



UNISCI Discussion Papers

REFLECTIONS OF CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION IN TV: PROGRAMMES IN KYRGYZSTAN

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“Globalization had never been a choice for the people of the world.”

E.S.Herman

“Sun rises from the East”

Anonymous

1. Introduction

Currently globalization has become one of the most important and permanent topics in almost all countries' agendas. However, except for some specialists, definition and dating of globalization is not clear. Generally people are inclined to define the term according to the conditions of their own country, individual conditions, educational background and their view of the world. Parallel to the criteria for the definition, there is a wide disagreement on evaluating the globalization process as a positive or a negative event. Nevertheless, there is the tendency to speak from a common framework especially in the countries deeply affected by globalization. In this study, I prefer to clarify basic tenets of globalization and the cultural globalization before discussing the cultural globalization in Kyrgyzstan in order to define our framework for this study.

In the beginning, scholar circles perceived and defined the phenomenon within the frameworks of political-economy, international capital flow, product and technology. But soon, those definitions and approaches became insufficient to capture the issue.

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Generally, it is accepted that globalization, as a fact and as a term, could be dated twenty or thirty years back. Some scholars argue that globalization started with the fall of the Berlin Wall, while others argue that it started with the colonial expansions of Britain and other European countries. On the other hand, a study conducted by scholars from Helsinki, argues that the globalization process started very early and went through a four-stage development. In this paper I will not talk about the whole history of globalization, but briefly describe the development of the global processes. According to the Helsinki model, the globalization process has followed the stages listed below:

1. Pre-modern globalization: Era characterized by religions that had political and military power;
2. Globalization in early Modern Era (1500-1850): The period characterized by the expansion of forms of modernism and European Empires;
3. Modern globalization (1850-1945): Explosion of Western economic and cultural power, rise of industrialization, introduction of new techniques in transportation and communication, etc.;
4. Contemporary modernization (since 1945): Globalization in all spheres of the social and economic activities and an explosion of global information flow.

There's nothing odd about perceiving and defining globalization as a more recent event, because in many sources, including the one mentioned above, it is stated that a huge development happened especially in the last two decades. Among those developments, globalization of the economy constitutes a very important dimension. On the other hand, it alone would not provide a sufficient base for explaining and understanding the effects of globalization. Indeed, cultural and economic aspects of globalization have to be considered and evaluated together, since ignoring one of those aspects would lead us to see an incomplete picture from the start.

In current cultural globalization, television constitutes one of the most important phenomena. Today, globally watched TV channels are regulated/owned by a few countries and a few people. In other words, the very product of cultural globalization itself constitutes an important part of economic globalization. In today's world, an important part of social life is determined by global processes and media. Television plays an especially dominant role as a determining factor.

As a result of the empowering dominance of international market, mass media capital, including television, has lost its national character in most of the countries. National capitals are incorporated in international capital not only in terms of ownership structure, but also in terms of production and distribution processes. In most regions of the world, including the European countries, capital-ownership compositions of the TV channels are not local or national anymore. They are becoming predominantly global.

Globalization constitutes an international electronics network throughout the world. But there is no space for cultural rights and cultural equality within that network.

In the "Space Era", because of the globalization, cultures fell apart from their roots. Culture in itself has lost its power: Developments in mass media and transportation technologies could easily make any culture a part of the past or a thing of the future. Under the weight of globalization, cultural characteristics have become nothing but nostalgia.



At the current stage, globalization turned into the domination means of a new cultural minority and has become the monopoly of a certain culture. Now, in most of the countries in the world, people are watching the same TV channels, following the same fashion, using the same electronic devices and eating more or less the same menu. Indeed, the basic motive behind making people to watch the same channels is to try to make them consume certain products. Actually the outcome of the current state of affairs could not simply be characterized as distribution and consumption of certain products, rather, it is the victory of a certain culture, the “global culture”, over any pluralistic and local entity. People from any part of the world, now defenseless, non-organized, and helpless against the bombardment of global companies and global media, have been forced to buy the product and values of globally dominant business and media.

The current globalization has never been a choice for the people of the world but it is the tool, as a process of tactic and strategy, to serve the aims of the business world. Governments, under strong political pressure, have accepted the “necessity of that process”, and helped the business world. Societies have been excluded from decision-making processes and from the debates about whether to enter that process or not. People of the entire world experienced a propaganda bombardment from big businesses and commercial media circles. In brief, we all depend on the decisions of less popular and over-authoritised elected people who consider themselves super citizens not only regarding domestic democratic issues but also on the so called process of globalization.

2.Globalization in Central Asia and in Kyrgyzstan

Although it is generally believed that history is nothing but the re-occurrence of events, we cannot say the same about the globalization issue, at least for now. Long ago, at the first millennium, it was the East, the region between the Middle East and the China, which hosted the invention of new musical works, new religions and new political forms. Those inventions had been transferred from the east to the west. In other words, the “sun was rising from the East.”

Like all neighboring Central Asian countries, the Kyrgyz case in her relation to globalization, requires to be analyzed with a different point of view. She has been governed by a different system for more than 70 years and lived within a different cultural context. Of course to expect or to think that influence of those 70 years could be removed in just 12 years is nothing more than a fantasy. The existence of the Western CINC organizations, institutions and mechanisms in the country could only help to accelerate the transition process; nevertheless, it would not follow a short and easy route.

The requirement for a new perspective in the analysis of globalization processes in Kyrgyzstan implies two main themes. The first is the fact that Kyrgyzstan’s transition to a sedentary life is quite a new phenomenon that is not yet complete. The second fact to scrutinize is the lack of native language use even by the indigenous people in Kyrgyzstan. Because of the Soviet past, it is not normally used even by the titular nation. As it is well known by the scholars of cultural studies, language plays a very important role in formation, development and the preservation of cultures, especially in the formation of the local cultures.

Globalization and the cultural globalization are influential in all countries of the world.

Indeed, that was the natural and inescapable outcome of the above mentioned developments. Two factors worth mentioning as initiating and accelerating globalization in the region are listed below:



1. Fall of the Walls, accompanied by the subjection of the whole world under one single ideology, quickened the globalization process in some countries while only initiated it in the Central Asian Republics.
2. September 11 attacks highlighted the position of region for the Western centers and sped up the idea that this region has to be incorporated into the global network in all aspects.

On the other hand, with the exception of East European states, in all post-socialist countries, globalization was introduced gradually so as to make it acceptable in those countries. However, globalization was to appear in every sphere of life while radical and immediate regime changes transformed the structures in the mentioned countries.

An example often given in cultural studies would be useful for understanding the introduction of globalization to those countries. "If you add some vodka to the milk you feed your cat, the cat in time would become addicted and want the milk with vodka. Gradual introduction of the cultures to the people is more or less similar to that example." While the Western countries experienced the process of globalization through a wide range of time, the post-soviet states experienced it in a relatively short time, and the result has been a shock for the people of those countries. Since they have lived in a mono-cultural, mono-ideological milieu for years behind the wall, they are now experiencing a culture shock.

Some scholars argue that there are also positive aspects of cultural globalization as well as its destructive aspects. One of these is the argument that the belief that gathering people under one culture would bring bring peace to the world. But we all know that our world is witnessing one war after another, which makes it hard to find any justification for the soundness of that argument. Moreover, if we approach the problem from those affected countries, we could state that the negative aspects are more dominant than the positive ones.

It's possible to base this on two main reasons. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the process of globalization entered the region relatively later than in the rest of the world, -unexpectedly and within a very short period of time- which created a certain shock. Secondly, as widely known, one of the fundamental characteristics of the cultural globalization is the aim to create a consumption society on the individuals of that society, since the very determinants of that culture require that. However, in societies with low standards of life and low GDP, commercials and programs carrying the consumption messages of global culture usually underlie identity problems and conflicts within the society. It is a well-known fact that those who are affected by globalization are the ones who have less capital and know-how accumulation to take part in the new "International division of capital". Those who have less equal position in the "game" are destined to lose. Indeed, this is true not only for post-socialist countries with low economic standards but also for many other countries with better economic performance. Not only the state or the society but also individuals are deeply affected in that process. In post-soviet sphere, it is not hard to predict that the rise of a consumption society would be followed by the collapse of moral and ethical values.

3.Reaction or Resistance to the Global Culture: Situation in Kyrgyzstan

Cultural globalization could only be realized as long as local cultures accept the norms of global culture. But there is always a possibility of reaction of local cultures against the global culture. In the 1960's, in the Western world, there were several forms of reaction to the existing system and culture, like protest cultures as the outcome and the symbol of the above



mentioned reaction. In that context, two forms of reactions could be tracked down and studied:

- a. Preservation and revitalization of local cultures.
- b. Formation of protest cultures and emergence of products of those cultures.

But we should state that both forms of reaction in Kyrgyzstan could hardly be observed and would hardly be observed in the near future. In Kyrgyzstan, there is no such a local culture structure that has been formed before and preserved through time. Moreover, there is the problem of mentality in the region, which serves as a barrier for the formation of local cultures. People are used to believe and obey. And they are accustomed to accept the existing system and the culture introduced by that system. Therefore, it is hard to mention, just like in the neighboring countries of the region, the formation of reaction or resistance forms.

On the other hand, impossibilities or specific barriers to that country, which will be mentioned below, underlie some forms of reactions, which are not intended, indeed.

4. Profile of TV Channels in Kyrgyzstan

In order to analyze TV programs and reflect on the effects of the globalization process in the country, we should study the broadcasting systems, the features of channels in these systems, and more importantly, the technical possibilities to watch those channels in the country.

We could classify television broadcasting systems in Kyrgyzstan into three categories

1. Wired system: ALA TV: 64 channels
2. Satellite receiver system CEKATEL TV: 20 channels (All also exist in Ala TV)
3. Channels that could be watched with standard antennas: 12 (Only 5 of them could be received/watched in all regions)

Those who live outside of Bishkek have no possibility to watch ALA TV and CEKATEL. Those who live in Bishkek and subscribed to ALA TV, as given in table 1, could watch 64 channels. The names of channels, countries of those channels, broadcasting languages and their proportions are given in that table. In table 2, channels in CEKATEL TV are displayed. And in table 3, those 12 channels that could be watched with standard antennas (by those who are not subscribed to ALA TV or CEKATEL TV) are listed. The broadcasting languages and their countries are shown in the following table and diagrams.

In analyzing these channels and their programs, the following points are important:

Because of economic limitations and geographic barriers;

1. Most people could not subscribe to ALA TV or CEKATEL TV.
2. Those who live outside of Bishkek could not subscribe to the ALA TV or CEKATEL TV even if they have money to subscribe.
3. Standard 12 channels could be watched with a good standard antenna. But in some regions, even a good antenna might not make it possible to watch all 12 channels because of geographic barriers. The number of people who could watch all 12 standard channels reflects only a small portion of the population. The average number of channels that could be watched by most people is 5.

Therefore, not only ALA TV and CEKATEL TV, but also those standard 12 channels are also included in our analysis.



Globally watched TV channels are among the most influential factors in diffusion, expansion and acquisition of global culture. Given the limited access to these channels in Kyrgyzstan, compared to other countries, the risk of a global culture crisis is also quite low.

However, the content analysis of standard TV channels' programs, those that could be watched with normal antennas, shows that the global culture is incorporated and reproduced in those programs even in a different language. This is obvious especially in programs like foreign movies or the adaptation of foreign program formats.

As partly mentioned in the above context, two forms of reaction could be tracked and studied: Protesting against the globally dominant one or the preservation of the local one. But in Kyrgyzstan there seems to exist a "natural" form of reaction that does not look like any of the above mentioned resistance form against the dominance of global culture. This spontaneous and unintended form of resistance could be evaluated as the outcome of two seemingly independent factors. First of all, the mountainous geography of the country creates a natural barrier for the diffusion of globally watched TV broadcasting waves to reach the houses of many Kyrgyz's. Secondly, because 70 % of the Kyrgyz population lives below the poverty level with low GDP per capita, many Kyrgyzes could not afford to subscribe to CABLE television. Even in the capital city, the number of subscribers are limited to certain number of city dwellers. In present conditions, these two factors, at least to a certain extent, constitute a natural barrier to the diffusion of the global culture.

Nevertheless when we analyze the standard TV channels received with the ordinary antennas, which are viewed by the great majority of the population, there appears another problem that needs to be mentioned. The great portions of the programmes in those channels are program or program formats made in the USA. First of all through these programs the products of global culture reach the country usually in Russian language and sometimes in Kyrgyz language. Secondly, whether copyrights are paid or not, local channels are producing programs, imitating the programs of global channels. Musical rhymes and program presentation styles are close in format to those of global channels. And in some cases, global programs are exactly copied.

After displaying the other side of the medallion, we could conclude by saying that the limitations to watch the global channels are not enough to stop the diffusion of global culture. They only slow down its speed of diffusion.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

National formations, national economies and national cultural identities are under severe pressure. Globalization as the transition from nation-state, national economy and national cultural identity into a new era and form has two faces: Global and local.

In that context, it is better to conceive the process as the integration of the global and local rather than conceiving the global taking the place of local destroying it totally. But, on the other hand, we should also not take the local, as something related to old identities but deeply rooted in innovations. It simply continues to survive within the context of globalization. It is not foreseen that the globalization process will destroy and terminate the local cultures and identities simply because it is not possible. What seems more possible is the simultaneous formation of new global and local identities. In that context, the local identities could be defined not according to a certain space or community but according to common space perception which itself belongs to the global picture.



The most probable rival to the global homogenization scenario would be the conception of fragmented culture. Today's the global culture, in terms of cultural anthropology, would be attributed to the organization of the plurality rather than copying the uniformity. Global culture and various sort of local cultures mixed up with each other and everywhere else in the world.

Watching the global channels, as the cable TV, is a privilege limited to the capital city of Bishkek. The lack of money to pay for the subscription is too high for many citizens, and the geography of the country continues to be a natural barrier even for standard TV channels. Kyrgyzstan continues to stay a bit far away from the global culture although not completely isolated from it.

6. Annexes

Program	Duration	%
NEWS	1740	22
GENERATION	550	7
GAME SHOW	345	4.5
FILM	1526	20
CARTOON	115	1.5
ENTERTAINMENT	670	8.5
MUSIC	125	1.5
SERIAL	1295	17
MIKSED	375	5
REALITY	425	5
DOCUMENTARY	255	3
TRAVEL	45	0.5
MAGAZINE	175	2
COMEDY	45	0.5
HEALTH	40	0.5
SPORT	60	1
KIDS	80	1
TOTAL	7866	100

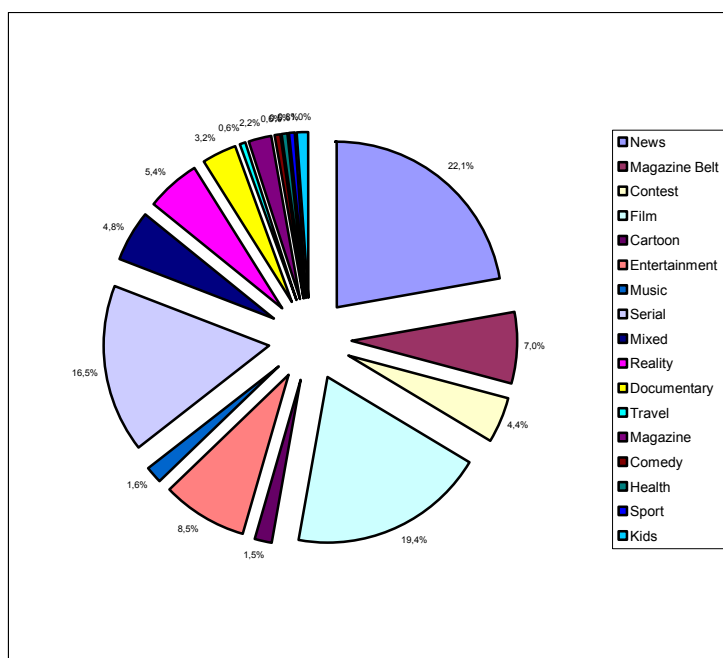


Table 1: Figures about the program genres and durations of KOOPT TV in a



Program	Duration	%
NEWS	1575	25
GENERATION	825	13
GAME SHOW	85	1.5
FILM	1610	25
CARTOON	270	4
ENTERTAINMENT	110	2
MUSIC	335	5
SERIAL	400	6
MIKSED	340	5
REALITY	20	0.3
DOCUMENTARY	225	3.5
HISTORY	55	1
MAGAZINE	35	0.5
NEWS	395	17
RELIGION	30	0.5
SPORT	30	0.5
KIDS	200	3
TOTAL	6400	100

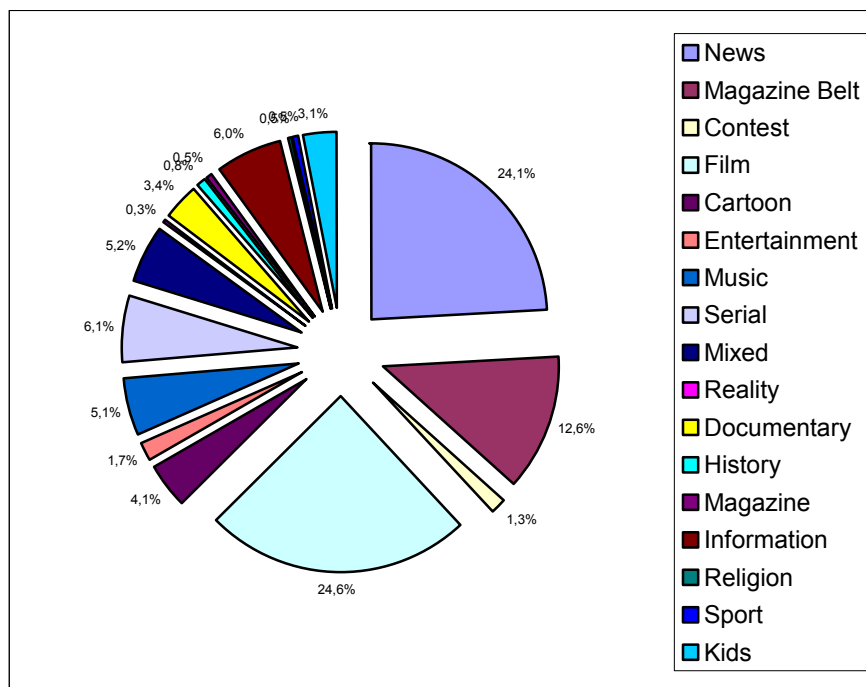


Table 2: Figures about the program genres and durations of KTP TV in a week



Program	Duration	%
NEWS	700	10
GENERATION	720	10
GAME SHOW	450	7
FILM	1940	28
CARTOON	100	1.5
ENTERTAINMENT	665	10
HEALTH	45	0.6
SERIAL	840	12
MIKSED	35	0.5
REALITY	120	2
DOCUMENTARY	660	10
COMEDY	220	3
MAGAZINE	65	1
NEWS	70	1
RELIGION	15	0.2
SPORT	195	3
TRAVEL	65	1
TOTAL	6905	100

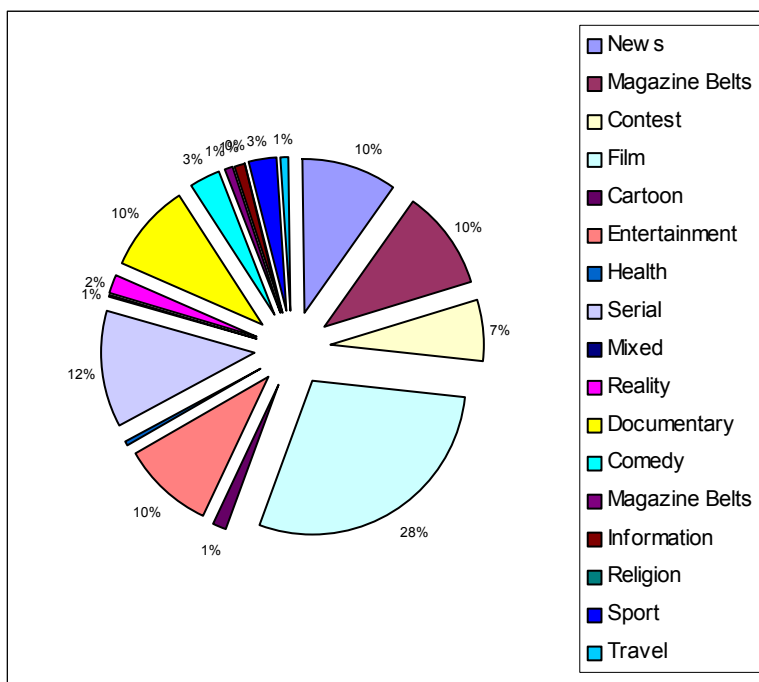


Table 3: Figures about the program genres and total durations of ORT TV in a week



Program	Duration	%
NEWS	1685	22.8
MIKSED	180	2.5
TRAVEL	55	0.7
FILM	1815	24.6
NEWS	165	2.4
ENTERTAINMENT	500	6.8
SPORT	420	5.7
SERIAL	1725	23.3
MIKSED	180	2.5
REALITY	25	0.3
DOCUMENTARY	265	3.6
COMEDY	375	5.1
TOTAL	7325	100

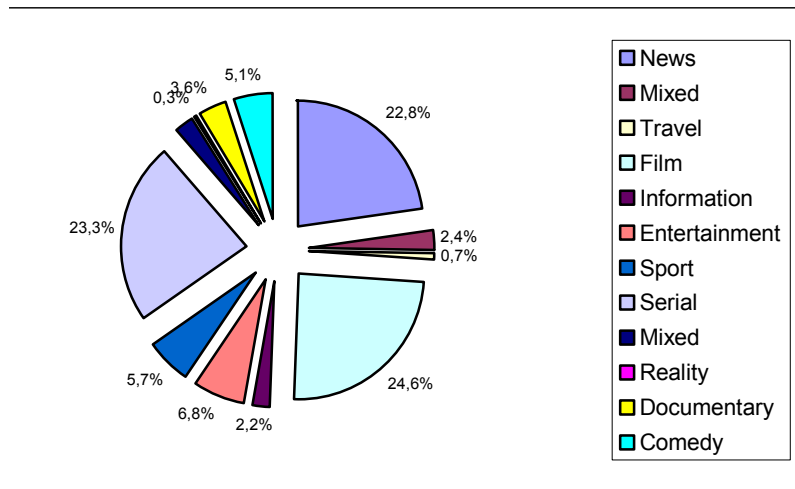


Table 4: Figures about the program genres and total durations of RTR TV in a week



Program	Duration	%
NEWS	990	12
MIKSED	510	6
RELIGION	210	2.5
FILM	2645	31
COMMERCIALS	160	2
ENTERTAINMENT	470	5.5
SPORT	85	1
SERIAL	1330	16
HISTORY	295	3.5
REALITY	90	1
DOCUMENTARY	480	6
MUSIC	445	5
CARTOON	775	9
HEALTH	60	0.7
TOTAL	8545	100

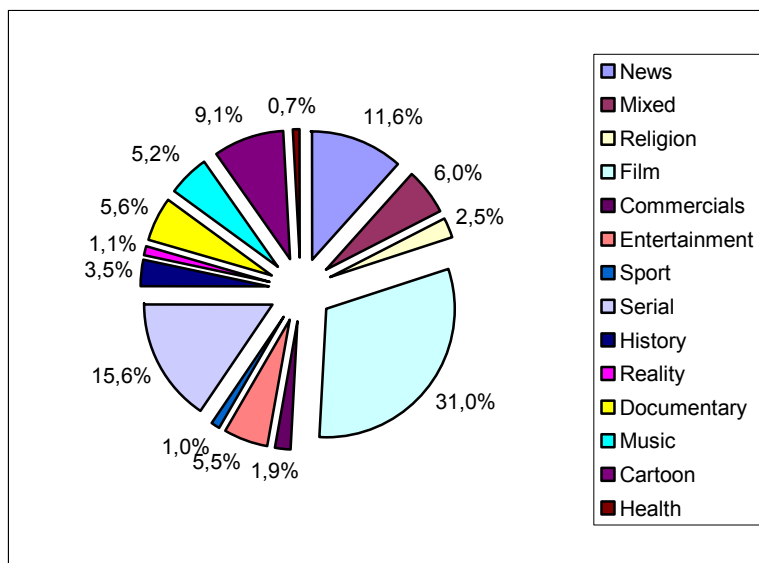


Table 5: Figures about the program genres and total durations of PIRAMIDA TV in a week



Program	Duration	Duration %
NEWS	850	10
MIKSED	135	2
HEALTH	40	0.5
FILM	2045	25
GENERATION	935	11
ENTERTAINMENT	745	9
SPORT	60	1
SERIAL	2050	25
GAME SHOW	315	4
REALITY	355	4
DOCUMENTARY	200	2
MAGAZINE	500	6
COMEDY	45	0.5
TOTAL	8275	100

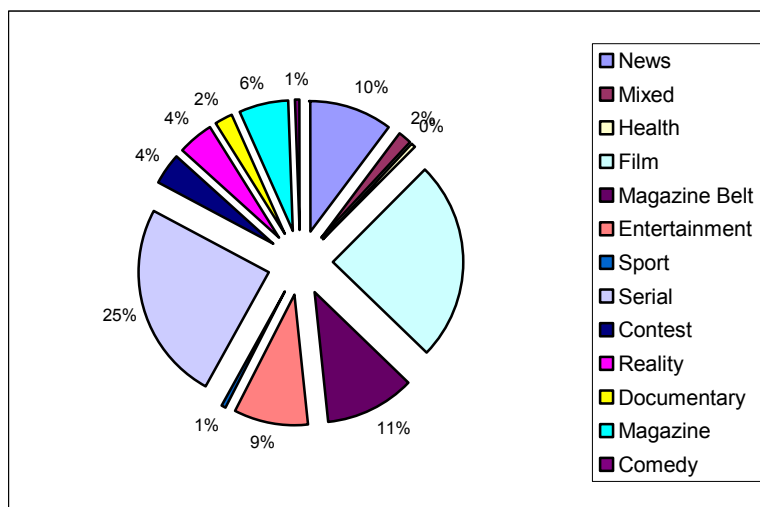


Table 6: Figures about the program genres and total durations of NTS+(NTV) TV's in a week

Program	Duration	Duration %
NEWS	1365	17
MIKSED	30	0.3
EDUCATION	105	1
FILM	1588	20
COMEDY	15	0.2
MAGAZINE	1465	18
SPORT	130	2
SERIAL	915	11
NEWS	845	10
REALITY	135	2
DOCUMENTARY	725	9
MUSIC	410	5
CARTOON	320	4
TOTAL	8.048	100

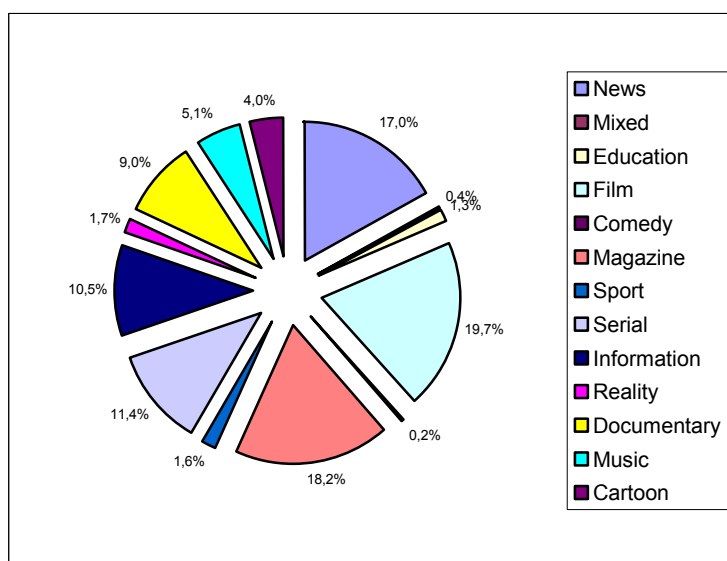


Table 7: Figures about the program genres and total durations of NBT TV in a week



Program	Duration	%
NEWS	8905	17.6
MUSIC	1315	2.6
MIKSED	1605	3.1
CARTOON	1580	3.1
SPORT	980	1.9
DOCUMENTARY	2810	5.5
SERIAL	8555	16.9
NEWS	1595	3.1
MAGAZINE	2240	4.4
FILM	13169	26.1
EDUCATION	105	0.2
REALITY	1170	2.3
COMEDY	700	1.3
GENERATION	3030	6
GAME SHOW	1195	2.3
HEALTH	185	0.3
RELIGION	255	0.5
HISTORY	350	0.6
TRAVEL	165	0.3
COMMERCIALS	160	0.3
KIDS	305	0.6
TOTAL	50374	100

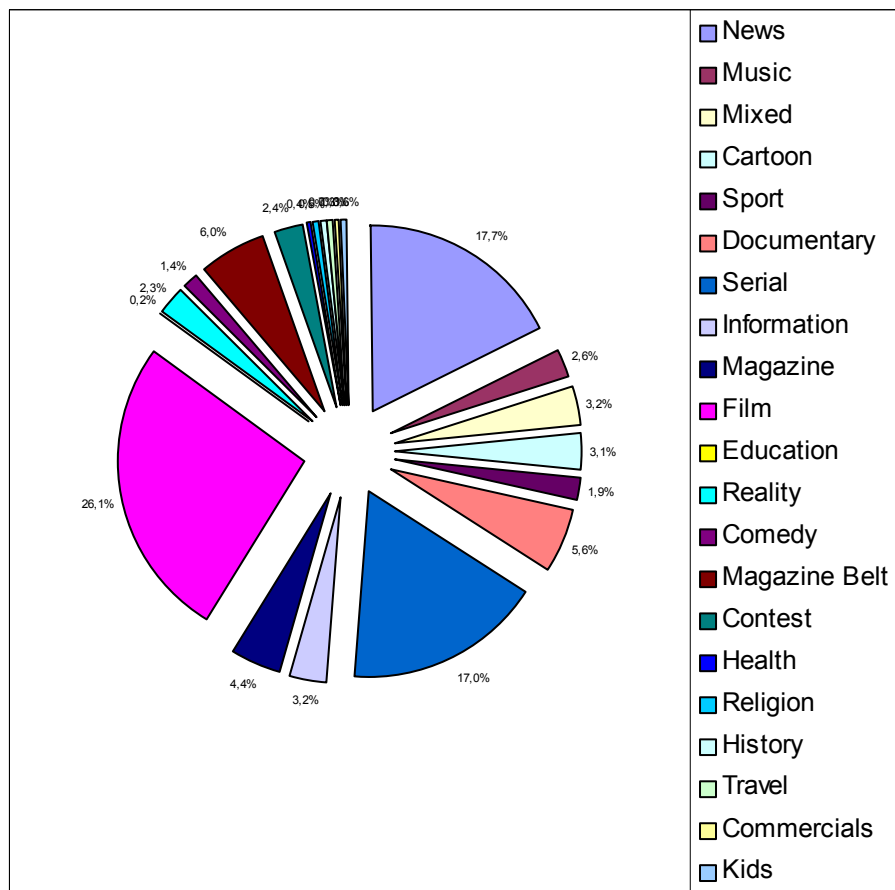


Table 8: Figures about the program genres and total durations of public TV's that could be watched with standard antennas in a week



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