

*Critical Studies in Television*

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## **The power of the format catalogue: How global institutional structures determine television production in a small national market**

**Abstract:** While the international flows of media content and the emergence of global media giants have gained extensive scholarly attention, their implications for national television production remain understudied. The article addresses the question of how the concentration of ownership and transnational flows involved in global media industries determine television production in a small national market. By analysing the structures, practices and agencies involved in programme format import and adaptation in Finland, the article introduces the format catalogue as the main vehicle of distributing and establishing the structuring properties of global formats in local television production.

**Keywords:** television production, television programme format, format adaptation, globalisation, structuration, Finland

Since the 1990s, two dramatic, interrelated changes have transformed television production all over the world. As a result of the increasing convergence of ownership, global media giants emerged to dominate television production and distribution across national and cultural borders. At the same time, international trade in finished programming has, to a notable extent, been replaced by trade in television formats, resulting in the global proliferation of well-known format brands and highly refined production practices. While theories of cultural imperialism and, more recently, of globalisation have inspired analyses of the international flows of television content and the dominance of international corporations, the implications for national television production remain understudied. In this article, I will examine the structures, practices and agencies of programme format importation and adaptation in Finland. I will argue that the concentration of ownership and

the global flows of media content, such as television formats, are the main structuring properties of contemporary television production. The format catalogue plays a major role in distribution and in establishing the global structures of the format industry in national and local television markets. By presenting a mid-level analysis of the Finnish television industry, the article thus presents new knowledge on the economic and cultural globalisation of media.

Finland, one of the Nordic welfare states, has about 5 million inhabitants and a distinct national language (for further information on the Nordic media landscape, see Syvertsen et al., 2014). It has a solid history of domestic television production, which, for decades, was characterised by the in-house production of national broadcasting companies. Independent television production began to emerge only in the late 1980s, after the establishment of a third terrestrial television channel. Today, all the major production companies that specialise in format adaptation have been turned into local branches of multinational media conglomerates. These companies mainly focus on selling and producing formats from their own catalogues. The change in the ownership of production companies has resulted in major transformations both in the content of Finnish television and in the work of Finnish television producers.

The changes described above concern television as both a cultural and an economic institution and simultaneously enable and restrict the agencies and practices of national television production. The theory of structuration, set out by Anthony Giddens (1984), outlines the relationship between structure, human agency and social practices. As Giddens (1984: 17) states, structure refers to the structuring properties ‘which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend them “systemic” form’. Social systems are not bounded by external structures, nor do they have internal structures. Instead, they exhibit ‘structural properties’. Structures only exist in the practices of human agents. Moreover, structures are

simultaneously constraining and enabling: they are not only the rules involved in production and reproduction, but also the resources. These rules and resources are recursively involved in institutions, which refer to 'the more enduring features of social life'. Giddens emphasises the duality of structure: the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction (ibid.: 17–25). Social reproduction thus indicates the repetitive character of day-to-day life, which includes, for example, routines (ibid.: 35). Also, the constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, but represent an intertwined duality (ibid.: 9). Agency does not refer to the intentions people have in doing things, but to their capability of doing those things in the first place (ibid.: 9). Structure and agency remain constantly in play and are at work both in the case of individual decisions and organisations (Newcomb, 2009: 268).

In this article, television production is analysed as a social system. More specifically, the study examines the import and adaptation of television formats in Finland. Analysing the structuration of a social system means studying the modes in which these systems are produced and reproduced in interaction (Giddens, 1984: 25). The idea of television production as a social system is based on three assumptions presented by Joseph Straubhaar (2007). First, television as a cultural technology is bounded, but not determined, by political, economic and institutional structures (ibid.: 8). Therefore, we need to analyse these structures on global, national and local levels. Second, these structures provide resources and constraints for cultural agents, such as television managers and producers (Straubhaar, 2007: 8). Human agency in the television industry demands both familiarity with the established practices and the expression of individual creativity. Third, the rules and patterns that determine everyday practice grow within these boundaries but are shaped by the institutions and those who work within them (ibid.: 8). The important structure of a television network, for example, is the complex sum of the daily routines and creative work of its owners,

managers, directors, writers, technicians and actors, who work within rules and resources set by those who own and run the structure (ibid.: 133).

As structuration theory helps us understand television production as a social system, we can formulate three main research questions: What are the structuring properties of Finnish television production? How do they determine local individual agencies? And, what are the repetitive practices that contribute to maintaining these structures? These questions will be answered by analysing a range of research materials using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods.

### **A note on methodology**

Methodologically, this study draws on media industry research and production studies. As a field of study, media industry research is engaged in an integrated analyses of media texts, audiences, histories and culture, and addresses, for example, questions concerning the relative power of individual agents within larger institutional structures, the power of media industries to shape cultural agendas and an empirically based understanding of media industry practices (Holt and Perren, 2009: 3–4). To study the structures, agencies and practices of television production, I have combined qualitative and quantitative research methods with a historical perspective. As there is no statistical data of format import available, I have conducted a preliminary quantitative analysis to study the historical flows of media content. The data consists of the programme titles of all the Finnish free-to-air terrestrial television channels. I have analysed a sample week (43) from four years (1988, 1996, 2004 and 2012) and selected all the programmes I can identify as format adaptations. The analysis results in an estimation of the volumes of format adaptations from the 1980s to 2010s and is presented as a diagram.

The quantitative data has been complemented by a desk study of the development of the independent production sector in Finland. The research materials include other scholars' previous research, websites and industry reports, as well as 14 thematic interviews conducted in 2014 and 2015. The interviewees represent the managers and producers of the four main national television companies (YLE, MTV and Nelonen) and the CEOs or executive producers of five independent production companies. All the informants were working with television formats at the time of the interviews or had a history in format import and adaptation. The interviewees are thus considered as 'exclusive informants'" (Bruun, 2016): they were chosen as informants, because they have irreplaceable knowledge about the import and adaptation of programme formats in Finland.

### **From distant shores to the global format flows**

First, I will take a brief look in this section at the history of format trade in Finland and present a periodisation of format imports. Similar to the television histories in many other countries, the first decades of Finnish television witnessed both unauthorised loans of programme content and casual examples of format trade. The two longest-running shows in Finland, *Tupla tai kuitti* and *Levyraati*, were both unauthorised adaptations of foreign television programmes (*Lascia o raddoppia/The \$64.000 Question* and *Juke Box Jury*, see Ferrari, 2012: 129). The earliest authorised format contract that I have been able to identify, was the license of *Romper Room*. The Finnish public service broadcaster YLE aired the adaptation titled *Tenavatuokio* in the late 1960s (Keinonen, 2016). In the 1980s, the main commercial broadcaster, MTV, premiered a dating show called *Napakymppi*. The show was an unauthorised adaptation of the popular US show *The Dating Game*, but a format contract was not negotiated and signed until the distributor was informed about the Finnish version (Äijälä, 2015; Sairanen, 2015; Tuominen, 2015).

While these examples indicate a gradually growing interest in established television formats, the format trade generally only took off a few decades later. for Finnish television to really enter the format era. In the 1990s, a growing number of licensed national adaptations, including *The Wheel of Fortune* and *The Lyrics Board*, travelled to Finland. Eerika Vermilä, the CEO of FremantleMedia Finland, states that in the early 2000s, a group of formats including *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, *Popstars*, *Idols* and *Big Brother* conquered Finnish television in the course of five years. These four titles, along with *Survivor*, represent what Jean Chalaby (2016) calls the ‘super formats’. As the interviews conducted for this study indicate, only during the last ten years have the volumes of imported formats and Finnish adaptations really reached a peak. To get some support for this claim and to provide an overview of the increase in format adaptations, I have conducted a small quantitative analysis (Table 1).

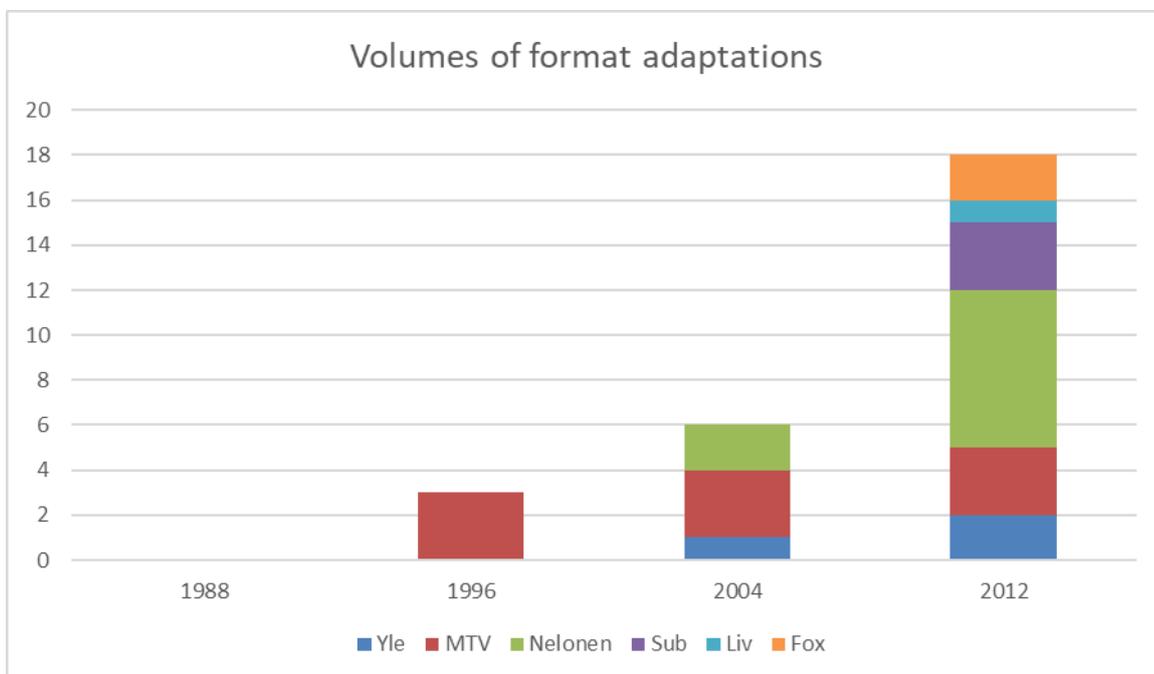


Table 1: Volumes of format adaptations.

Table 1 presents the volumes of format adaptations observed over four decades. Although a few format adaptations have been observed in the 1980s, none of them aired during the sample week in 1988. The numbers remained very small in 1996 and 2004, but as the sample week represents only the fall television schedule, the total number of format adaptations per year can be estimated to be somewhat larger. The table documents a major increase in format imports between 2004 and 2012; in fact, the yearly reports on Finnish television programming published by the Ministry of Transport and Communication indicate that the change took place during the last years of this eight year period (LVM, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2014, 2015).

When these figures and the interview evidence are compared with the periodisation of the global growth of television formats by Bourdon (2012), Chalaby (2012) and Moran (2013), we can see that Finnish television culture has followed developments in the UK, the USA and other major television-producing countries with a lag of 10–20 years. Based on this evidence, it seems that the implications of format import and adaptation on Finnish television production have only taken shape during the last ten years or so. At the same time, a major structural change, that of the concentration of ownership, has been transforming the Finnish television industry.

### **From small indies to global media giants**

Prior to the birth of the third terrestrial television channel Kolmoskanava in Finland, in 1986, independent television production was practically non-existent (Lassila, 1989: 9). The two national broadcasters, YLE and MTV, aired in-house productions almost exclusively (Soramäki, 2007: 79). However, as Kolmoskanava did not establish production units (Hellman, 2011; Lassila, 1989), the channel created a demand for independent television content. The late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed changes both in the regulation of broadcasting in Finland and in the organisation of

television companies, trends which further accelerated the growth of the independent production sector (Soramäki, 2007: 91).

In the early 2000s, most Finnish indies were rather small film and television production companies (Sihvonen and Wakonen, 2000). Less than 15 years later, the picture had changed: the list of the major Finnish production companies in 2014 was dominated by the local arms of global media giants (YLE Toimintaympäristö, 2016). At this time, only three production companies could be defined as Finnish in terms of ownership, none of which was producing format adaptations.

However, the list of major independents included five established producers of format adaptations: FremantleMedia Finland, Banijay Finland, Shine Finland, Zodiak Finland and Eyeworks Finland. As their titles indicate, each of these represents the local branches of a multinational media corporation.

Since 2014, another round of super-mergers has increased the rate of concentration in the Finnish television sector. This includes the mergers of Shine and Endemol as well as Banijay and Zodiak. In 2014, Shine Finland had a turnover of 7 million euros and was seventh on the list of producers by economic production. The group had entered the Finnish television industry in 2009 by buying the local office of the Nordic media company Metronome Film and Television. It established itself as the producer of adaptations of global programme formats, such as *The Biggest Loser* and *Got to Dance* (Uronen, 2016: 67). With the 2009 acquisition, all 15 companies of Metronome Film & Television became a part of the British Shine corporation owned by Elisabeth Murdoch (Moran and Malbon, 2006: 91; Uronen, 2016: 67). In January 2015, Shine, Endemol and Core Media merged into Endemol Shine Group, and Shine Finland was renamed Endemol Shine Finland. Previously, Endemol had been a minor production company in Finland, although it has played a leading role in the development of format industry globally. Through these mergers the Finnish arm of a Nordic

media company became the local office of a super-indie, owned by Apollo Global Management and Rupert Murdoch's global media giant 21st Century Fox.

In 2014, third place was occupied by Banijay Finland with a turnover of 9 million euros. In 2007, the Finnish production company Solar Television had been sold to Banijay Entertainment of France and was renamed Banijay Finland. The owners of the Banijay Group include two Italian families, Agnelli and de Agostini, who are also shareholders in Juventus, Ferrari and L'Oreal, among others. According to the CEO of Banijay Finland, Joonas Hytönen (2015), the media company created an extensive catalogue by buying the IP rights of established programme formats, including such 'classics' as *Temptation Island* and *Popstars*. In 2014, Zodiak Finland had a turnover of 6 million euros and held eighth place on the list of major Finnish production companies. In 2005, the international production company Zodiak bought the pioneering Finnish indie company Broadcasters, creating Zodiak Finland; in 2016, its merger with Banijay Finland was announced. Banijay Finland is now in charge of producing audiovisual entertainment, while Zodiak Finland operates drama and film productions.

As we can see, the Finnish independent production sector, and format adaptation in particular, is currently characterised not only by concentration and conglomeration but also the domination of global media giants. An important reason why media companies are expanding is globalisation, namely the need to remain competitive as traditional boundaries around national media markets are eroded (Doyle, 2002: 2). This development is enhanced by technological convergence, which is also diminishing traditional market boundaries (ibid.: 2). But I would argue that the converse factor is also evident, as industry convergence contributes to globalisation. My data indicates that the concentration of ownership along with the global flows of media content, including television formats in particular, present two of the main structuring properties of contemporary television

production. By creating the rules and resources for social action, such structuring factors determine the opportunities available to human agents (Giddens 1984). All the major production companies in Finland are now local branches of the global enterprises and are therefore subject to the priorities and resource requirements of their parent companies. As I will show in the next section, this concentration of ownership results in the dominance of the programme formats and production practices that are favoured by the media giants and may thus decrease the diversity of programming. The format catalogue now plays a major role in global distribution and establishes structuring properties of the global format industry with respect to local television production.

### **Format catalogue and programme acquisition**

According to Giddens (1984: 17), structures exist in the practices of human agents. As similar content and practices emerge all over the world, they contribute to the reproduction of the existing structures. Thus, the global structures of television production become visible in the practices and routines of daily work (Straubhaar 2007). The format catalogue is a central tool in marketing new programme formats and, as such, plays a role comparable in some ways to that of the mail-order catalogues of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All global production and distribution companies have their own catalogues with hundreds or thousands of programme titles. Some of them, like the catalogues of Shine Endemol and Banijay, are available for public browsing on their websites (Endemol Shine Distribution, 2017; Banijay International, 2017).

A number of my interview informants stated that format catalogues determine which programmes the production companies offer to broadcasters. The CEOs of Banijay Finland, FremantleMedia Finland and Eyeworks Finland admitted that they primarily sell formats from the catalogues of their parent companies (Hytönen, 2015; Vermilä, 2015). Antti Väisänen (2015, 2017) estimated that, in

2015, Eyeworks Finland produced a dozen format adaptations. About half of these came from the company's own catalogue, while the other half consisted of formats purchased from 'third parties' (smaller, independent production companies). Joonas Hytönen (2015) stated that, during the last few years, he has been primarily selling formats from the catalogue of Banijay. Eerika Vermilä (2015) from FremantleMedia Finland also confirmed that 'one naturally prefers the catalogue and aims to sell those [formats] at first hand', while also looking for formats from the third parties.

Television managers have a similar view. Sari Valtanen (2015), Executive Producer at MTV, considered the mergers of production companies and the emergence of format catalogues as major transformations in Finnish television production. Katja Santala (2015) from SBS Broadcasting Group and Jani Hartikainen (2014) and Karoliina Kytömaa (2014) from Nelonen Media also noted that the globalisation of Finnish television production can be seen in the resulting programming. As Kytömaa (2014) stated, the multinational production companies 'have their own pipelines, which produce the kind of programming they are expected to sell in Finland'. Also, Jorma Sairanen (2015), former Senior Vice President of Programming at MTV, and Ari Ylä-Anttila (2014), Commissioner at YLE, took for granted that production companies mainly offer formats from their own portfolios. In a worst-case scenario, this decreases the plurality of television output (Kytömaa 2014), as higher levels of market domination mean fewer competing suppliers and may therefore result in less pluralism (Doyle, 2002: 14). However, the relationship between concentration of media ownership and pluralism is not always so straightforward (ibid.). As my data implies, globalisation and the concentration of ownership may also have more subtle consequences on the resources available to Finnish production companies.

Several of those interviewed discussed how much time and money production companies devoted to devising and developing original programme ideas. Sairanen (2015) stated that the local branches

of international production companies do not have departments for product development in Finland. As these companies are expected to sell and produce adaptations of imported programme formats, they are not interested in devising new programmes or co-financing pilot episodes. Previously, broadcasters could share the financial risk with production companies, and decisions about new programmes were only made after producing a pilot episode. In the current context, programmes are often commissioned simply after viewing a foreign adaptation of the programme format (Sairanen, 2015). Production companies are clearly unwilling to take the financial risks involved in product development; this may also stem from the lack of business continuity and the short-term planning horizon employed (Uronen, 2016: 15). Economic downturn and unexpected mergers obviously result in insecurity within the industry.

Additionally, the CEOs of Eyeworks Finland and Banijay Finland both indicated that local product development is typically overshadowed by the format catalogue (Väisänen, 2015; Hytönen, 2015). The CEO of Eyeworks Finland stated that he strives to keep the share of original Finnish programming at 50% of the total amount of their productions (Väisänen, 2015). The lack of financial and human resources is a common situation in all the Finnish production companies and is partly due to the global economic downturn. However, this situation clearly results from structural changes in the field, as well. As the Senior Vice President from Nelonen Media stated, global production and distribution companies centralised their development units (Hartikainen 2014). While these units are currently being replaced by a more decentralised model (Hartikainen 2014), local programme development has continued to suffer from a lack of resources. The CEO of Banijay Finland admitted that they employ a limited number of staff (Hytönen, 2015); as resources are allocated to ongoing productions, no time is allocated to brainstorming or long-term planning. But, despite these harmful developments, local programme development has not been entirely

replaced by the global television formats. Banijay Finland, for example, has continued to devise original ideas when they have not been able to find a suitable format (Hytönen, 2015).

While the concentration of television production may have unfavourable effects on programme diversity, there are also positive outcomes. As Giddens (1984: 17) points out, the structuring properties make it possible for similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space, thus enabling social production and reproduction. International production companies have accumulated knowledge of technologies, production and marketing practices and content characteristics as well as methods of centralised product development. They additionally benefit from large volumes in production and delivery, and these advantages become visible in their format catalogues (Uronen, 2016). Although my interview data suggests that international production and distribution companies do not support local product development, they do achieve economies of scale, which provide their local arms with an enormous range of formats in several genres. The trade in formats may also, in some cases, even result in an increase in domestic television production (Esser, 2010: 148), as imported foreign content is replaced by adapted programme formats. Nevertheless, while transforming programme acquisition, television formats are also increasingly determining the practices of television production.

### **Localising global practices**

When it comes to the actual practices of television production, formats seem to have a great – and above all, positive – impact. According to my interview informants, television formats have contributed to the development of national television production by bringing in international knowhow (Tuominen, 2015; Väisänen, 2015; Ylä-Anttila, 2014; Äijälä, 2015). Knowledge and skills are mainly transferred from one production to another and from one country to another

through format bibles, production consultants and visits to the original productions (Kytömaa, 2014; Väisänen, 2015). This knowhow may concern minor details but, cumulatively, can make a major contribution to the style (and success) of the show. These details include, for example, techniques used in lightning, shooting and staging of the production (Tuominen, 2015). Karoliina Kytömaa (2014) stated that formats have played a major role in teaching how to create specific illusions. For instance, while producing the Finnish adaptation of the US transformation show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, the production team visited the original production in the USA and learned how to make a transformation that takes 3–5-days look as though it takes place in one day (Santala, 2007: 30).

Thus, the importance of knowhow has contributed to the professionalisation of Finnish television (Kytömaa, 2014; Tuominen, 2015; Ylä-Anttila, 2014). In my interviews, the term ‘professionalisation’ is mainly used in reference to two aspects of television production. First, it is about making the production process more efficient (Äijälä, 2015); the implications of this are most tangible in cases where an existing production format is applied in the production of domestic original programming to make the process as fast and reliable as possible. A Finnish daily drama titled *Salatut elämät* (‘Secret lives’, 1999–present) serves as an example here: the factory-like production process of *Salatut elämät* was organised according to the model of the Grundy company, based in Australia, although the content of the show was created in Finland (Keinonen 2017). By introducing an efficient model for managing and organising the production process, this highly-refined production format enabled the establishment of a daily drama in a television market lacking the necessary knowhow. Second, professionalisation may involve the emergence of new professions. As a result of producing format adaptations, Finnish production teams have established new job titles, which demand highly specialised expertise (Vermilä, 2015).

Professionalisation of production practices in Finland has also increased the local understanding of the television business and encouraged Finnish producers to carry out major format adaptations. As Antti Väisänen (2015) stated, ‘a visit to a British format production helped the production team to understand that the problems and challenges are similar in every production. Some teams may have more money, more people, more time. But the problems remain the same’ (Väisänen, 2015). Saku Tuominen (2015), pioneer in Finnish format import and adaptation, presented the *Dancing with the Stars* format as an example: ‘I don’t believe we would have had taken such a risk in Finland – of producing a massively expensive dancing show for celebrities. But when you have a track record of 10 countries, it is not that easy to say that it’s not going to work. What if it does work? [What] if your rival buys it? I believe, that if we didn’t have formats, the average price of productions would be lower. Formats have added scale, professionalism and courage to Finnish television’ (Tuominen, 2015). Contrary to frequently made assumptions, format adaptations do not always equal low production budgets. Big shiny-floor shows, such as *Dancing with the Stars*, have big budgets even if they are format adaptations, but the track record of the format serves as a ‘warranty’ of commercial success. If *Dancing with the Stars* was a Finnish invention with no history in other countries, it probably would not have been commissioned, because the financial risk would be too high. As the formats have a track record, they may encourage television managers and producers to invest in more expensive productions aiming to attract bigger audiences and thus raise average production budgets.

Interestingly, none of my interview subjects articulated the other side of the coin, namely, the restrictions presented by tightly controlled format content and highly refined production practices. This dynamic is what Silvio Waisboard (2004) refers to as ‘McDonaldisation’. While serial television production was previously structured according to the values and experiences of local producers, global format actors now hold major power in defining national television practices

(Kjus, 2009: 102). Kjus (2009) states that the collaboration of global and local actors in scheduling, conceptual priorities and production itself may weaken local production capacity, as their independence, knowhow and creativity suffer in the interaction. Nevertheless, Kjus also admits that ideas and assistance from abroad can help local producers better understand their own situation and provide them with new perspectives. The crucial deciding factor, in this situation, is how the collaboration is organised (ibid., 102). Close collaboration between the format owner and the commissioning broadcaster (or production company) allows for knowledge transfer, in which the process of adaptation is supported by the format owners, providing the production team with accumulated knowledge of the particular format. As a result, the local production team may improve their competence by adopting tried and tested ideas and practices (Szostak, 2013: 77–78).

As previous research suggests (e.g. Szostak, 2013; Keinonen, 2017), this transfer of knowledge has implications that reach beyond the format adaptations themselves. Eerika Vermilä (2015) noted that the lessons learned from formats are applied in developing the structure, content and production in programmes based on local original ideas as well. Formats naturally also contribute to the creation of new programme formats. Format bibles and production consultants bring with them skills, knowledge and techniques that can be transferred to other productions (Chalaby, 2016: 101). Tarja Pääkkönen (2015) stated that Finnish programmes had previously been rather ‘parochial’: although successful in Finland, they have been unable to attract buyers abroad. Formats have taught Finnish producers how to ‘remove national elements’ (Pääkkönen 2015) and make their programmes universally appealing. Matti Paunio (2015) from MTV also confirmed that, by producing format adaptations, Finnish production companies have learned a great deal about the processes of format creation. While formats may have overshadowed the development of original programming in some of the production companies, others are trying to produce content for export markets. Here, the knowhow included in format packages has helped a great deal.

Many of the informants I interviewed also raised the question of quality. Hartikainen (2014), Tuominen (2015) and Väisänen (2015) all argued that formats have set the standards for domestic programmes and thus contributed to ‘raising the level of Finnish television production’ (Hartikainen 2014). New, higher standards have arisen because of two developments: the accumulation of knowledge discussed above, along with constant comparative evaluation of domestic original programming and globally successful television formats (Väisänen 2015). As Väisänen (2015) argued, this comparative approach can be seen both in production and in reception. Viewers are watching various adaptations of the same format and use similar evaluation criteria to judge the different versions – even though the British version may cost 1.8 million British pounds and the Finnish adaptation only 450,000 euros (Väisänen, 2015). As formats set global standards by which national television is evaluated, they do not necessarily threaten the independence and creativity of local production but can help it to meet international standards.

### **Structure and agency**

The global structures of the format industry provide resources and constraints for cultural agents, such as television managers and producers (Straubhaar, 2007: 8) acting as intermediaries between format owners and national audiences. Local executives negotiate viewers’ tastes and exporters’ or distributors’ catalogues, thus deciding which programmes and which formats to purchase and how to schedule them (Havens, 2006: 3). In Finland, the CEOs of independent production companies usually work as executive producers on their productions, consequently carrying both financial and artistic responsibility for their format adaptations. As the Finnish production companies are owned by global media giants, the work of the CEOs and producers is enabled by the resources provided by parent companies while being restricted by the rules and requirements they establish. The search

for new programmes and ideas is, for example, driven both by institutional needs and economic pressures. Most buyers rely on a relatively small number of distributors, from which they purchase programming. They also prefer producers with proven track records (ibid.: 6). Jani Hartikainen from Nelonen (2014) confirmed that they typically prefer production companies that operate on ‘a larger scale’: they expect the company to have enough resources and professionals to carry out the production. ‘The more complicated the production is, for example in the drama genre, the more there is accumulation of knowledge’ (Hartikainen, 2015). A reliance on established collaborators and the repetition of tried-and-tested practices thus contribute to the reproduction of the global structures.

The production of a format adaptation usually involves collaboration between the local production team and the production consultants, such as flying producers (Valtanen, 2015). Consultancy is about carrying specific production know-how, valuable industrial expertise and a specialised awareness of production organisation and routines to all corners of the world. The consultant thus mediates between the competing demands of preserving the format brand and customising the programme for local audiences (Moran, 2009: 43). Tarja Pääkkönen (2015), CEO of Shine Finland, emphasized that the producer needs to be capable of collaboration: ‘[The producer] is between a rock and a hard place, to some extent. There are the Finnish directors and writers, who have a certain understanding of the show. And then there’s the flying producer on the other side’.

Although programme managers and executive producers play the main roles in commissioning, scheduling and producing television programmes, the production process involves a countless number of small-scale decisions. Most of these minor details in programme content or the production process are determined by television professionals working as freelancers (Hytönen, 2015). Only the most prominent figures in production, such as producers, have permanent positions

in production companies – most of the staff is only hired for a specific production. Freelancers thus participate in transferring knowledge from one production company to another, and meanwhile, the global structures are produced and reproduced within national borders.

International television executives who purchase and schedule imported programming form a unique group who receive their ideas about television as much from one another as from their domestic television cultures (Havens, 2006: 6). While the production of serial television was previously determined by the decisions and judgement of local producers, it is now increasingly determined by international format actors (Kjus, 2009: 102). As Kjus (*ibid.*, 101) states, most of the new formats increase the participation of audiences, but reduce the participation of producers. The institutional structures of television production thus restrict the agency of local television producers. As a generation of television professionals worldwide begins to think about television in similar ways, they contribute to the standardisation of television production in a more powerful way than televisual texts, reception practices or global patterns of ownership has done thus far (Havens, 2006: 7). Concentration of ownership may accelerate the distribution of common knowledge and values, as these are repeated in routinised practices of producing format adaptations. In social reproduction, these practices become the structures of the global television industry (Giddens 1984). At the same time, however, television professionals have the power to resist the forms of standardisation and to produce, purchase and schedule television programmes in different ways (Havens, 2006: 7). Thus, the structural properties of the global television business do not alone determine programming decisions, but rather they facilitate interactions that can influence such decisions.

## **To conclude**

This article has shown that the concentration of ownership in the television industry and other structuring properties enable the emergence of similar social practices in television production all over the world. As the national institutional structures have been largely replaced by global ones, the practices and agencies of national television production have been transformed. Here, the format catalogue plays a central role. Format catalogues simultaneously provide the local producers with resources and restrictions: they are broadening the range of available programme concepts and disseminating tried and tested practices of television production, but, at the same time, they limit the possibilities of developing original programme ideas. Consequently, the work of television managers and producers is not only determined by their creativity and the preferences of national audiences, but also by transnational trends, globally accumulating knowledge and the strategies of multi-national media conglomerates. The format catalogue serves as the main vehicle for bringing both favourable and restrictive global institutional structures into national television production.

For smaller television markets, the availability of resources to support indigenous production, as opposed to less expensive “imported” content (Doyle, 2002: 17), is a particular concern. As my analysis indicates, the independent production sector in Finland is characterised by a limited number of production companies specialising in format adaptations. The industry is run by a small number of central figures, who exert considerable agency in the management of broadcasting companies and independent production companies. As these figures identify with a cohort of like-minded colleagues from all over the world, they may become truly cosmopolitan television professionals, able to follow the example of other Nordic countries and establish Finland as the exporter of original, even innovative television content. But do they risk their positions as the gatekeepers of national television culture in this process? While the reproduction of global structuring

properties clearly has a favourable impact on the professionalisation of television production in smaller markets, concerns have been expressed about the diversity of programming. Thus, the overall, long-term implications of the globalisation and the concentration of ownership remain to be seen.

### **Funding**

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## **Interviews**

(Company names and job titles at the time of interview)

Hartikainen, Jani (2014) Senior Vice President, Television, Nelonen Media, 16 December 2014.

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