

Abstract PhD Thesis

**‘Who (really) runs the show? Producing television formats in the age of transnationalization’**

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This PhD thesis examines the production of TV formats and the transnational integration of TV production companies to understand the manifestations and implications of the transnationalization of media production. Being the main structuring properties of contemporary television production, analysing these two interrelated phenomena is essential to understand what gets produced, why, how and for whom in the current TV landscape. Moreover, they form the perfect lens through which to understand the broader process of the transnationalization of media and cultural production. Transnationalization refers to the increasing connectivity and collaboration between media industries, companies, and professionals across national borders. It has been theorized as a highly complex process characterized by global–local interactions and interdependencies. Yet, these complexities and interactions lack a firm empirical grounding.

Aiming to develop a more critical, comprehensive and empirically informed understanding of transnationalization, this PhD thesis adopts a multi-level, multi-sited and multi-method research approach. By including cases and research sites in multiple countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), this thesis responds to media scholars’ call for multi-national and multi-sited production research that is deemed essential to understanding both transnationalization and contemporary media production. The empirical research consists of four sub-studies that examine how transnationalization plays out on different levels and in different cases. In each study, multiple methods and data types are used, including trade press articles, interviews, and participant observations.

The results demonstrate that, first, TV formats play a key role in the transnationalization of TV production; second, transnationalization (also) materializes on the micro-level of production; and, third, transnationalization involves complex power dynamics and subtle mechanisms of centralization and standardization. Together, the results challenge not only the ‘localization paradigm’, with its focus on localization and decentralization, but also the conceptualization of transnationalization in terms of global–local hybridization or harmonization, as found in many studies on formats. Instead, I call for a more critical approach to and use of transnationalization, an approach that is sensitive to what goes on in actual production and to the adjustment of (local) production practices and priorities. The production of (non-scripted) TV appears so deeply transnationally structured, organized and practised that it can be questioned what local production still means. This is not the direct result of takeovers or single format adaptations, but rather a long-term process that involves the transnationalization of multiple factors that shape production and alter the conditions of TV production.