

aim working on 24 hours recording multiply for the number of *programs*³). Considering the formal conditions in which practitioners work, drives our research within the tradition of sociology of media production, resembling the study of sociology of journalism and newsmaking⁴. Putting our research within this tradition allows us to clarify our object and its frame; moreover gives us different tools and semantically consolidated concepts to arrange in a better way our efforts.

Despite in earlier period researchers on newsmaking have faced different challenges due to new media and globalization of news, we can say that their literature has clarified a lot on the issue of social construction of the news. Although journalists' practices are changing (for instance they could reach more and different sources) anyway we know enough about criterions of selection, at the same time we could say that *news value* have not changed at all.

If in journalism the selection of news could appear like a common sense choice – a selection shared by practitioners and audiences – this situation is not the same for the entire production and localization of reality TV formats. We have decided to discuss two fundamental moments choosing along this very complicated process that brings a global format to become a local/national program,

First of all we are going to tell about the moment in which broadcasters decide to buy a format within a global market⁵. The second moment we are going to discuss is placed during the actual localization of formats: when the staff have to face 24 hours of recording, in which way do they select sequences for daily episodes? What criterions of selection do they use?

Pointing out logics thorough which broadcasters select and buy formats for their schedules and, at the same time, looking for criterions of selection thorough which staff compose daily episodes allow us to penetrate with some empiric results one of the most discussed issues in media studies: *cultural homogenization*.

One of the meaningful characteristic of these formats is their being *global*. These formats are created by TV production companies and are sold around the globe (*Big Brother* counts localizations in 50 different countries, *The Farm* in 40 different countries). TV productions companies need that these formats are always recognizable and need that formats maintain similar traits in every their localization. TV production companies can continue to sell their formats only pursuing those aims. Waisbord (2004) has brilliantly highlighted this process and he has spoken about McTv. If in our research we can grasp logics thorough which formats are selected by broadcasters and criterions through which staff make daily episodes, we can suggest some empirical indications on the relation between standardization of contents and cultural homogenization.

2. Production stages and their actors

According to objectives of our study, during this research – quoting Erving Goffman (1967) – we were not interested to people and their moments, but we were interested to moments and their people. We preferred pointing out moments of discussion and negotiation, for this reason, before proceeding in our purposes, is better trying to focus on different stages which compose the entire process of localization of formats, highlighting which actors participate to these different moments.

Trying to summarize the long process of localization – process that remains anyway more complex than we can show here – we point up 4 principal stages (Battocchio 2003):

³ The *program* is a database that records and memorize the flux of sequences chosen by directors and his/her staff. This means that if a TV production has, as in the production of Italian Big Brother, four programs, the staff works every day on 24 hours of recording multiply for 4.

⁴ We could picture the staff that works for reality TV as journalists which have to face every day events outside to tell us the day after.

⁵ The major global markets for TV contents are NAPTE (National Association Of Television Program Executives) in Los Angels and Mipcom (Marche International des Films et des Programmes pour la TV, la Video le Cable et les Satellites) in Cannes

1. research and development: phase in which broadcasters are looking for formats in international markets;
2. *pitch*: phase in which a TV production companies offers its formats to broadcasters;
3. definition of project: when broadcasters and TV production companies discuss all details for the acquisition of the format;
4. production: localization of formats

In order to introduce which actors are involved in this process we have to describe some diachronic dynamics of formats market .

Broadcasters could participate to this market in order to present and to sell their formats too, but, after the adjustment of the market, different actors have specialized their competences. In the last decade we have assisted to three different phases of formats market. The first one (1995-200) was characterized by a great and impetuous growth. Since a couple of relative small TV production companies have highly enriched selling one of their products (it is the case of Endemol with *Big Brother* or Celador with *Who wants to be a millionaire?*) the market seems to be a sort of Eldorado where every company could make easy money. In order to offer a format of *reality show* or *game show* it is not necessary having a great amount of economic resources. In this period one small TV company could be driven to picture of exploiting the market just through one good idea transformed in format. The true has been that in the next phase (2000-2004) market has knew a drop: at the end just a few number of outsiders could really penetrate the market, broadcasters have left ambitions of offering formats themselves and circulation of titles was pretty much complete⁶. Now we are facing a new phase where the most important American/European TV production companies know that for continuing their business in this market is not enough making and offering formats. They have offer formats to broadcasters but at the same time they have to propose themselves as concrete producers of their formats.

In consideration of these market dynamics, we can affirm that there are three principal actors disputing those stages of localization we have already mentioned.

First of all we have broadcasters. Broadcasters, as we have already said, go to the market looking for formats. They usually don't sell, but, what is really different from the past (considering soap opera, sit comedies, serials and so on), broadcasters don't buy neither. What they usually do is paying for a license. Broadcasters pay to TV production companies which have made these formats in order to localize them. So for demand we have broadcasters and for supply we have TV production companies⁷. Now remains to discuss about the third actor. The third actor is who practically produce the formats broadcasters have paid for. In Italy, in the field of *reality show*, there are two of these TV production companies that could localize formats. One is Endemol Italy that is an holding of the bigger international *owner*; the other one is Magnolia, one Italian independent TV production company.

Obtaining a license to localize one format means paying for receiving an ensemble of rules, bonds, a set of suggestions, working documents, scripts and other pre-production materials. If all this material is inside format package, there is a complex of terms that usually is stipulated during negotiations between broadcaster and *owner*. Since demand has grown so impetuously *owners* have been able to manage their supplies in a position of advantage in comparison to broadcasters. This has meant that in early years *owners* substantially decide with whom broadcasters have to produce their formats.

⁶ At websites www.foxreality.com it is possible checking a complete list of all reality show.

⁷ From this moment to the end when we'll tell about TV production companies which have made and sold formats, we'll refer to them simply as *owners*.

Analyzing TV activities we usually attribute to broadcasters an alternative choice: buy or make (Devescovi 2003). Broadcaster in order to fill their schedules could buy some programs from abroad or make programs themselves. What formats market made in action has been a third alternative: buy to let other make.

With reference to what we wrote about the four principal stages in which we have divided the entire process of localization of formats, we can affirm that the first two stages are characterized by negotiation between owners and broadcasters; for the other stages we have to consider the role of local TV production company too.

3. Pitch: when broadcasters have to decide

Up to now we have introduced the process and discussed on different main actors that participate at the entire complex of localization of format. According to what we said at the very beginning, now we have to consider which logics operate in broadcasters practices for selecting formats.

We have already defined the “pitch” as the moment in which *owners* offer to broadcasters some formats. In fact, though we usually say that broadcasters go to market for having some new formats, the true is different. In consequence of specialization of actors within market and due to contemporary growth of some *owners*, nowadays are directly owners to offer some new formats to broadcasters.

We have to highlight what kind of logics operate within broadcasters’ organizations to choose if accepting or refusing owners’ pitch.

For a matter of brevity we have decided to avoid arguments on the concrete way through which, in broadcasters, practitioners take their decisions, in order to discuss immediately about logics.

Criteria for selection of formats that we have highlighted through our interviews and participant observation follow next logics:

1. logic of cultural acceptability;
2. logic of broadcaster identity;
3. logic of (no) risk;
4. logic of global success;
5. brand logic.

Logic of cultural acceptability. In every single society exists a border that divides what in TV is acceptable from what is not. This border is never definitely fixed. Sometimes, selecting programs, other logics could prevail allowing some “no cultural acceptable program” to reach our screens. In this case, if the format obtains success, the border line moves and changes. When practitioners decide if a format must or must not be selected, they evaluate through their experience of what is going on in TV and in society. This is the reason for which Italians, Portuguese or Spaniards have never watched some formats that Dutch television usually broadcasts. In Italy *Big Brother* too was accompanied by a huge amount of polemics and criticisms. At the end other logics had worked in order to select that particular format that changed Italian television (as world television too).

Logic of broadcaster identity. This one is the easiest logic to grasp. It is clear indeed that broadcasters have to evaluate if the format supplied by *owners* is coherent with its schedule. Though this logic exists and works in evaluation of formats, we must say that reality TV programs if on one side show an homogeneous aesthetics and fix patterns, from the other side could be really flexible. This means that sometimes a format that could appear far from broadcaster identity, through a careful casting could fit with the rest of schedule. In Italy Rai (Italian public service) started to broadcast *reality show* only in celebrity version. Rai might not allow to broadcast context in which “common

people” lived in starving or paining way. This can happen with celebrities, because in this way is more deeply marked the dimension of *show* instead of *reality*.

Logic of (no) risk. Referring to George Ritzer’s study (1998) on cultural organization in globalization era, we could define this criteria like a sort of “schedule mcdonaldization”. Media practices sort out with diffusion of formats at the same time have increased efficiency, calculability, predictability an control.

Besides lower costs, imported formats offer some measure of predictability based on their past performances in numerous countries. The constant and increasing pressures for turning profits means that there is little, if any, time for innovating or trying new ideas. All incentives are to reach out for proven ideas that can help diminish uncertainty. Formats, then, are the ultimate risk-minimizing programming strategy. Format owners provide extensive experience that includes the record of shows in different countries, what worked and what didn’t, and details on national variations. Game-show producers, for example, bring a plethora of statistics about the records of different games and detailed information about production that draws from hundreds of hours of programming in several continents (Waisbord 2004, p. 365).

What we point out in our research is that broadcasters – when evaluate some new format – tend to select formats which maintain features close to what it has been already a success in their schedules. This logic works for the purpose of minimizing what actors themselves define *risk*. It is not at all this the context in which we can discuss the sociological importance and the cultural semantic of the concept of risk. In this occasion could be enough *decode* this concept in opposition to *daily* (Jedlowski, 2005). Taking a risk in selecting some new formats means selecting something that is not familiar and recurrent in own schedule.

Logic of global success. Complementary to the logic of (no) risk, this logic means that broadcasters tend to select formats which count already an amount of success localizations in other countries. This kind of format brings not only a good grade of reliability but a huge stock of information about audiences’ reaction and solutions for production. Moreover a global success is deeply rooted in what Goldfinger (1994) would define immaterial economics. Most probably it is already a well known product, its fame usually precedes itself.

Before introducing the last one, it is pretty much important to underline one thing. Considering logics farer from the narrow broadcasting competence (evaluating if a format matches with its schedule is definitely one broadcast competence) methods for deciding if select this kind of format become more standardized. In fact we have passed from qualitative analysis that broadcasters usually do for evaluating formats in respect of their schedule to a simple quantitative evaluation of records that format have obtained in other localizations.

Brand logic. In earliest years audiences recognize brands of the most important *owners*, they trust them and they usually appreciate aesthetics of their products. At the same time broadcasters are getting used to cooperate and to work with these companies. So often broadcasters tend to select some formats just because it has been supplied by that particular company.

Analyzing briefly these five logics that we have just presented and considering dynamics in which these logics have emerged, it is possible affirming that circulation of formats in Italy represent a way through which broadcasters have lost part of their independence and capability of choice (this represent the counterpart of what we say respect of buying for letting others make).

4. Selecting sequences: the value of reality values

We have already completed the discourse on selection of formats. Now we have to discuss about a particular moment of production and we have to make a step forward. We consider that staff

have already taken choices on pre-production (location casting, staff, etc.). We take in account the particular moment in which, during the production, staff have to compose daily episode selecting (but we could say gatekeeping) sequences from a 24 hours recording.

It is not so simple identifying what is the crucial moment in which these choices for editing daily episodes are taken. We have to underline that the process that leads to edit what we watch on our screens is composed by decisions taken in different levels; these decisions often are a results of rationalized mechanisms institutionalized along the last years. Directors, labelers – who make a syntheses of everything is recorded – authors who suggest what follow on setting and everyone who compose staff is important for editing daily episodes. Like in newsmaking, in this situation too, periodical meetings are programmed every day for discussing and deciding on editorial and narratives lines..

In this chain that unifies every member, from cameramen to director, we have decided of analyzing the moment in which authors face all what was recorded and labeled, to define narratives. If we analyzed media practices in journalism we could say that in this occasion we don't focus on *news gathers* – who select occurrences from sources in order to distribute these sources to every single editorial room – but we focus on news processors (Bass 1969).

The sense of cooperation we have experienced on locations during our participant observation and, at the same time, the uniformity of point of views expressed in our depth interviews allow us to affirm that exist three complementary ways to give account about process of gatekeeping whether we discuss on *entertainers gathers* or whether we discuss on *entertainers processors*.

1. narratives born automatically;
2. we have to take care of narratives;
3. narratives must be followed.

The first group is the most related to what we have already introduced like *reality values* (*reality values* in the same meaning of news values [Wolf 1985]: what make that particular fragment recorded important for narratives).

We are going to present a list of these *reality values* which we grasp during our research.

Audience tailored: we can find a definition on this *reality value* within an article of Wieten-Pantti (2005) on breakfast television.

Its mode of address and presentation of content, its settings and props, the ways in which it tries to reconcile fragmentation and flow, and make use of 'liveness' and 'time', are functional for establishing a relationship with the morning audience, its moods, schedules and activities. (Wieten-Pantti 2005, p. 22).

In the same way entertainer gathers and processor in reality TV tend to privilege sequences and fragments in which “could interest daily life of our audiences” (ethnographic notes).

Emotions management- This one is the reality value through which entertainer processors try to build with their audiences an emotional relationship: expressing and exploring audiences emotions.

Paternalism. This reality value finds its root in the role of public service. Espen Ytreberg (2002) presents a brilliant study on the ways in which public service make its self presentation. In his research Ytreberg points out that “in recent media policy debates, the image of the paternalist has frequently been invoked to characterize a kind of patronizing” (p. 761). This is what usually happens during the process of gatekeeping for reality TV. Authors select determinate issues because could be useful in creating *patronizing* situation; these fragments are selected because let find out a moral and moralistic final for diverse narratives-

Tabloidization and voyeurism. These are the most typical reality values. We can affirm that these values are connected closely to reality TV, are part of its aesthetics. What could represent back stage, gossiping, what reveal something new about characters in the context of the show most probably will be selected by different gathers.

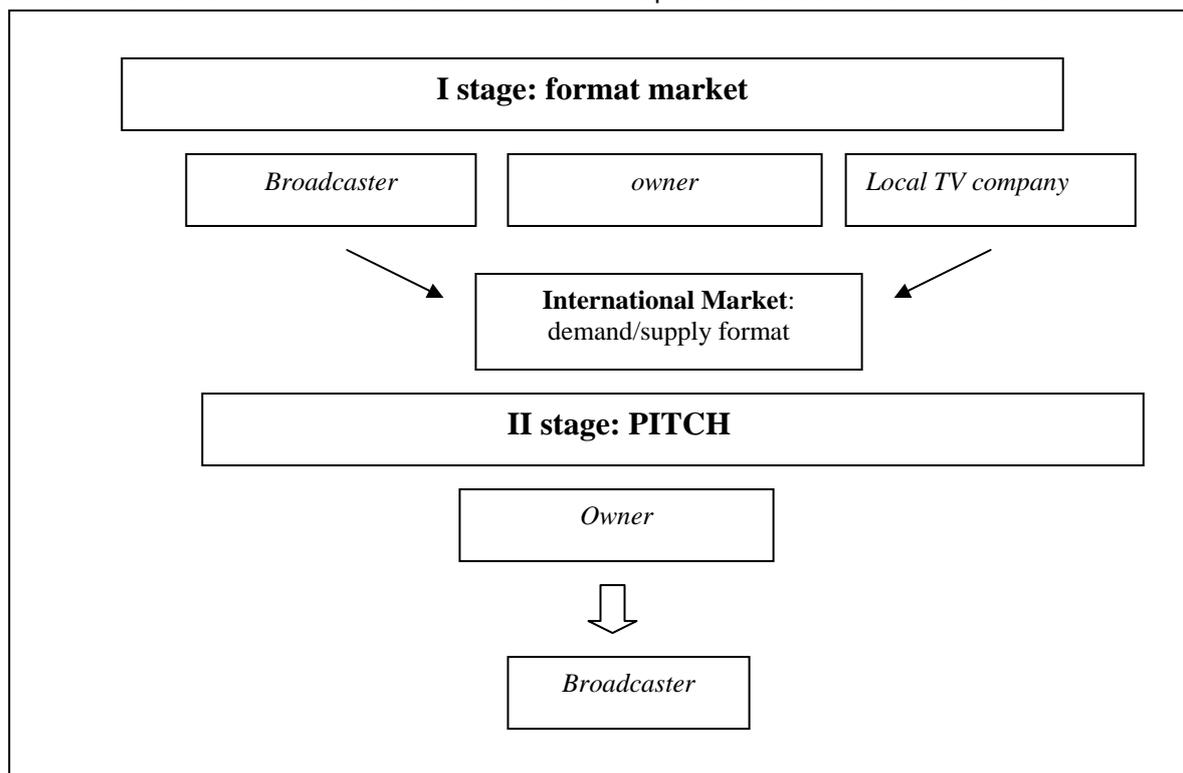
Interactivity. In order to achieve this reality value we have to consider that reality TV represents a multiplatform content. In a lot of occasions gathers use this value just because what they are selecting could be useful material for clip, internet and mobile TV too.

5. Conclusions

After this very brief account of what happens in the back stage of a *reality show*, we have to fill our principle aim of this paper: give some empirical data for discussing the issue of cultural homogenization.

The way to complete this path is considering again some of the moments of negotiation we highlighted during the last pages. Before doing this, we must remind that results of these different negotiations we have highlighted are local, depend on every single situation: in short is really hard making some generalization.

We can summarize the first two steps we indicated in a unique flux. In this simple graphic we point out the moment in which all actors involved in this process accede to formats market.



Although we have often said that dynamics are definitely more complex than what we have just shown, anyway we can affirm that these two stages decide the most part of evaluation about a global standardization of content or – extending its semantic – the evaluation on globale homogenization of content driven by circulation of formats.

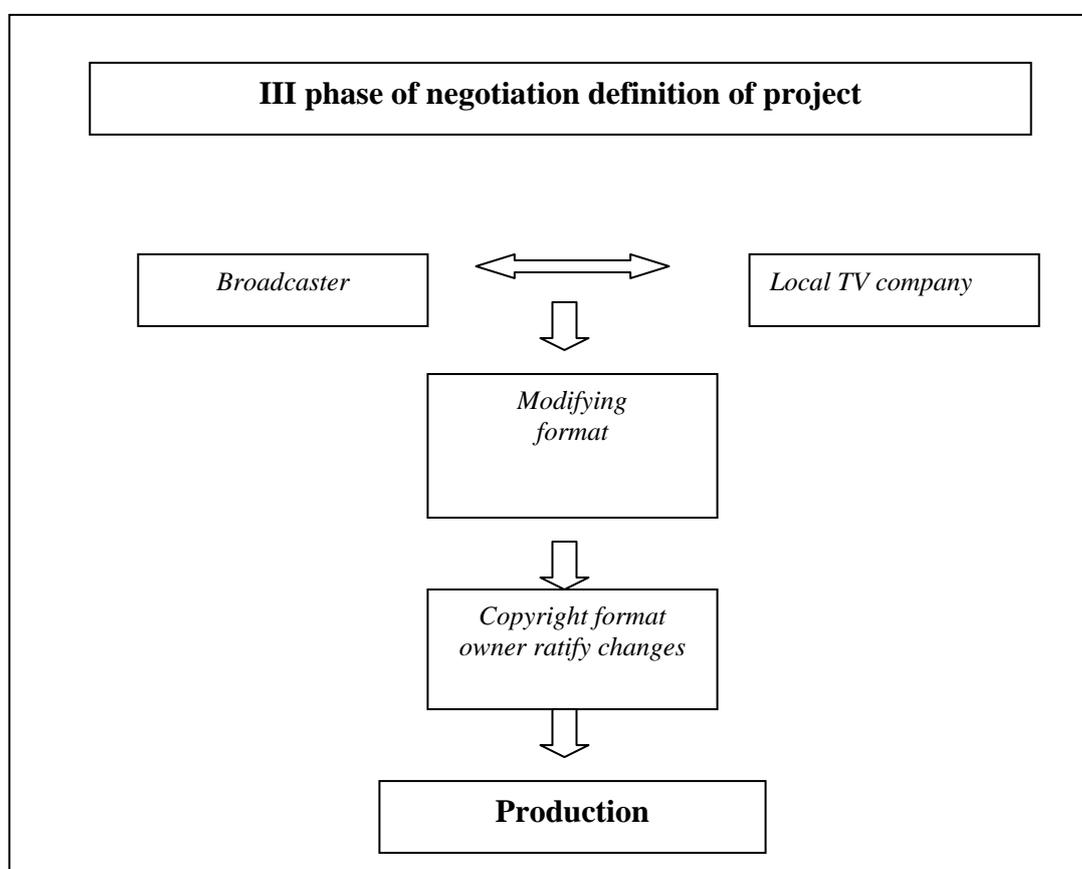
If our evaluation on this issue depend on local outcomes, these outcomes strictly depend on relation between format copyright owner and TV production company that localize this format. If the

bond between these actors is strong, if they work for the same objective and if they are able to present the format in its originally form (like they have to do in every single localization), then we could affirm that all these factors generate for sure a standardization of contents.

For the future, if some features we have indicated will find a confirmation, it is possible that a standardization of content could impose itself. We refer particularly to some characteristics that have emerged in the last phase of market. We refer to the growth of power in negotiation in favor of the most important copyright format owners and the fact that they are developing their holding in local context .

Otherwise results of our research have shown that local TV production companies (in our case both Magnolia and Endemol Italia) operate in a quite independent way, trying to adapt formats to Italian context. Our position is that we cannot talk about transnational homogenization of content, but otherwise it is possible discuss about homogenization in every national media system.

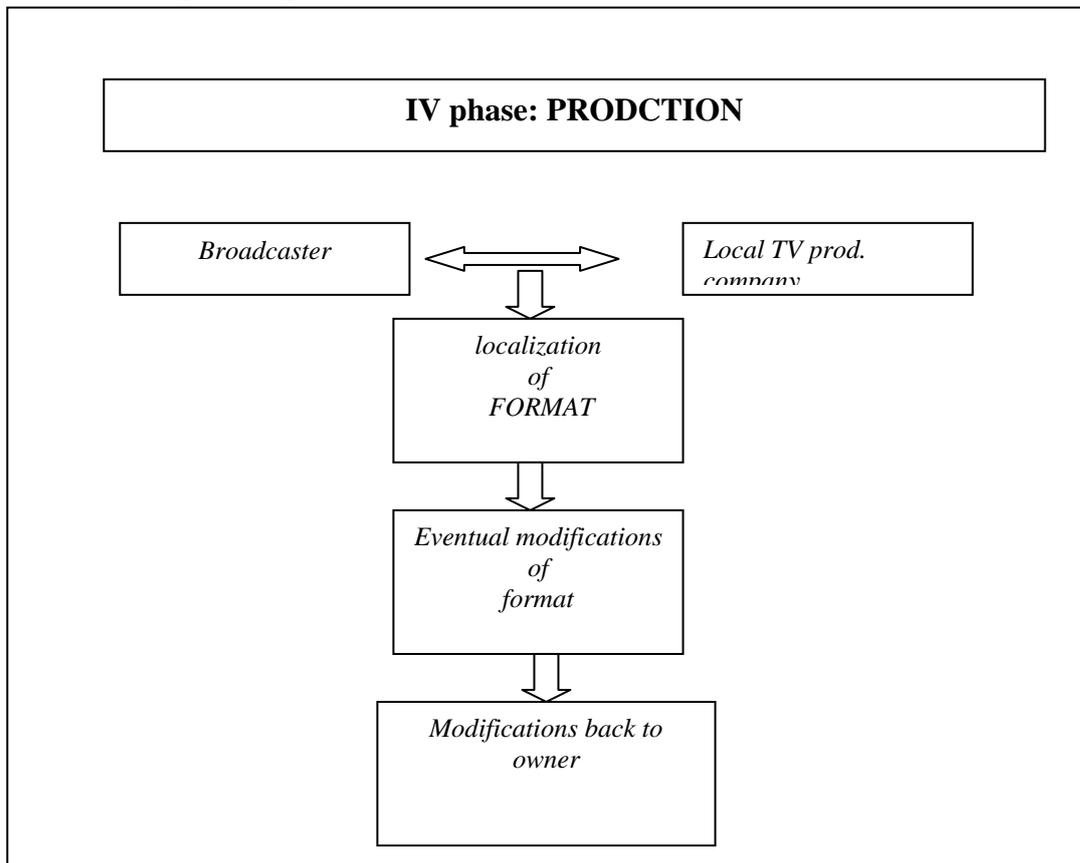
What we are sustaining could be shown better analyzing the last two phases of localization.



If for the first two phases in order to evaluate the impact of formats on TV is important considering the relation between copyright format owner and local TV production company, in the last two is more important the relation that local TV production has with broadcaster. In our research we have highlighted that the two most important Italian companies have definitely socialized dynamics, rhythms and mechanism to this kind of TV genre. This means not only they know better than anyone else the way in which produce this format, but that, in diverse occasions, they have invented some of these mechanisms. Moreover who works within these companies often has carried out similar paths.

What is happening is that logics through all companies work are really similar and often in during the production these logics prevail on broadcasters too.

Moreover we have to consider that during the packaging of what we watch in our local television, copyright format owner doesn't count in a decisive way. In fact the only its worry is that if format remains recognizable. At the same time what counts for copyright is obtaining some eventual modification thought during the production,



In conclusion we can repeat that there are two factors that push us to suggest the possibility of a process of standardization within national media system and not a transnational media system. From one side because during production owners remain abroad; second because in the case of Italy, these two relative small companies are increasing their decision making power and they share the same way of working, same mechanisms and logics.

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