, also pushes them away from the contextual milieu: such is the destiny of getting "globally interconnected", at the price of being "locally disconnected" (Castells, 1996, p. 436).

A final consideration about the role of mega-platforms, which is commonly associated, and for good reasons, to the rise of a new global and undisputed power. On the theoretical side, the notion of platform is useful as it implies some sort of spatial *pattern* – geo-cultural, political, economic, or simulation – and it evolved from the descriptive status it held, to becoming the hallmark of contemporary sovereignty. In this sense, that platform economy would lead to a post-capitalist transition has been repeatedly observed, variously due to it being fueled by the data, putting an end to the importance of money, replacing capital with information, or extracting people's behavioral, rather than labor value.[16] From my side, I will put forward a different consideration: that in a long duration perspective the contemporary digital disruption, as radical as it is, may well be *in line* with the evolution of the world-system. That any world-market organizes itself around a major city, is one of the most paramount Braudel's lessons, and so does digital economy, as visualized in Table 4.8, listing out the main hubs in the field of platform enterprise (Evans & Gawer, 2016, p. 12).

As one would expect, the peripheric dimension of Europe also pops out – apart from a German software district – with the US and China clearly taking the lead. In the same direction, a Braudelian framework has been also applied by Peck and Phillips, which analyzed "the emergent spatialities of platform capitalism". In short, those "variegated and conjunctural form", encompassing material spaces, "(de)regulatory settlements" and even the cloud, can be interpreted as a form of world-economy in Braudelian terms, which require capitalism "to be situated": "the coexisting fragments of an emergent globality, each with their own power centers and patterns of concentrated

Table 4.8 Top ten cities by market cap of the headquartered platforms

	City	*Country*	*Number of platform companies*	*Market cap (in billion $)*
1	San Francisco Bay Area	USA	44	2,298
2	Seattle	USA	4	7,678
3	Bejing	China	30	2,468
4	Hangzhou	China	6	2,428
5	Shenzen	China	5	1,918
6	Tokyo	Japan	5	1,098
7	Walldorf	Germany	1	978
8	Cape Town	South Africa	1	638
9	Norwalk	USA	1	628
10	Shanghai	China	14	558

Source: Evans & Gawer, 2016

control" (Peck & Phillips, 2021, p. 76). In particular, the authors refer to a specific stage of economic development, that Braudel notoriously defined the "anti-market", as the peak of the concentration tendency proper to capitalism: "when the great predators roam and the law of the jungle operates", in his inimitable language (Braudel, 1979b, p. 230). The *de facto* monopoly of digital platforms over global market, along this line, is to be intended as the completion of a longer historical process, grounded on a twofold spatial logic: the geographical expansion of the world trades, and the centralization required for taming the super-national territories.

In other words, the adoption of a spatial perspective helps understanding both the continuity between digital economy and the previous accumulation cycles, and the specific challenge raised by the mega-platforms: or, to apply Harold Innis' model, the particular "dominance" taken on by the media which puts an emphasis on the dimension of *space*, more than time (Innis, 1950, p. 76). The connection between space and sovereignty also recalls a strong notion in political philosophy: that the act of drawing a line on the ground also implies the imposition of a power over it. This is in fact Carl Schmitt's definition of *nomos*, by which "I do not mean here a set of international rules and conventions, but the fundamental principle of distribution" of the authority (Schmitt, 1943/2016, p. 310). By forcing "order and orientation" over the chaos of human things, the setting of a spatial perimeter acts as a form *individuation* and lays the foundation of the legality regime to come (Schmitt, 1950/2006, p. 67): and according to Schmitt, as we know, the very European spatial form, the one specific to the continent, is the state (1950, pp. 125–136). As I have already touched upon more pragmatical issues – the necessity of a more complete data collection; the methodological limitations of our work; and the empirical tasks ahead of us – let us finally indulge in this purely theoretical aspect, if not in a haunting dilemma. If any spatial configuration is *itself* a form of sovereignty, a question arises as to whether the spatial forms we are considering – media systems, anti-markets, platforms, and mega-platforms – are compatible with the already existing institutions of different kinds. Is there any enmity, in the end, between the *nomos* of the media and the *nomos* of Europe?

Notes

1 On the Orientalist construction of Eastern Europe in Western discourse, see in particular Adamovsky, 2005 and Murray-Miller, 2023.
2 According to Delanty, more precisely, the symbolic role played by the Soviet Union is historically in line with that of Russia, which has been literally invented as an external threat, either *Eastern* or *Asian*, during the 21st century (1995, p. 59).
3 For the analogy and comparison between Eastern and Southern Europe, in the perspective of the comparative media framework, see Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012; Örnebring, 2012; Peruško & Čuvalo, 2014; Jakubowicz, 2008; and Wyka, 2008. It is also relevant that Hallin and Mancini happened to support the similarity between the two systems (2013, p. 22).

4 The lack of data about the Eastern media market, especially in the case of newspapers and radio, is actually one of the main problems we had to face in the three years of the EUMEPLAT project – as Ekaterina Balabanova wrote 15 years ago, "the media in Eastern Europe remain still largely unexplored" (2007, p. xiv; same conclusion in Coman, 2010). This criticality has also been brought to the attention of the funding institution, in the context of our final policy recommendations. It is my impression that, in the near future, it will be essential to strengthen the cooperation between the Eastern and Western European academy.

5 In this sense, we rely on the distinction between *imperialism* and *empire*, as defined by Negri and Hardt: with the first intended as the supernational expansion of the state, and the second as a genuinely global form of sovereignty (2001, pp. 221–234 in particular).

6 The detailed data and the methodological plan are defined in the EUMEPLAT deliverable D3.4-Catalogue of Best Practices and Main Obstacles to Europeanization, available at www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

7 New Bulgarian University was responsible for the methodology and the workplan of the research task, for which credit goes to Dessislava Boshnakova, Evelina Christova, Stokyo Petkov, Boriana Gosheva, Desislava Dankova, and Justine Toms. As to data collection and analysis: for Belgium, Femke De Sutter, Daniël Biltereyst and Sofie Van Bauwel; for Czechia, Miloš Hroch and Nico Carpentier; for Germany, Volker Grassmuck; for Greece, Stylianos Papathanossopoulos, Ioanna Archontaki and Achilleas Karadimitriou; for Italy, Panos Kompatsiaris and myself; for Portugal, António Vasconcelos, Sofia Ferro Santos, Rita Sepúlveda and José Moreno; for Spain, Valentina Latronico, Jim Ingebretsen Carlson and Francisco Lupiáñez-Villanueva; for Sweden, Vilhelm Andersson; for Türkiye, Yasemin Gümüş Ağca, Lutz Peschke, Irmak Dündar and Seyedehshahrzad Seyfafjehi. For the methodology, see the EUMEPLAT deliverable D3.1- Methodological Framework, available at: www.eumeplat.eu/results/deliverables/.

8 As already observed, at a first glance, this would confirm the "free scale" nature of digital networks, with the same tendency towards concentration, or power law, affecting any fraction of the function, like in a fractal form (see Barabási, Albert, & Jeong, 2000). How to combine this statistical evidence with the concepts specific to social and cultural theory, sadly, is still to be discussed.

9 *How Netflix Is Creating a Common European Culture*, "The Economist", May 31, 2021.

10 For some reason, the concepts of the Frankfurt School were very popular until the 1980s, while being almost abandoned in the following decades. This is noteworthy, as such theory has been used for analyzing a cultural ecosystem to which *it could hardly apply*, while being removed in the face of the impressive power concentration that has taken place in the last 30 years.

11 The exportation of cultural forms from the margins to the center is possible as well, undeniably: in Sassoon's work, for instance, modern tragedies represent the peculiar case of a semi-peripheral voice making its way to the center of the European system (2006, p. 741). As Franco Moretti points out in his rejoinder to David, this happens indeed – but not frequently enough to undermine the general explanation (2013, p. 108, note 1). Having said that, which is straightforward, we would remark upon another aspect. There are visible homologies between two theories adopted by Moretti: Kuhn's alternance between long periods of normality and improvised rare paradigm shifts, and the natural evolution – at least in Stephen Jay Gould's version of punctuated equilibrium. In this respect, the two paradigms do not align, not align, as in Darwin but rather, as in Darwin, the geographical movement plays a main role in generating the morphological changes, while literary evolution, in Moretti, is mostly an *internal* affair of the core regions.

12 We refer to the fact that Piketty, as bizarre as this may be, does not propose any definition of capital and in short, equals it with patrimony – “nous utiliserons les mots “capital” et “patrimoine” de façon interchangeable, comme des synonymes parfait” (2013, p. 84). This is certainly legitimate; as the two words *are not* perfect synonyms, though, this definition would require a more solid theoretical ground. Despite its importance, that I do not aim at diminishing, *Le capital au XXIe siècle* is not, in the end, a book about capital.

13 To be more precise, Piketty’s take is that the structural side of heritage and patrimony has *always* been more relevant than the individual agency, with one exception: after World War II, and “possibly for the first time in the history, jobs and educations have provided people with social promotion” (2013, p. 382). This would speak in favor of the exceptionality of the 1945–1973 Kondrateff wave – and the Kondrateff wave, as we know, corresponds to one of the temporalities codified by Braudel.

14 I also notice that in Ivan Berend’s work on economic spatializations, on which we have relied in the chapter about the regional patterns, a similar observation is made about this twofold tendency of contemporary capitalism (Berend, 2020, pp. 85–86).

15 Data from We Are Social 2022.

16 See, among others, Srnicek, 2016, pp. 30–31; Couldry & Mejias, 2019, p. 5; Mayer-Schönberger & Ramge, 2018, pp. 138–143; Zuboff, 2019, pp. 232–242; Wark, 2019, pp. 39–59. I discuss this topic in greater detail in Miconi, 2022, 2023.

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