

Ordinary People on Television

A longitudinal study of Swedish Television, 1982-2011

Göran Eriksson, Leonor Camauër & Yuliya Lakew

Abstract

By using a longitudinal design and measuring television content and the occurrence of ordinary television and ‘ordinary’ participants at four different points in time from 1982 to 2011, this study investigates the alleged shift towards ordinariness in the 1990s. Using Sweden as a test case, three research questions are posed: To what extent did ordinary television programming increase during the 1990s? To what extent did the participation of ordinary people increase as a consequence of this shift? To what extent has public service television adapted to commercial competition through broadcasting more ordinary television? The analysis confirms the alleged shift towards ordinariness. Ordinary television and ordinary participants did increase during the studied era, but a key argument put forward is that this shift occurred gradually and that one should avoid using overdramatic epithets to characterise it. The results also suggest that the public service broadcaster (SVT) also moved towards ordinariness but that this change was modest and occurred later than expected in Sweden.

Keywords: broadcasting, commercial competition, democratisation, participation, public service, reality television, television history

Introduction

Television, it seems, has entered the age of the ordinary. The number of formats revolving around and using as their prime material ‘ordinary people’ has exploded in recent times. (Teurlings 2001: 249)

As in the above citation, scholars have claimed that television from the 1990s onwards has become more ‘ordinary’ (see also, e.g., Taylor 2002; Bonner 2003; Turner 2010), which means two closely related things. Firstly, television’s increasing ordinariness is seen as a consequence of the emergence and growth of programmes that are broadly designated as reality TV, including programme genres, such as docu-soaps, makeovers, talent shows, and diverse game shows (cf. Hill 2005), and an increase in the number of the more popular forms of talk shows (Bonner 2003). Secondly, this change of programming is associated with a growing number of opportunities for ordinary people to appear on television (cf. Turner 2010). The different forms of programming that developed dur-

ing this era were, to a large extent, organised around participants who were conceived of as ordinary people.

Discussing this shift towards ordinariness, scholars seem to neglect the fact that ordinary participants have been crucial in popular media production for more than a century, not least in broadcasting (Griffin-Foley 2004). A good example is the quiz show, which involves ordinary participants both as contestants and as studio audience members. This type of show quickly became very popular during the early days of radio in the USA (Head 1976). According to Holmes (2008: 44), commercial television in the USA and UK acquired more extensive audiences through quiz shows, which also became very popular in many other European countries (Bourdon 2004). Early on, in the 1950s, as Scannell (2014: 104) notes, there was a drive among television producers to leave the simulated environment of the studios and go “into the world, into people’s lives, into the places where they lived”. This orientation to ordinariness, in an attempt to address the viewers in familiar and inclusive ways, has always been crucial for televised communication (Scannell 1996).

This discussion raises questions about television’s alleged shift towards ordinariness. Did television go through such a radical change in the 1990s? This study aims to answer this question by measuring the occurrence of ordinary television and ‘ordinary’ participants at four different points in time, from 1982 to 2011. Using this historical and quantitative approach, we aim to contribute to the literature by obtaining more systematic knowledge about this alleged shift towards ordinariness that was claimed by previous research, and assessing the extent to which such claims about the increase of ordinary programming and ordinary participants are valid. The claimed shift came about in a time when television services in many countries went through several important changes. In many countries, television services were deregulated and the competition among broadcasters for viewers’ attention increased. The broadcasting industry looked for ways to reduce production costs, and reality TV, with ordinary participants, offered a competitive option compared to expensive drama productions (Raphael 2009). Alongside the deregulations, there was also an increased use of independent production companies and a growing market for an international trade with “formats programmes” (Moran 2008). The 1990s onwards also saw a rapid technological development which increased the number of channels (*ibid*), but also transformed programmes to multiplatform events which made direct audience feedback possible (Ytreberg 2009).

In this study, using a specific European country, Sweden, we test the claims about the increase of ordinary programming and participants. Given the specific features that Sweden’s media system shares with those of its Nordic neighbours (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway), we believe that Sweden constitutes an interesting case study. Syvertsen et al. (2014) argue that, without being identical, the Nordic media systems constitute a distinct system type that is characterised by an independent – albeit publicly subsidised – press, publicly financed broadcast media (which retained a large part of their audience despite commercial competition), and very well-developed internet services. Similar to their Nordic colleagues, the public service broadcaster SVT employed different strategies to face this new competition and, among other things, partly reshaped their output to accommodate diverse forms of reality TV. Thus, in addition to its focus on Swedish television in general, this study also focuses on the extent to which SVT expanded their ordinary television output and when this took place. The reasons for

this latter focus are twofold. On the one hand, historically, SVT is an institution, which in spite of the loss of its initially dominant role, has managed to maintain a prominent position in society (see Syvertsen et al. 2014). Secondly, theoretically, there are reasons to assume that SVT succeeded in keeping this central position by adopting a specific strategy towards the myriad of challenges it had to confront in the 1990s, a major one of which being the competition arising from the proliferation of ordinary television formats in the commercial channels. A relevant question here concerns the role that ordinary television played in this shift.

The concept of ‘ordinary television’ originates from Bonner (2003: 3), who uses this concept to designate a category of programmes that are characterised by the use of direct address to the viewers, the inclusion of ‘real’, ‘ordinary’ people, and a heavy focus on mundane themes and activities. However, in this study, we have been somewhat more restrictive than Bonner regarding the genres that we included under the umbrella designation of ordinary television. Our focus lies on four programme genres: quiz/game shows, debate/talk shows, advice programming (including makeover shows), and reality TV (for more details, see the Methodology and Data section below).¹ We see these four broad categories as genres in which ordinary people can be expected to occur and play crucial roles. In assessing the occurrence of ordinary people in our sample, we employ what Carpentier & Hannot (2009) designate as an essentialist definition; that is, we employ a definition that (for the sake of measurement) does not consider the constructedness of ordinariness. Our definition includes participants who are not considered media professionals, experts, or celebrities, or who are otherwise notable or in the public eye (cf. Syvertsen 2001: 319). These participants appear under their own names and primarily represent themselves, their everyday lives, and their own experiences.

As Bonner (2003) shows, ordinary television is an essential but often disregarded part of the history of television. In accordance with Scannell (2010: 39), we consider all programme genres as of historical interest and think that “it would be an elementary error to think that the only properly historical parts of the record were serious factual programs; news and documentaries.” We think that by focusing on this often-neglected part of television history, we can provide a crucial piece of knowledge regarding what Corner (2003: 275-276) describes as television as a sociocultural phenomenon, and be a part of an important discussion about “the shifting circumstances of the public sphere”.

The alleged shift towards ordinariness also raises the question as to whether this constitutes a more profound sociocultural shift, or if it is just, as Turner (2010: 4) puts it, a “contemporary media fashion”. Some scholars interpret this shift in more optimistic terms. Hartley (1999: ch.12) sees it as a turn towards a democratisation of entertainment (what he calls “democra^tainment”), involving increasing opportunities for participation and identity work. Others, like Turner (2010), think that we should be cautious about taking such connection between participation and democratisation for granted (cf. Literat 2016). In this study, we cannot respond to questions concerning this claimed democratisation, but the study will provide a ground for continuing such a discussion.

Swedish television and its ordinariness

When theorising about the development of ordinary television in Sweden, two closely related aspects are particularly relevant: the specific character of the Swedish public service ideology, and the flexibility shown by the public service broadcaster in the realisation of its mission during periods of social, institutional, and technological change.

The Swedish public service ideology

Television was launched in Sweden in 1956 in the form of a public service company.² The then-social democratic governmental majority wanted the mission of television to be similar to that assigned to the radio services 30 years previously. Television would have an enlightenment mission: it would serve the public and promote culture and education, an ideal that Swedish politicians shared with those in many other European countries. However, despite overarching similarities between the public service conceptions across countries, researchers have also found differences. Drawing on Scannell & Cardiff (1991), Syvertsen et al. (2014) note that whereas the British version of public service was based on aristocratic values, favouring high culture and aimed at raising the standards of the working class, the Nordic version was “more universalistic, influenced by the ideals of the labor movement /.../ and more geared toward the general evolvment of the human character” (pp.81-82), which was also reflected in the output.

Flexibility and adaptation

The aim of promoting education and culture did not preclude the Swedish public service broadcaster from including entertainment in its programming from early in its history, and these offerings might have been a key driving force of television’s swift expansion.³ Comparing the introductions of Swedish radio and television, Weibull (2013) claims that the launching of the latter was to a greater extent characterised by “light entertainment” and that it was a more “democratic medium increasingly filled with ordinary people in picture” (ibid 2013: 50). Indeed, the inclusion of entertainment programmes (e.g., quiz shows and broadcasts of extraordinary events such as coronations and royal weddings) in early television has been seen as one of the factors explaining its rapid expansion: “when it became clear that this educational approach did not characterize the entire programme output the willingness to watch television was greater than expected” (Kleberg 1994: 195).

One of the company’s early successes (starting in early 1957) was the quiz show *10.000 kronor – kvitt eller dubbelt* (10,000 crowns – double or nothing), which was clearly influenced by the American programme, *The \$64,000 Question*. This success also opened the door for other quiz shows, showing American influences and involving ordinary people as contestants (Björk 2009). Bourdon (2004) noted that although they were fiercely criticised by some on the basis that they trivialised serious knowledge, game and quiz shows enjoyed great popularity in European countries. Because they were both cheap to produce and popular, these shows occupied a central place in the schedules of public service broadcasters, which adopted different strategies to accommodate this genre to their cultural mission, most often by including educational content in the shows

(ibid 2004: 287-288). In the quizzes aired on Swedish Television, the involved judges and hosts all had academic backgrounds (Kleberg 1994: 202).

The public service monopoly remained until 1990. The commercially-financed TV4 was launched in 1991, at a time when TV3 and Nordic (from 1996, Kanal 5) already had a rather extensive reach through their different cable and satellite TV systems. With the increasing number of channels, the total amount of programming expanded. Although part of this expansion consisted of imported films and TV series, the 1990s also saw the emergence of reality TV. In 1990, TV3 started airing *Efterlyst* (a Swedish version of *Crimewatch*), and this programme was soon followed by docu-soaps that focused mainly on rescue services. The early 1990s also saw the advent of dating shows. For instance, TV4 aired *Tur i kärlek* (Lucky in Love), and *Casanova*, and Nordic/Kanal 5 broadcast *Vem tar vem?* (a Swedish version of *The Dating Game*). One of the cable channels (TV1000) took the *Real World* concept to Sweden and aired two versions of it (*Real World Stockholm* and *Real World Visby*) in 1995-1996.

Competition from commercial broadcasters seems to have affected public service television. According to Bourdon (2004: 288-289), the commercial channels' obvious orientation towards more popular programming and their success with it led public service broadcasters to follow suit. Although the influence of cultural elites on SVT's programming had been waning from the 1960s, the era of competition brought with it even more encompassing changes: in the 1990s, ratings became more important, popular factual and entertainment genres spread, and scheduling modalities from commercial television were adopted (Syvertsen et al. 2014). TV4 was particularly successful on Friday and Saturday evenings, achieving high ratings with programmes such as *Fångarna på fortet* (a version of the French-format *Fort Boyard*) and *Bingolotto* (a lottery show). To meet this competition, SVT produced the reality game show *Expedition Robinson* (the first version of *Survivor*) in 1997 (Bolin 2013).

The decision of the public service company to air *Expedition Robinson* was widely debated and often criticised (see Bolin 2013: 275). In their yearly report for 1997⁴, SVT presented the series as an offering that was related to their "cultural mission". The series was characterised as a "program project that attempts to introduce new, group-experimenting content into the entertainment genre" (PSU 1997: 65). In this context, the company's cultural mission was further explained as including a "renewal of television as a cultural form in its own right" (ibid.: 64) and was considered a crucial strategy for distinguishing Swedish Television from its private competitors. In the public debate, however, *Expedition Robinson* was called "bullying TV", and the criticism escalated when one of the participants committed suicide shortly before the first episode was aired. The show nevertheless achieved high ratings, and the criticism soon faded.

In the coming years, many different manifestations of reality TV appeared in the TV schedules. Some (like *Big Brother*) were based on internationally-distributed formats, whereas others were developed by Swedish production companies (like *Baren* [The Bar] and *Villa Medusa*). Around the turn of the millennium, reality TV was widely discussed in the Swedish media and often faced fierce criticism. Despite the critical voices, it was also seen by the media as more than just a trend: reality TV was often depicted as "here to stay".

The developments discussed above suggest that during the era of competition, SVT met social, technological, and media-institutional change with profound changes in its programming, but without renouncing its enlightenment mission. Syvertsen et al.

(2014: 80) suggested that SVT, like other Nordic public service broadcasters, was guided by what they conceptualise as an “adaptive approach to enlightenment”. This means that the public service broadcasters were “resourceful, resilient, and adaptable to changing circumstances”; they were influenced by their commercial competitors but adjusted their programming to fit their own objectives. Supposedly, this policy has allowed public service broadcasters to retain an overall programming profile over time that distinguished them from their commercial competitors, thus legitimating the public service institution as such.

Research questions

Based on the above considerations, we singled out three clusters of theoretical arguments that were especially relevant to our study. On the one hand, some arguments suggest that the emergence of reality television and related programmes during the 1990s led to an extensive increase of ordinary television and, consequently, to an increasing number of ordinary people participating in such broadcasts. On the other hand, claims have been raised that ordinary television, including ordinary people, has always been a key element of television output. This led us to pose the following two research questions:

RQ1: To what extent did ordinary television programming increase during the 1990s?

RQ2: To what extent did the participation of ordinary people increase as a consequence of this shift?

Finally, it has also been asserted that public service broadcasters adapted to the competition, a claim that has been qualified with regard to media systems in the Nordic countries by the suggestion that, despite influences from commercial television, these broadcasters did not abandon their particular public service mission. Against the backdrop of this discussion, we pose a third question:

RQ3: To what extent has public service television adapted to the commercial competition through increasing their output of ordinary television programming?

Methodology and data

Sampling

In this study, we investigate four points in time: 1982, 1992, 2002 and 2011. These were strategically chosen to represent the era during which Sweden shifted from a system that was characterised by a state monopoly (1982) to one that was characterised by commercial competition (2002, 2011). The time points were chosen to capture the alleged shift towards ordinariness that supposedly occurred during the 1990s.

We chose to study one month of TV programming in each time period. We chose the month of March, altogether 31 days of programming per year, and for each day, we examined the programmes aired between 6:00 PM and 12 midnight, when the greatest number of people watch TV. We consider March a “typical” TV month, with many TV series underway. The Christmas and New Year holidays often have special programming in Sweden, and the summer months have many reruns. March has few major sports championships (such as the Olympics or World Cup football) that would significantly

affect programme offerings. It was not possible to study TV3 programming during March 2002 due to a lack of archival material. In this case, we chose to study the 31 days between 22 March and 21 April of the same year. Archival material was also lacking for TV3 in 1992, and it was not possible to reconstruct the programming by other means. Thus, for 1992, the investigation covered SVT1, SVT2, TV4 and Kanal 5 (called Nordic until 1996) (see Table 1). Despite these gaps, we consider the materials to provide a good indication of the developments under study.

The unit of sampling and analysis is the individual TV programme. The data were collected from TV schedules, including brief programme descriptions. We gained access to the schedules by reading the magazine *Röster i Radio-TV (RRTV)* (Voices on Radio and TV), which has been published by Sveriges Radio for over 60 years, and from the National Library of Sweden's (Kungliga bibliotekets) national audio-visual archive *Svensk Mediedatabas (SMDB)* (Swedish Media Database). A shortcoming of this method is that minor discrepancies can occur between the planned programming schedules and the actual broadcasts due to occasional last-minute changes (for example, the addition of extra news broadcasts). However, these differences are expected to have been marginal. In cases where we took the further step of coding individual programs (as described below), no such scheduling changes were found.

Definitions and coding

The coding was performed by three coders in two cycles using a prepared codebook for each step. Difficult cases were discussed regularly within the group and with the project leader (Eriksson) to ensure uniform coding. The first cycle was based on the analysis of TV schedules using the particular TV programme listed for each time-slot serving as the unit of analysis. In the first cycle of coding, we coded all units present in the schedules with respect to basic data, such as the time period, date, day of the week, time of broadcast, programme length (in minutes, according to the schedule), channel, and genre.

Genres were assigned according to the following five categories: advice shows; game/contest shows; debate/discussion shows; reality TV; and news and current affairs. All other material was coded as "other". The genre assignment was based on the information available in RRTV and SMDB. We also had access to SVT's own database. Cases in which the information was unclear were dealt with in greater depth, and such programs were assessed based on a viewing of the specific programme.

All programs that were aired with a starting time between 6:00 PM and 11:59 PM were coded, with the exception of recent rebroadcasts (within 31 days). Rebroadcasts after a longer period were coded in the same way as for other units. Altogether, 4714 units were coded in the first step (see Table 1). The coding of genres and subgenres was performed in accordance with the definitions provided below.

To be coded as an advice show, a programme would be organised around the giving of advice in a specific subject or area. The common factor is that some form of expertise is transmitted from the expert/host (sometimes one and the same person) to the participants in the programme, and hence, directly or indirectly, to viewers. Examples of the category include programs where experts answer viewers' questions; for example, DIY Shows (where experts concretely demonstrate how best to perform various tasks

within, e.g., carpentry, gardening, personal economy, or cooking); Make-over Shows, where participants undergo a change, e.g., in clothing, home furnishings, diet, or personal economy during the course of an episode or series of episodes with the help of expert advice); and Consumer Information Programs (which provide information on, e.g., products or consumer rights).

Programmes were coded as game/contest shows if they were built around some form of game or contest, with winners being selected and often receiving a prize. Examples of such programmes include: Quiz Shows, which test contestants' knowledge; Game Shows, which take the form of a physical competition or a guessing game between contestants; Dating Shows, where participants take part in games connected with possible future relationships; and Lottery Shows, which present the results of some form of lottery in which viewers can participate.

To be coded as a debate/discussion show, the primary activity would be a discussion or conversation between one or more programme hosts/guests, and possibly a studio audience. The host leads/moderates the conversation between the participants, who argue for different viewpoints in a formalised way. The level of formality can differ between programs and over time. Discussion shows aim to investigate and shed light on various subjects, and to spread ideas, experiences, and knowledge. Over time, the format has developed in the direction of a less formal discussion style more closely resembling everyday conversation (see Örnebring 2001).

Reality TV programmes purport to be somewhat documentary in character regarding the participants and events. Such programmes include "real" people who do not follow a predetermined script. Events can be staged or reconstructed, but are presented as "real" occurrences. The category includes Reality Game Shows, which take the form of an elimination contest in which contestants leave the show one after another as time progresses (e.g., *Big Brother*); Docu-soaps (reality documentaries), which follow events that are presented as real events occurring in real time; Reconstruction programmes, which recreate real events (such as crimes); and Social experiments, where one or more participants are transplanted to a new environment or social context.

Reality TV and its subgenres are difficult to categorise, and the boundary between certain reality formats and advice shows that include an element of makeover is not always clear. Reality TV, as Hill (2005: 14) so aptly puts it, is an example of "how television cannibalises itself in order to survive, drawing on existing genres to create successful hybrid programmes, which in turn generate a 'new' television genre." In our analysis, the coding was decided based on the intention behind each programme. For example, a programme such as *Biggest Loser* was coded as a Reality Game Show and not as an Advice Show Makeover because it contains a clear element of competition. For the same reason, *Big Brother* is coded as a Reality Game Show rather than a Docu-soap.

The category news and current affairs included all programs that were described as news or as the product of journalistic work. All programs that were not coded into one of these categories were coded as "other". This category is therefore the largest and includes all fiction (drama, films, etc.) as well as sports and children's programmes.

In the second coding cycle, we more closely analysed the units belonging to the four genres of particular concern in our study. These amounted to 491 units in total. A minor data loss (of four units in total) occurred during the second coding cycle. In all

cases, this loss occurred because the recordings were not available through the archive, and we could not obtain them by other means. These units were *Dagens rätt* (Special of the Day; 29 March 1992, Kanal 5), *Big Brother Live* (14 March 2002, Kanal 5), *Bachelorette Sverige* (27 March 2011, TV3), and *Jobbjägaren* (The Job Hunter, 24 March 2011, Kanal 5). In total, we analysed 487 units. Detailed coding was not conducted on foreign-produced shows, which first appeared on Swedish channels in 2002.

Recordings of the relevant programmes were provided by SMDB. It is important to note that the television schedules in 2002 and 2011 included foreign-produced advice shows and reality shows. These were only coded in the first coding cycle.

Table 1. *Overview of data coded in two cycles*

| Period | Channel | Cycle 1 Number | Cycle 2 Number |
|-----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1982 | SVT1 | 283 | 18 |
| | SVT2 | 271 | 15 |
| Total: | | 554 | 33 |
| 1992 | SVT1 | 355 | 12 |
| | SVT2 | 289 | 25 |
| | TV4 | 317 | 58 |
| | Nordic | 219 | 0 * |
| Total: | | 1 181 | 95 |
| 2002 | SVT1 | 167 | 19 |
| | SVT2 | 190 | 9 |
| | TV3 | 146 | 51 |
| | TV4 | 435 | 48 |
| | Kanal5 | 141 | 38 |
| Total: | | 1 529 | 165 |
| 2011 | SVT1 | 309 | 33 |
| | SVT2 | 355 | 27 |
| | TV3 | 192 | 33 |
| | TV4 | 401 | 82 |
| | Kanal5 | 193 | 19 |
| Total: | | 1450 | 194 |
| Total 1982-2011 | | 4 714 | 487 |

Comments: *In 1992 Nordic (later Kanal5) was a newly started channel that primarily broadcast TV series and movies.

To define who is ordinary or not on television is far from a straightforward issue. On the one hand, to label people appearing on television as ordinary does not, as Thornborrow (2015: 3) puts it, “fully capture the complex local identities and situated expertise that their participation frequently involves”. On the other hand, participation on television is also about adapting to requirements of a particular format and a set of given performance roles (Ytreberg 2004); ordinary identities on television can thus be seen as produced identities (cf. Turner 2010). As mentioned earlier, in this study, for the purpose of measurement, we use an essentialist definition (see Carpentier & Hannot 2009), i.e., a definition that considers ordinary people as a stable category. This category includes

participants who cannot be considered (a) media professionals (representing media institutions); (b) experts (participating as representatives of particular knowledge domains); (c) celebrities (e.g., well-known actors, musicians); (d) politicians (representing political institutions); or (e) other notable participants (e.g., authors). To be coded as an ordinary person, a participant must appear as representing nothing other than her/himself. This definition does not take into account where participants appear in what could be seen as extraordinary circumstances, or perform (spontaneously or not) exceptional and extraordinary actions. In some contexts, the notion of ordinary people has also been a euphemism for working class people (Wood & Skeggs 2011), but the definition we use here does not attend to such issues as social class or if the participants are authentic or not. So, besides the above-mentioned criteria (a-e), our definition does not take into consideration how identities are discursively accomplished (Thornborrow 2015) or constructed through particular editing techniques (cf. Eriksson 2015; 2016). Furthermore, as noted by other scholars, the dividing line between celebrities and ordinary people is not always sharply drawn (Turner 2010). A person can become widely known through a docu-soap, for example, and with repeated participation, such a person can become famous, or what Rojek (2001) terms “celetoids”. We have nevertheless chosen to view such recurring participants as ordinary people because they still participate as representing themselves.

Following this notion, when participants who were deemed ordinary appeared in the programmes, we coded “yes” and continued with the follow-up variables. Participation was counted if the ordinary participants were on screen or participated through other means such as letters, text messages, online chat, e-mail, edited features, or telephone. Even persons who participated anonymously, for instance through letters or anonymised interviews (e.g., in silhouette with disguised voice) were counted. However, only cases where a distinct person was involved (even if anonymous) were counted; cases where the participation was collectivised into an unidentifiable group of people (“We have received many texts from people wondering...”) were not counted.

This coding procedure led to certain difficulties concerning whether people were participating in a programme’s activities. To count as participating, the person appearing on the programme should obviously contribute to the activities taking place. For example, we did not count people who appeared in the background, for example, in a docu-soap, and thus did not participate in the activities that are central to the programme. We also coded the participants’ gender, and the calculations shown below are based on these variables.

The key variables (i.e., genre, number of men, and number of women) were tested for inter-coder agreement using Krippendorff’s alpha. One of the coders recoded a sample of 60 units (from the second cycle of coding) that was initially coded by the two other coders in the group. For genre, the test showed good agreement (0.98). For number of men and number of women, the test results were 0.69 and 0.70, respectively; these results are less satisfactory, and the conclusions related to these variables should be seen as more tentative than those related to the genre-variable.

Results

We investigated the increase in the amount of ordinary television over time by running a cross tabulation test. This analysis, which is presented in Table 2 as a contingency table, shows a steady increase in ordinary programming over time. The share of ordinary TV expanded from 6 per cent in 1982 to 18 per cent in 2011, thus constituting almost a fifth of all programming in March 2011. The differences observed throughout the years were statistically significant ($\chi^2(3) = 83.67$, $p < 0.001$). A part of the growth seen in 2002 and 2011 can be explained by the increased airing of foreign-produced shows. Descriptive data show that 4.4 per cent of the programmes involving ordinary people in 2011 were foreign-produced (this value compares with 0.9 per cent in 2002).

Table 2. *Distribution of ordinary television programming, 1982-2011 (per cent)*

| | 1982 | 1992 | 2002 | 2011 |
|--------------------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Ordinary TV | 6 | 8 | 12 | 18 |
| Other | 94 | 92 | 88 | 82 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| n = | 554 | 1 181 | 1 529 | 1 450 |

Comments: The table includes both Swedish original content and foreign-produced programmes. Note that the "Other" category here also includes News and Current Affairs programming.

Because ordinary television is a multifaceted phenomenon, we looked closer at its genres and at the dynamics within them. This analysis and the following discussion will focus on the second cycle of coding, and thus exclude foreign-produced shows. The changes over time that are observable in Table 3 are statistically significant ($\chi^2(9) = 149.3$, $p < 0.001$), but require further comment. In 1982, ordinary television was dominated by debate/talk shows. During that era, such programmes were rather formal debates and were considered serious discussion on important societal matters. Although the number of programmes within this genre had remained steady over the following period (an increase was observed from 16 in 1982 to 21 in 1992), it no longer remained the dominant genre of ordinary television. Instead, the quiz/game type grew extensively from 1982 to 1992, increasing its share from 24 per cent to nearly 66 per cent of all ordinary television programmes in 1992.

Table 3. *Distribution of the genres of ordinary television, 1982-2011 (per cent)*

| | 1982 | 1992 | 2002 | 2011 |
|--------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Advice | 27 | 12 | 19 | 28 |
| Quiz/game | 24 | 66 | 22 | 21 |
| Debate/talk | 49 | 22 | 11 | 10 |
| Reality | 0 | 0 | 48 | 41 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| n = | 33 | 96 | 166 | 196 |

Comments: The table concerns only Swedish original content (n=491).

The following period, from 1992 to 2002, was characterised by the rise of reality TV; during this period, the data are consistent with previous theoretical claims. As shown in Table 3, no reality shows were aired during the period studied in 1992, but in 2002, this category constituted almost half (48 per cent) of all ordinary programming. Ten years later, the number of programmes remained almost the same; however, their share slightly decreased from 48 per cent to 41 per cent. Although quiz/game, debate/talk, and reality shows continued at a steady level in 2011, advice programmes increased both in absolute terms (from 31 to 55) and as a share of all programming (from 19 per cent to 28 per cent). This shift mainly consisted of an increase in the number of makeover programmes from 2 in 2002 to 27 in 2011 (constituting 1 per cent and 14 per cent of the total share of ordinary television, respectively), representing almost half of the total share of advice programmes in 2011. It appears that the trend towards increased makeover television programmes, which was identified by other scholars in the 1990s (see Moseley 2000), reached Sweden during the early 2000s.

Table 4. *Average number of ordinary participants per program, 1982-2011 (mean values)*

| | 1982 | 1992 | 2002 | 2011 |
|------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Ordinary people | 2.6 | 5.7 | 10 | 8.2 |
| Women | 0.73 | 2.95 | 4.60 | 4.07 |
| Men | 1.88 | 2.71 | 4.54 | 3.96 |
| n = | 33 | 95 | 165 | 194 |

Comments: The table only involves programmes coded as ordinary television.

Did this increase in the amount of ordinary television lead to an increase in the number of ordinary participants, as suggested by previous research? To answer this question, we conducted three ANOVA tests to compare the mean values of the number of participants across the years (see Table 4). A significant linear trend (Welch's $F(3, 190) = 26.08$, $p < 0.001$) was observed, indicating that the number of participants increased over time. An SNK post-hoc test revealed that the increase was significant between 1982 and 1992 and between 1992 and 2002. The changes observed between 2002 and 2011 were not statistically significant. ANOVA tests for differences between male (Welch's $F(3, 148) = 12.36$, $p < 0.001$) and female (Welch's $F(3, 198) = 34.77$, $p < 0.001$) participants also confirmed a linear increase over time. The results of SNK post-hoc tests, however, revealed that the only statistically significant increases occurred between 1982 and 1992 for women, and between 1992 and 2002 for men. Nevertheless, the advent of reality TV and makeover television has led to the more frequent appearance of ordinary participants on television. No gender was prevalent over the other (Table 4).

Table 5. *Ordinary television on public service and commercial channels, 1982-2011 (per cent)*

| | 1982 | 1992 | 2002 | 2011 |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Public service TV | 100 | 39 | 17 | 31 |
| Commercial TV | 0 | 61 | 83 | 69 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| n = | 33 | 96 | 166 | 196 |

Comments: Public service includes SVT1 and SVT2, while commercial channels include TV3, TV4, and Kanal 5.

Regarding our third research question, the results of the cross tabulation test that we ran are somewhat ambivalent. There is a significant association between the yearly differences in the number of programmes, and the type of ownership of TV channels ($\chi^2(3) = 89.38, p < 0.001$). Looking closer at Table 5, we see that SVT constituted a good share of the ordinary programming (39.5 per cent) in 1992, during the early days of competition. SVT then dropped to below half of this share in 2002 (17 per cent), a finding that appears to contradict the theoretical argument that public service television altered its programming due to commercial competition. However, we also found that the share of ordinary television increased to 31 per cent in 2011, suggesting that SVT was responding more actively to the challenge posed by its commercial competitors from 2002 onwards. We interpret this increase in the context of what Syvertsen et al. (2014: 80) termed “the adaptive approach to enlightenment”. That is, SVT adapted to the change in television landscape by offering reality and game shows, but this occurred to a rather moderate extent.

Table 6. *Distribution of programming in public service television and commercial channels (TV3, TV4, Kanal 5) 1982-2011 (per cent)*

| | 1982 | 1992 | 2002 | 2011 |
|-----------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Public Service | | | | |
| Ordinary TV | 6 | 6 | 5 | 10 |
| News/Current affairs | 21 | 23 | 37 | 48 |
| Other | 73 | 71 | 58 | 42 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| n = | 554 | 644 | 610 | 664 |
| Commercial | | | | |
| Ordinary TV | – | 11 | 17 | 25 |
| News/Current affairs | – | 25 | 32 | 29 |
| Other | – | 64 | 52 | 47 |
| Total | – | 100 | 101 | 101 |
| n = | | 537 | 919 | 786 |

Comments: The table includes both Swedish original content and foreign broadcasts. Public service includes SVT1 and SVT2, while commercial channels include TV3, TV4, and Kanal 5.

Looking at these numbers, we find more evidence for this interpretation. In 2011, 10 per cent of SVT airings consisted of ordinary television; for the commercial channels, this share was 25 per cent (Table 6). These figures suggest that SVT continued to provide a broad array of genres in accordance with its mission of catering to all interests and tastes. Moreover, the company has also continued to provide news and current affairs programmes to a considerable extent. These programmes have an even more prominent position currently than previously: the share of news programmes increased from 1982 to 2011 (from 21 per cent to 48 per cent of the total output).

Concluding discussion

Overall, our study confirms the shift towards “ordinariness” that has been suggested by previous research. Our analysis shows that what we define here as “ordinary television” increased during the 1990s, particularly with the emergence of reality and makeover television, and constituted a significant component of the Swedish TV output in 2011. Ordinary television tripled in three decades from 6 per cent in 1982 to 18 per cent in 2011, when such programmes constituted almost a fifth of all television programmes aired between 18.00 and 24.00. The differences observed between years are statistically significant. It is noteworthy that this increase in the amount of ordinary television coincides with the growth of news and current programming on the Public Service channels from 1982 to 2011, and that these programmes remained at a steady level on the commercial channels from 1992 to 2011.

Regarding the second question, we note that this development has also led to an increase in the number of ordinary participants on television. This number increased significantly between 1982 and 1992, and again between 1992 and 2002, but then remained at a steady level until 2011. The advent of reality and makeover television thus also led to an increase in the number of ordinary participants, consistent with many theoretical claims (e.g., Turner 2010). As television consumers, we now view what are – or at least what appear to be/are constructed as – ordinary people in an increased number of programmes.

As stated above, the response to the third question is more complicated because the results appear to some extent to counter the theoretical argument that the introduction of commercially financed TV pushed public service television towards providing more entertaining ordinary television in the 1990s. The results of our study suggest that the adoption of ordinary genres by the public service broadcasters occurred later than expected in Sweden, from 2002 onwards. Nevertheless, we interpret this increase as a facet of “the adaptive approach to enlightenment” (Syvertsen et al. 2014). We believe that SVT’s strategy greatly contributes to the solid position that the company still enjoys in the Swedish media landscape.

Although we can prove here what we see as an important shift in the history of Swedish television programming, we think that one should be careful when assessing this shift. Syvertsen et al. (2016), discussing the propensity of media studies to focus on disruption and change rather than continuity, warn us of the risks involved in the use of dramatic epithets for characterising processes of change. Such epithets might actually be counterproductive, because they can conceal the fact that changes are inherent components of development, and are differently radical and differently paced in differ-

ent countries. Consistent with this notion, we suggest that spectacular words such as “explosion” – as in the introducing citation above – should be avoided when theorising the shift towards ordinariness that was identified in this study. Our study rather supports an argument that this shift occurred gradually, and one should then also consider that this shift took longer than the theoretical arguments might suggest, particularly for the public service company SVT. Furthermore, although ordinary television currently constitutes 18 per cent of the total TV output, to say that television “has entered the age of the ordinary”, as stated by the introducing citation, might be overstating the case.

Nevertheless, there are reasons to ponder the wider implications of these changes. Some scholars have taken an opposite stance to Hartley’s optimistic view, and read this development as a shift from an ideal characterised by the promotion of citizen participation towards a “commercialization of audience participation” (Sampedro 2001) as this participation becomes part and parcel of the television companies’ strategies for achieving higher ratings (cf. Syvertsen 2004:373). Discussing what he terms “the demotic turn”, Turner (2010) appears to agree that there is no necessary relationship between increased participation and democratisation. He makes the point that broadcasters (or other media producers) control the content and use it in a way which best suits their own (often commercial) purposes. A key remark in his discussion, aimed at Hartley’s optimistic view, is that television today is not just mediating identities; instead, television producers produce identities. Turner (2010: 19) asks, if this shift towards ordinariness is not “producing democracy, then what is it doing?”. His initial answer is that it is producing content – “a lot of content”. Based on the results of our investigation, this is difficult to question, and if one considers the rather extensive criticism that diverse reality TV and makeover formats have received (e.g., Heller 2007; Ouellette & Hay 2008; Wood & Skeggs 2011; Eriksson 2015; Camauër 2016), we believe there are at least two reasons why one should be considerably less prone to interpreting the shift towards ordinariness in terms of democratisation. First, studies have shown that the “ordinariness” of programme participants in such shows is debatable. Participants are often selected for certain personal characteristics or specific ways of life that might be spectacular and extraordinary in many ways (Turner 2010), and identities are produced through certain production techniques, which can easily reproduce prejudices about social groups (Eriksson 2015). Second, there are very few studies on how people make sense of and relate to ordinary participants on television.⁵ To pose the question as to whether the shift towards ordinariness is democratising or not appears rather fruitless as long as we only conduct research on how ordinary identities are produced, rather than also exploring how people consuming ordinary television relate to its ordinary participants.

Notes

1. Thus, we exclude the science/technology magazines and breakfast/morning/night shows that Bonner (2003) also includes in her categorisation of ordinary television.
2. When the airings started, they were managed by Radiotjänst (Radio Services), which later became Sveriges Radio (Swedish Radio). Since 1979, the public service company has been named Sveriges Television (Swedish Television).
3. Kleberg (1994: 194) noted that television expanded quickly in Sweden: there were more than 2.5 million license-holders during the early 1970s, which implies that approximately 80 per cent of Swedes had adopted the medium, an expansion that largely exceeded official forecasts.

4. Public service-uppföljning 1997 för Sveriges Television (hereafter PSU 1997, English: Public Service Follow-up 1997 for Swedish Television).
5. Skeggs & Wood (2012) is a good exception to this.

References

- Björk, Ulf (2009). It's Better to Steal the Idea: Swedish Television Copies Programs from America, 1957-1969. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 29(2): 219-277.
- Bolin, Göran (2013). Questioning the Entertainment Value, pp. 261-282, in Djerf-Pierre, Monika & Ekström, Mats (eds.) *A History of Swedish Broadcasting: Communicative Ethos, Genres and Institutional Change*. Göteborg: Nordicom.
- Bonner, Francis (2003). *Ordinary Television: Analysing popular TV*. London: Sage.
- Bourdon, Jerome (2004). Old and New Ghosts: Public Service Television and the Popular – a History. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7(3): 283-304.
- Camauër, Leonor (2016) Denigrating and Being Denigrated for a Higher End: Constructing Ordinary Expertise Through Supportive and Belligerent Talk. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 13 (Part A), 4-10.
- Carpentier, Nico & Hannot, Wim (2009). To be a Common Hero: The Uneasy Balance between the Ordinary and Ordinarity in Subject Position of Mediated Ordinary People in the Talk Show Jan Publick'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12(6): 577-616.
- Corner, John (2003). Finding Data, Reading Patterns, Telling Stories: Issues in Television Historiography. *Media, Culture and Society*, 25(2): 273-280.
- Djerf-Pierre, Monika & Ekström, Mats (eds.) (2013). *A History of Swedish Broadcasting: Communicative Ethos, Genres and Institutional Change*. Göteborg: Nordicom.
- Eriksson, Göran (2015). Ridicule as a Strategy for the Recontextualization of the Working Class: A Multimodal Analysis of Class-making on Swedish Reality Television. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 12(1): 20-38.
- Eriksson, Göran (2016). Ridicule as De-legitimization of the Working Class in Swedish Reality Television. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 15(3), 304-321.
- Griffin-Foley, Bridget (2004). From Tit-bits to Big Brother: A Century of Audience Participation in the Media. *Media, Culture and Society* 26(4): 533-548.
- Hartley, John (1999). *Uses of Television*. London: Routledge.
- Head, Sydney (1976). *Broadcasting in America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Heller, Dana (2007). *Makeover Television: Realities Remodelled*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Hill, Anette (2005). *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Holmes, Sue (2008). *The Quiz Show*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Kleberg, Madeleine (1994). The History of Swedish Television – Three Stages, pp. 182-207, in Bono, Francesco & Bondebjerg, Ib (eds.) *Nordic Television: History, Politics and Aesthetics*. Rome: Festival Nordico & Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.
- Literat, Ioana (2016). Interrogating Participation Across Disciplinary Boundaries: Lessons from Political Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Art, and Education. *New Media & Society*, DOI: 10.1177/1461444816639036.
- Moran, Albert (2008) Makeover on the Move: Global Television and Programme Formats. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 22(4): 459-469.
- Moseley, Rachel (2000). Makeover Takeover on British television. *Screen*, 41(3): 299-314.
- Ouellette, Laurie & Hay, James (2008). *Better Living Through Reality TV*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- PSU 1997 (Public service-uppföljning 1997 för Sveriges Television [Public Service Follow-up 1997 for Sweden's Television])
- Raphael, Chad (2009). The Political Economic Origins of Real-TV, pp. 123-140, in Murray, Susan & Ouelette, Laurie (eds.) *Reality Television: Remaking Television Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Sampedro, Victor (2001). New Genres in Commercial Television and Their Effects on Public Opinion. Unpublished paper retrieved 2017 01 21 http://www.nodo50.org/multitudesonline/McTele_Council%20of%20Europe_English.pdf
- Scannell, Paddy (2014). *Television and the Meaning of Live: An Enquiry into the Human Situation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Scannell, Paddy (2010). Television and History: Questioning the Archive. *The Communication Review*, 13: 37-51.
- Scannell, Paddy (1996). *Radio, Television and Modern Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Scannell, Paddy & Cardiff, David (1991). *A Social History of British Broadcasting*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Skeggs, Beverly & Wood, Helen (2012). *Reacting to Reality Television: Performance. Audience and Value*. London: Routledge.
- Syvertsen, Trine (2001). Ordinary People in Extraordinary Circumstances: a Study of Participants in Television Dating Games. *Media, Culture & Society*, 23(3): 319-337.

- Syvvertsen, Trine (2004). Citizens, Audiences, Customers and Players: A Conceptual Discussion of the Relationship between Broadcasters and their Publics. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7(3): 363-380.
- Syvvertsen, Trine; Enli, Gunn; Mjøs, Ole & Moe, Hallvard (2014). *The Media Welfare State: Nordic Media in the Digital Age*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Syvvertsen, Trine; Enli, Gunn; Mjøs, Ole & Moe, Hallvard (2016). Rethinking the Nordic Media Model: A Challenge to Democracy, in Carlsson, U (ed.) *Freedom of Expression and Media in Transition: Studies and Reflections in the Digital Age*. Gothenburg: UNESCO chair on Freedom of Expression, Media Development and Global Policy and Nordicom.
- Taylor, Liz (2002). From Ways of Life to Lifestyle. *European Journal of Communication*, 17(4): 479-493.
- Teurlings, Jan (2001). Producing the Ordinary: Institutions, Discourses and Practices in Love Game Shows. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 15(2): 249-63.
- Thornborrow, Joanna (2015). *The Discourse of Public Participation Media: From Talk Show to Twitter*. London: Routledge.
- Turner, Graeme (2010). *Ordinary People and the Media: The Demotic Turn*. London: Sage.
- Weibull, Lennart (2013). New Media between Technology and Content, in Djerf-Pierre, Monika & Ekström, Mats (eds.) *A History of Swedish Broadcasting: Communicative Ethos, Genres and Institutional Change*. Göteborg: Nordicom.
- Wood, Helen & Skeggs, Beverly (eds.) (2011). *Reality Television and Class*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ytreberg, Espen (2009). Extended Liveness and Eventfulness in Multi-platform Reality Formats. *New Media and Society*, 11(4): 467-485.
- Örnebring, Henrik (2001). *TV-parlamentet: debattprogram i Svensk TV 1956-1996*. Göteborg: JMG.

GÖRAN ERIKSSON, Professor, Department of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences (HumES), Örebro University, goran.eriksson@oru.se

LEONOR CAMAUËR, Associate Professor, Department of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences (HumES), Örebro University, leonor.camauer@oru.se

YULIYA LAKEW, Ph.D. Student, Department of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences (HumES), Örebro University, yuliya.lakew@oru.se