



Small Among Giants: Television Broadcasting in Smaller Countries. Edited by Gregory Ferrell Lowe & Christian S. Nissen. Göteborg, SE: Nordicom, 2011. 231 pp. ISBN: 9789186523169.

Gregory Ferrell Lowe and Christian S. Nissen's edited volume, *Small Among Giants: Television Broadcasting in Smaller Countries*, challenges the assumption that “big countries with big markets and big operators” (p. 7) provide desirable and suitable broadcasting regulatory and organizational models for emulation by smaller countries.

The catalyst for the book was a strand of discourse that arose out of a 2007 conference hosted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) about its recent charter renewal. The conference sparked discussion about whether the BBC's transitional model could serve as an exemplar for the reorganization of public service broadcasters in other countries.

The book is a welcome contribution to the analysis of the operation and regulation of media markets—one that ventures outside the usual case studies of successful, big market players. Although the book is primarily European focused, the authors do draw on examples from countries outside of continental Europe, including Taiwan, Australia, and Canada, to illustrate the effect of a country's size on the organization of broadcasting across a range of sociocultural, economic, and political conditions.

It is unsurprising that the book is written with a primarily European focus. The European Commission's 1989 Television Without Frontiers Directive (TWF), and the more recent 2010 Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AMS) strive to establish a single European market that promotes cross-border trade, while at the same time preserves cultural diversity, media pluralism, and the independence of national media regulators (European Commission, 2015; European Commission, 2010). Country size has thus undoubtedly been an ongoing concern for European policymakers and national media regulators as they strive to cultivate an open market and simultaneously limit the potential effects of the asymmetrical flow of cultural products from bigger countries into smaller ones.

Rather than organizing the topic under investigation according to case studies of different countries (as is often the case in comparative media studies of this nature), the editors explicitly opted instead to organize the collection according to *issues* in order to promote deeper comparative analysis and understanding of the complex dynamics that undergird the phenomena in question. This strategic decision has proven successful, and the book provides readers with a rich picture of how size affects broadcasting across a wide array of environments and conditions.

The book's primary audience is policymakers and academics engaged in more practically oriented, empirical media industry studies. Despite variations in methodology and theoretical approach, the authors in the book unanimously conclude that country size effectively limits how broadcasting is organized and operated, and that one-size-fits-all policies will not work. The authors caution that adopting strategies

from bigger countries may not only be unsuitable for smaller countries, but also potentially damaging (p. 10).

One of the greatest successes of this collection is its devotion to exploring multidimensionality, complexity, and nuance. Although the collection generally labels countries with populations of greater than 20 million inhabitants as *large* countries (p. 36), the authors, in their contributions, stress that size is not a static, universal measure—rather, it is multifaceted, and it must be examined in context and in relation to other germane factors. The authors use the following metrics to evaluate “size” in their various examinations: territorial mass, industry size, population size and density, market size, economy size, and economic and cultural dependence on a larger, contiguous same-language neighbour.

The notion that relative size is sometimes more important than absolute size in evaluating a country’s broadcasting prospects is convincingly argued in the chapter on the sociocultural context of markets for broadcasting by John D. Jackson with Yon Hsu, Geoffrey Lealand, Brian O’Neill, Michael Foley, and Christian Steininger. In this chapter, Jackson et al. point out that although Canada has a population that is greater than 20 million, its cultural and economic dependence on its much larger, same-language neighbour, aligns it more with the issues facing small countries. The same point is made for Taiwan and its proximity to, and dependence on, the much larger China. By examining Canada, Taiwan, and three other countries with similar dependence on larger, same-language neighbours, the authors are able to reveal patterns that hold true across the sample, including the fact that, in all five cases, regulatory regimes were initially designed to maintain cultural sovereignty and reinforce national identity, and to prevent cultural intrusion. The authors show that, in all but one case, this notion of broadcasting as a national project has retreated from view, and four of the five countries examined have trended toward the free-market, competition-based model of their larger same-language neighbours.

The dedication to exploring context in relation to size is continued in Annette Hill and Jeanette Steemers’ chapter on the selling of reality entertainment formats by small nations. The chapter examines the success of some smaller nations, such as the Netherlands and Sweden, in becoming significant exporters of reality formats in the international space. On the face of it, the success of these small countries appears to challenge the book’s main argument that size effectively limits a country’s chances of attaining success in the global broadcasting market. The authors combine political economy and production analysis to demonstrate that certain “success factors,” such as having a strong independent production sector, a competitive internal broadcasting sector that fosters creativity, and a tradition of making reality primetime programming, mitigate the effects of small size in the creation and export of successful formats (pp. 208–209). The authors do conclude, however, that today the most successful formats tend to emerge from large transnational production companies that are most often based in larger countries such as the United Kingdom.

Another particularly nuanced and insightful chapter is Tom Moring and Sebastian Godenhjelm’s examination of broadcasting for minorities in small and large countries. The authors find that while a country’s broadcast market size is an important factor

that affects the overall resources it has at its disposal to broadcast to minority audiences, possessing the political will to ensure that these audiences are adequately served is even more important (p. 202). The authors show that in some small countries where financial resources are limited, programming from border countries broadcasting in the minority language is used to fill in the gaps.

An increasingly important dimension that the book does not examine is the extent to which the internet marketplace for audiovisual products is altering broadcasting dynamics in small nations. In theory, having access to the global marketplace via the online space could mitigate some of the limits resulting from country size. Although the editors explicitly decided not to incorporate this topic into the collection (p. 13), a much more comprehensive picture would have emerged if even a single chapter were devoted to the topic, especially given the increasing importance of this area in the industry. The addition of such an exploration would have fit well with the collection's overall dedication to multidimensionality. Thus, the exploration of how new media is altering broadcasting prospects for smaller countries is an area ripe for inquiry.

From a technical standpoint, the book is well composed, but it must be noted that there are multiple typos throughout, which are at times distracting. These are minor, however, and do not take away from the book's many successes. The addition of an index would have also been beneficial to the reader.

The book's cautionary stance toward the adoption of big country broadcasting strategies by smaller countries is particularly germane to the present Canadian situation, given the recent decision by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), the country's media regulator, to adopt precisely the kinds of big country strategies (see CRTC, 2015, March 12) the book cautions against. This book will thus be immensely useful to any scholar or policymaker looking to examine the potential impacts of the recent Canadian broadcasting regulatory changes.

References

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