

Television in Denmark

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Denmark

The Scandinavian tradition of social and cultural concern characterized the development of broadcasting in Denmark. A state monopoly dominated broadcasting throughout most of its history; but broad citizen participation and foreign broadcast spill-ins have tempered its power. In the 1980s, the previously highly constricted one-channel television system was opened significantly through the creation of community radio and television, cable television, and satellite-delivered channels.

History

The regulation of Danish radio began in 1907 with the enactment of a law giving the minister of public works the authority to grant licenses for wireless communication. Soon, many radio clubs operated informally by broadcasting over governmental and military transmitters (Prehn, 1986), with a certain amount of disorganization. These private operations were closed down by the government in 1925 and replaced with the passage of a broadcast law by the state radio authority, Statsradiofonien. Although the minister of public works still maintained some regulatory capacity over radio, Statsradiofonien received all radio control previously held by private interests. Over the next quarter century, the public monopolist developed a national network of radio stations financed by listening fees.

In 1951, Statsradiofonien added two AM and two FM stations and established a second network. In 1963, under pressure because of the popularity of broadcast pirates, a third network was added that specialized in entertainment and popular music. In 1951, Denmark became the first Nordic country to introduce a national television channel.

In 1959, a new broadcasting law was passed that provided for the establishment of an independent public institution with a monopoly over both television and radio broadcasts. This institution, which replaced Statsradiofonien, was named Danmarks Radio. Until 1964, the government had the right of advance censorship over Danmarks Radio, and advertising was prohibited.

The Radio and Television Broadcasting Act of 1973 and its subsequent amendments established various bodies for the control of broadcasting. The governing board of Danmarks Radio consists of eleven members, with the

8 chairman appointed by Danmarks Radio and the remaining members appointed
9 by parliament. It became highly politicized, and reform proposals recom-
0 mended a smaller and less political body. As a result of the push for reform,
1 the composition and jurisdiction of the governing board changed; it can no
2 longer address programming matters and members of the parliament can no
3 longer sit on the board (GEAR, 1988).

4 There is also a General Program Advisory Committee, appointed by the min-
5 ister for communications, as well as a County Program Advisory Committee.
6 Separate local commissions are in charge of granting three-year radio and five-
7 year television broadcasting licenses to nonprofit and independent companies
8 and associations. The minister for communications appoints a committee to
9 distribute transmitter stations, handle complaints about licensees' operations,
0 and revoke licenses when necessary. The minister also established a Broad-
1 casting Complaints Commission, which can order broadcasting stations to cor-
2 rect misrepresentation of facts, and a TV Advertising Advisory Committee,
3 which offers advice about the content of television commercials and which also
4 has the authority to order the correction of misrepresentation.

5 Because Denmark is a small country and because no advertising is allowed
6 on the national channel, DR's broadcast budget is limited. This situation nec-
7 cessitated a substantial importation of programs, which in turn caused domestic
8 criticism. The result was a focus on domestic production and a domestic con-
9 tent of 51 percent in 1983, increasing to 60 percent in 1990.

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1 The Opening of Broadcasting

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3 Pressures for diversity and change came first from pirate radio stations. In 1958,
4 Radio Mercur began broadcasting from international waters and rapidly gained
5 popularity. To prevent such pirate broadcasting, the Telecommunication by Ra-
6 dio Act of 1949 had legislated that, "The setting up of, operation of, or use of
7 broadcasting stations on the open sea or in the air space above it shall not be
8 permitted." On that basis, Radio Mercur was shut down by the government in
9 1963. The message of its audience appeal, however, was not lost, and a similar
0 program mix on the third official channel was introduced. Some of the pirate
1 radio's disc jockeys were even included in the staff of the new channel. Soon
2 the new third channel became highly popular. In 1987, 73 percent of listeners
3 tuned to the third channel and only 17 percent to the first channel, which main-
4 tained talk and serious programming. Even more striking, the first channel at-
5 tracted listeners for only eleven minutes per day, compared to ninety-two min-
6 utes for the third channel. A proposed fourth channel was postponed for economic
7 reasons.

8 In 1983, local radio became a policy priority again under pressure from the
9 pirates, this time mostly land-based, small community groups. The second channel
0 was transformed to serve regional broadcasting, through nine regional radio
1 stations. Also established at that time were radio workshops in which commu-
2 nity groups were taught how to use radio. These local radio operators either

102 transmitted over a low-power station or distributed their programs over cable
103 television. State and local subsidies were provided and additional income was
104 contributed from other sources, but advertising was not permitted. In late 1985,
105 a permanent legal structure that would regularize local radio broadcasting was
106 proposed to Parliament (Prehn, 1986). Act 589 of December 19, 1985, amended
107 the 1973 law to standardize transmission facilities and licensing for local radio
108 (Danmarks Radio, 1987). The 1987 amendments to Part IIa of the Act ce-
109 mented the local, noncommercial status of broadcasters and allowed local au-
110 thorities to hold licenses as providers of production and transmission facilities.
111 As a result, the minister of communications or local councils was empowered
112 to force licensees to broadcast public affairs programming.

113 In 1983, the Ministry of Culture granted a total of ninety-two operating li-
114 censes to local radio stations for a three-year trial period accompanied by sci-
115 entific research. By 1986, 300 organizations had applied for licenses and 108
116 local radio and 43 television projects had been licensed. Of the newly licensed
117 projects, 24 percent were community groups; 6 percent, religious organizations;
118 12 percent, newspaper publishers and journalists; 18 percent, labor unions and
119 adult education organizations; 6 percent, municipalities; and 26 percent, citi-
120 zens groups (Prehn, 1986). As they became more established, the community
121 stations increased their broadcasting time to about six hours per day in 1988
122 (Petersen et al., 1988).

123 The low wattage of their transmitters limited the range of community radio
124 to about 10 kilometers (Petersen et al., 1988). Networking too was technically
125 prohibited, but economic and political imperatives overcame these prohibitions.
126 The variety of new radio stations was great, ranging from one-person opera-
127 tions that aired a few hours a day, to stations operated by religious organiza-
128 tions or unions, and catering to their members especially. Eight local television
129 stations are operated by the trade union, which is the closest to a network that
130 the government will allow without a license. However, these stations required
131 a substantial union subsidy. There were also citizen radio stations that aimed
132 at "total plurality." Radio Aarhus, located in the second largest city in Den-
133 mark, was probably the most extreme of such operators. It was founded by 120
134 Aarhus organizations and clubs, and each of these, no matter how large, has at
135 most thirty minutes of weekly programming. Twenty-five percent of weekly air
136 time is kept open. Radio Aarhus claims to run without any hierarchy or cen-
137 sorship, and all citizens can air their announcements. Most of the fixed costs
138 of rent and technical operations are covered by the municipality, but much of
139 the money is provided by the Association of Radio Aarhus' friends and lis-
140 teners. In 1985, 45 percent of the population listened to community radio; by
141 1987, this number had grown to 55 percent. Danmarks Radio attracted listeners
142 for 828 minutes per week in 1985, compared to 281 for community radio, but
143 its popularity slipped, and by 1987, it drew listeners for 788 minutes compared
144 to 409 for community radio (GEAR, 1988).

145 By 1989, there were 277 local radio stations authorized and operating. Ad-
146 vertisements were permitted after 1989.

147 Although official broadcast television policy limits Danes to only two chan-

48 nels, much of the country can receive at least one foreign TV channel, and
49 most Danes supplemented their spartan one-channel choice with the German
50 and Swedish public channels. About half of the households can receive all three
51 German public channels, and Sweden's two channels are received by a similar
52 half of the viewing population. Others could receive East Germany or Norway.
53 One study shows that households receiving only the Danish channel watch six-
54 teen hours per week, whereas those that can receive five additional channels
55 from Germany and Sweden watch five hours more. Of those Danish households
56 that have a choice, 29 percent watch a German rather than the Danish channel
57 (Prehn, 1986).

58 The political left and right were split over the issue of private television
59 (Henriksen and Schmidt, 1980). The left was not prepared to relinquish the
60 idea of broadcasting as a forum for public education, and the right was against
61 a state broadcasting monopoly. Since the opponents had almost equal represen-
62 tation in parliament, much influence fell to a small center party.

63 From 1983 to 1985, an experiment with regional television was conducted
64 in southern Denmark (TV-Syd). In addition, community television was begun
65 in 1983, with thirty-four stations using low-power transmission or cable. The
66 experiment was made permanent in 1987. About fifteen public stations operate.
67 Although commercial organizations were technically excluded, some of the lo-
68 cal organizations were, or became, covers for commercial interests. Weekend
69 Television in Copenhagen, for example, started as a genuine community effort
70 but eventually was operated by large newspaper publishers and Denmark's larg-
71 est film company. Another Copenhagen channel started with amateurs and vol-
72 unteers but eventually became a pay-television channel owned by the Swedish
73 company Esselte, the largest producer of videocassettes in Scandinavia and a
74 major participant in Dutch pay cable.

75 In 1991, there were 174 radio stations, with an audience of about one quarter
76 of the listening population. Forty radio and eight local TV stations are operated
77 by the trade union movement. These stations have collaborated with local pub-
78 lishers in advertising and have even attempted, in association with Esselte Film
79 and Nordiske Film, to introduce pay TV (Prehn, 1990, p. D25). However, the
80 union station's financial losses mounted, and they were partly sold to Lifacto,
81 a multinational company that owned Copenhagen's Kanal 2.

82 In Denmark, as in Norway, a discussion of new commercial media was linked
83 with the question of advertising. Traditionally, the Nordic countries, with the
84 exception of Finland and Iceland, have not permitted advertising. Reception of
85 foreign commercial broadcast signals with advertising was accelerated by the
86 emergence of satellite-delivered programs distributed to 35 percent of the
87 households in Denmark over cable. Satellite transmissions made foreign adver-
88 tising possible, but domestic advertising was still banned, thus disadvantaging
89 Danish industry in its own country. Since 1988, advertising has been allowed.

90 In 1980, a media commission was appointed by the Social Democratic gov-
91 ernment to recommend policy. After five years, the commission published a
92 report that recommended, among other things, the establishment of a second
93 television channel. TV2 was set up as an independent public channel, with a

94 dual national and regional structure, and began broadcasting in 1988. It is fi-
95 nanced largely by advertising but is not a commercial channel. TV-Syd, one of
96 the experimental TV stations, was converted into an independent TV station
97 and became the first part of the new network. TV2 is governed by an eight-
98 member central board, with five members appointed by the minister for com-
99 munications, two appointed by regional boards and one by labor unions. Each
00 of its eight regional enterprises, to be phased into operation by 1991, is simi-
01 larly overseen by a regional board.

02 TV2 encourages independent TV production; the idea is that, for the first
03 time, Danes will have a choice of outlets for domestically produced program-
04 ming. It is hoped that Danish viewers who were disinterested in DR's schedule
05 will turn to other Danish programming rather than to foreign networks.

06 TV2 is permitted to include advertisements, handled by the separate state-
07 owned corporation TV-Reklame. Commercials for alcohol or tobacco are not
08 permitted, and ads may not interrupt programming (Danmarks Radio, 1987).
09 Advertising revenues supply about 70 percent of the station's budget. The other
10 30 percent comes from license fees of about \$200 annually for color sets.

11 TV2 broadcasts in-house productions during 30 percent of its air time; 50
12 percent of its programming originated in Denmark and Norway. By 1989, TV2
13 had achieved viewing parity with DR (TBI, 1990).

14 In 1990, a fully commercial national channel, P4, was proposed.
15

16 Cable Television

17 The emergence of cable television as a driving force for media reform was
18 unplanned. Until the 1980s, there was no clear governmental policy on cable
19 television. Apartment complexes established master antennas to avoid a forest
20 of individual ones. In time, they amplified weak signals from West German
21 and Swedish stations (and sometimes East German and Norwegian signals). By
22 1983, almost 60 percent of all Danish households were connected to one of the
23 8000 master antenna (MATV) systems that are usually run by local housing
24 associations. Most systems had six channels and less than 100 subscribers.
25 However, some were much larger (Qvortrup, 1984). The Royal Danish Com-
26 mittee on Mass Media reported that eight MATV systems had more than 10,000
27 subscribers. Connection charge per subscriber was \$300 to \$400, plus an an-
28 nual subscription charge of \$20 to \$35. The housing associations that operate
29 the systems became an important independent force for media liberalization,
30 since they represent viewers' interests.

31 In 1985, the Social Democrats and the Conservatives passed a new media
32 law permitting the cabling of Copenhagen for satellite reception and cable TV
33 and allowing the cable distribution of foreign television programs (Medium,
34 1985). This was a major step in liberalization. Under this law, however, the
35 nonlocal distribution monopoly would still belong to the PTT. Only the PTT

236 and the regional Danish telephone companies could receive satellite programs
237 and distribute them.

238 This was based on a decade-old concept. In 1974, the established Danish
239 cable manufacturer NKT had developed plans to link up with the Jutland Tele-
240 phone Company, one of the Danish regional telephone organizations, in order
241 to provide an integrated fiber-optic broadband network. This led to innovative
242 network planning, and in 1980, details of the project were taking shape. The
243 driving forces behind this project were the PTT and the four regional telephone
244 companies (then independent), all of which were concerned about loss of control
245 over satellite reception. In 1983, the Royal Commission on Mass Media
246 proposed a "hybrid" solution, with an integrated national broadband network
247 that would provide both television and telephone linkages. The PTT, however,
248 preferred to separate telephony from broadband services in order to pursue the
249 ISDN (integrated services digital network) route for telephony while linking the
250 many MATV systems by a nationwide microwave network to the PTT-operated
251 satellite earth stations. The regional telephone companies, on the other hand,
252 were more eager for a nationwide integrated broadband communications system
253 partly because an expansion to broadband service would free them from restrictions
254 imposed by old agreements with the PTT (Qvortrup, 1984). And the influential
255 housing associations had a still different perspective; they desired satellite
256 programs received directly through their MATV systems without having
257 to go through the telephone carriers at all. The most aggressive private cable
258 network operator, Finvik, part of the larger Swedish firm Kennevik, took a
259 similar position. Thus, the issue of a broadband network was shaped by the
260 relative power relations between the PTT, the regional telephone companies,
261 and the housing associations.

262 In 1986, the ruling center-left coalition and the Social Democratic opposition
263 came to an agreement about a national broadband cable system. They approved
264 the innovative Digital Optical CATV Trunk (DOCAT) system as a hybrid (digital
265 fiber, analog coax) trunk system connecting the cable systems with satellite
266 receiving stations and other sources of programming. The system is run by the
267 PTT and the regional telephone companies and feeds television and radio channels
268 to the local cable networks, which select and distribute them to households.
269 DOCAT is viewed as a step toward an integrated broadband network.

270 Yet DOCAT met with strong resistance from influential local housing associations
271 and cable companies, because it established a high-priced monopoly over
272 satellite telephone and program importation. Many associations began to bypass
273 the telephone companies and receive satellite signals directly and more cheaply.

274 Eventually, satellite reception was liberalized in 1987. The telephone organizations
275 thus must work harder to make their investment in DOCAT worthwhile, and this
276 creates an incentive for them to provide the seed money for many channels.
277

278 In 1991, 30 percent of the country was interconnected by DOCAT. Over 50
279 percent of Denmark (about 660,000 households) was effectively cabled and
280 some 25 percent of all homes received satellite programming. Forty-eight per-

81 cent of the TV audience regularly viewed Swedish stations and 31 percent
82 watched West German stations. Yet over 80 percent of the viewers were watch-
83 ing Danish television, equally split between DR and TV2, showing a stable
84 interest in national programs.

85

86 **Conclusion**

87

88 At the end of a decade's evolution, Danish television looked much changed.
89 Where there once had been a sole public channel with limited appeal and sup-
90 plemented by foreign spill-ins, there was now more diversity. These changes
91 were the result of public preferences (evidenced by the popularity of pirate
92 broadcasters), the wish of community groups to be heard and seen over the air,
93 the desire of commercial interests for a national advertising outlet, and the
94 emergence of numerous cable systems carrying a variety of imported channels.
95 Although cable television began in an unplanned fashion, often at the initiative
96 of housing associations, it soon became an industrial policy and prestige project
97 for government and the telephone industry. The investments in the national
98 cable interconnection are likely to create pressures for the transmission of fur-
99 ther satellite programs and Danish channels. Barriers still exist, but further
liberalization, including continued international and domestic integration, is likely.