

Competition and public service broadcasting: stimulating creativity or servicing capital?

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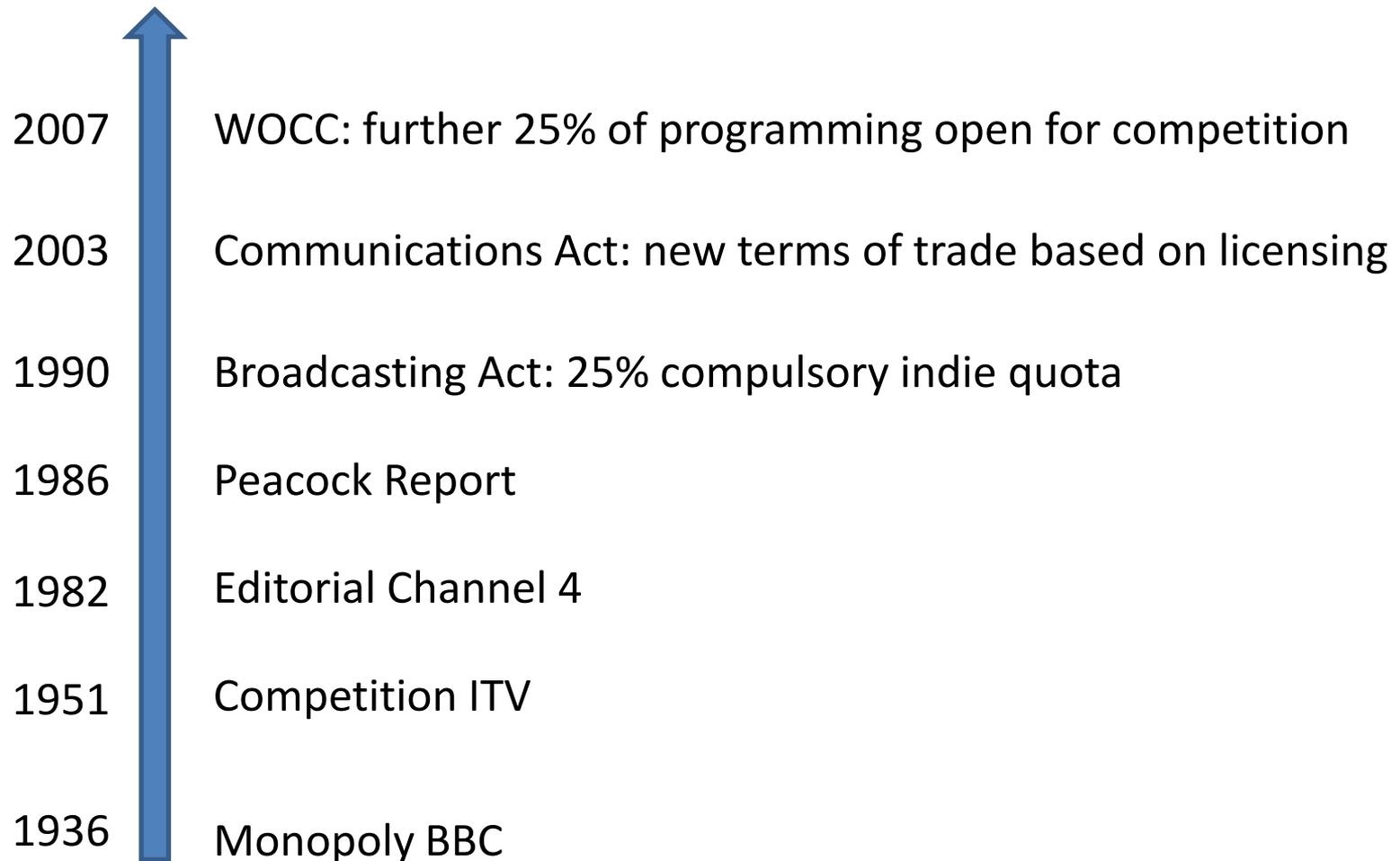
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Diversity of provision of public services symposium

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regulatory change and the BBC



the independent production sector

- **growth**
 - revenue doubled from £960m to £2bn (2000-2007)
 - record export earnings of £391m in 2008
- **consolidation**
 - 700 companies (top 10 accrue 98% of revenue)
 - share of top 10 indies increased from 19% to 65% (1993-2007)
 - share of small indies with revenue less than £2m fell from 61% to 2% over the same period
- **influence of capital market**
 - 8 of the top 10 indies used by the BBC are owned or controlled by companies with revenues of over £100m
 - all funded by stock market floatation or private equity backing

cognitive variety and creativity

- **social constructivist theory of knowledge:**
 - mutual understanding promoted among individuals who share a common background (cognitive proximity), but creativity more likely from interaction of individuals with differing mental frameworks (cognitive distance)
- **optimal cognitive distance:**
 - “large enough to offer variety for innovation, and small enough to enable collaboration” (Nooteboom 2008).

new competencies?

- spin-offs from BBC
- concentration of production in London
- mobility of freelance workers
- roster dominated by small group of 'super-indies'

commercial pressures

“you’ve got to satisfy the shareholders and promise things to the City and then deliver them. So, yes, of course it affects a lot of things in terms of driving the figures... it’s probably one of the things that informs the policy: that we should have more returning series and formatted shows because they have more commercial value longer term. There are probably people here who would love to make more beautifully crafted documentaries on very interesting subjects but there’s just not the money in it.”

(commercial director, super-indie, March 2008)

decline in producer autonomy

“I think those 10 years, about ‘85 to ‘95; there was an intense period of self-awareness and experimentation going on. In those years, and probably up to the late ‘90s, it was common for a commissioning editor to pull in a talented director and say, what would you like to do; I want to hear your ideas. That doesn’t really happen anymore. You’ll get called in to ask whether you are interested in working on a particular project, which has already been pretty well defined by a commission.”

(BBC manager, May 2008).

discussion

- independent sector motivated to produce innovation in profitable genres
- reorientation of BBC may preclude risk taking
- institutional design influences programming conventions and norms