Abstract
One of the Swiss television arena’s most interesting characteristics is undoubtedly its linguistic, cultural and territorial make-up, due to its division into three macroregions: the German-, French- and Italian-speaking zones. Two significant phenomena coexist in each region. One is the cultural and linguistic proximity of foreign radio and television systems, whose channels are widely consumed within the Confederation, too; that applies both to public service networks (such as ARD, ZDF, RAI or France Télévision) and to their commercial counterparts (like RTL, VOX, the Mediaset channels, La7 and TF1). The other phenomenon is the strong presence of the public service broadcasting, SRG SSR, which in turn is structured into seven channels: three in German, two in French, and two in Italian. In the Swiss television system, the public service broadcaster has played and still plays an important role as a bulwark of the national identity. This article analyses the strategies used by RSI, the public television service in Switzerland’s Italian-speaking region, in acquiring and scheduling a kind of television product usually considered “global”: American-made TV series. The paradoxical hypothesis advanced is that public service television fulfils part of its mission, while resisting competition from the neighbouring countries’ channels, precisely by adapting and scheduling this “global” product.

Keywords
Global TV; public service broadcasting; Swiss TV; small media systems; national mediation.

1. FROM AMERICA TO SWITZERLAND: NATIONAL IDENTITY, GLOBAL FORCES

This article brings together three different research strands that have been particularly influential in recent Media Studies.

The first theoretical framework refers to a well-established research tradition in media globalisation and media circulation that has scrutinised the ability of American cultural products to attract and articulate popular consumption worldwide in a way that is always negotiated with national media and cultures. More precisely, American products circulating outside the US are always caught in a process of “national mediation” or “localisation” that inserts them into a specific cultural and media context via distribution strategies, linguistic adaptation (e.g. dubbing and subtitling), scheduling...
policies etc. Furthermore, following the insights of contemporary studies on production and distribution cultures as well as research ideas on media and television convergence, this article focuses especially on the various approaches to shaping US television series adopted by a public broadcaster—like RSI, Radiotelevisione Svizzera—faced with increasing competition from Italian TV networks and new digital forms of distribution.

The second theoretical frame of reference comprises an equally fertile research tradition that includes those studies dedicated, especially in the European context, “to the most important contribution that Europe has made to the history of world television,” namely public service broadcasting. As many writers in different geographical and national contexts have underlined, public radio and television services have made an essential contribution to constructing national identities in their respective countries, albeit in quite different forms and at quite different times. European television institutions, like the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), have been established, and attempts have been made to construct forms of programming that are common or coordinated at European level (as with Jeux sans Frontières, the Eurovision Song Contest or the Euro-News, EuroSport and ARTE channels). But the public services have historically played a primarily national role, reinforcing an “imagined community” intent on consuming the same current-affairs and entertainment content. Indeed, those services have sometimes actually contributed to build that community, as in Italy, which was culturally and linguistically fragmented until the 1950s.

The third theoretical framework concerns the ideas about the relationship between globalisation and nation in the context of “small media systems.” The American media products’ expansive, globalising or even “imperialist” tendency must always be counterbalanced with the “nationalising mediation” processes that apply to those products.
in specific distribution and consumption context. Nevertheless, it must also be borne in mind that the “nations’ strengths” vary just as much. In particular, when referring to “national mediation”, we have to consider the nations’ different strengths, noting especially the power imbalance between large and small countries, and even more so the imbalance between large and small media systems. For small countries and small media systems, the role of public service radio and television seems even more crucial: does public service broadcasting have a specific function in adjusting and counterbalancing this imbalance of power?

The Swiss television arena is an especially significant case for studying this particular union of globalisation, “national mediation” and the public service broadcasting role. In Switzerland, public service radio and television is of especially central importance. Historically, it acted as the “mirror and voice of the nation”, as aptly summed up by Theo Mäusli. And besides, this nation is unique not just because it is “smaller” than its “big neighbours” (Germany, Austria, France and Italy) but above all because it is profoundly coloured by linguistic and cultural pluralism. Indeed, the country has three main official languages (and four national ones, in all) and is divided into three main regions: the German-, the French- and the Italian-speaking parts, plus some areas within those regions in which Romansh, the fourth language, is spoken.

This article aims to analyse the television scenario and the role of Swiss public service broadcasting in the Italian-speaking region, focusing specifically on the distribution strategies developed by RSI for US TV series to compete with the major Italian networks. As I seek to show, the adoption of specific strategies of offering and positioning American series products on RSI channels has contributed, if slightly paradoxically, to reinforcing public service television’s role in the country, in the constant competition with the foreign TV channels (especially the Italian ones).

The study uses a composite methodology combining macro-level analysis of the media and TV environment and markets, both in Italian-speaking Switzerland and in Italy, with micro-level scrutiny of the professional strategies that emerge as much from the channels’ offering as from the official documents. In particular, I analyse data on the programme offering and the consumption of American television series on RSI and on the Italian channels available in Switzerland, and I examine the strategies used by the Italian-language Swiss public service broadcaster to optimise the offering of those products in today’s specific competitive context.


As in many countries across Europe, Switzerland’s broadcasting system has been affected by important changes during the last decade. Digitisation and media-convergence processes have prompted changes in players’ strategies, in textual features, and in audience habits. As regards technological platforms and audience consumption, cable’s dominance has been challenged by the growth of IPTV, while new technological devices

13 Mäusli, *Voce e specchio*. 
support TV content “anywhere and anytime”\textsuperscript{14}. As Cola and Prario have noted\textsuperscript{15}, despite the technological changes in the 2000s and the growth in new distribution platforms, such as IPTV, the Swiss broadcasting system is still characterised by several constant factors rooted way back in its now long history. First is the central role of SRG SSR, the public service radio and television broadcaster operating at national level in a “federal” structure that reflects the country’s regional and linguistic complexity: “SRG SSR operates 18 radio stations and seven television channels, each of which holds a prominent position in their respective markets in all regions”\textsuperscript{16}.

A second characteristic feature of the market is the still-fragmented TV market, a reflection of the country’s linguistic and cultural diversity, with four major tongues, including the neighbouring countries’ national languages. As noted just above, in every linguistic region, the respective main Swiss public service broadcasting channel remains the leader. However, other PSB channels and local and commercial networks often lose out in audience ratings to foreign private and public channels\textsuperscript{17}. Therefore, free-to-air viewing is heavily influenced by channels from neighbouring countries, since the multilingual national identity facilitates porosity in TV viewing. Channels from Germany, Austria, France and Italy – both public and commercial – are widely available via terrestrial overspill and on multichannel platforms\textsuperscript{18}.

Let us look at the situation in Switzerland’s Italian-speaking region in detail. As in the other regions, the Italian-speaking regional viewing share is split between Swiss public service broadcasting channels RSI La1 and RSI La2, minor private and local channels (e.g. the small Teleticino), and Italian channels, both public (e.g. Raiuno, Raitre) and commercial (e.g. Canale 5, Italia 1, Rete 4 and La7) – see Table 1.

As Table 1 shows in detail, despite a minor change in the methods of calculating the figures\textsuperscript{19}, television consumption in Italian-speaking Switzerland over the last ten years has remained essentially stable. The public service broadcast networks attract just over a third of the total viewers. The main competitors of the region’s two public service broadcast channels (La Uno and La Due) are not – unlike in most European markets – other commercial channels in the same country. Rather, they are foreign channels (Italian ones, in this case) from both the public service (the RAI channels gained 16% of the total audience in 2014) and the commercial world (Canale 5, Italia 1 and Rete 4 obtained 19% in the same year).

\textsuperscript{14} Grasso, Scaglioni, Televisione convergente; M. Scaglioni, La TV dopo la TV. Il decennio che ha cambiato la televisione: scenario, offerta, pubblico, Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2012.
\textsuperscript{16} Cola, Prario, “The Commercialisation of Television in Switzerland”: 123.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
MASSIMO SCAGLIONI

Table 1 - Trends in percentage “market share”\textsuperscript{20} in Italian-speaking Switzerland, 2004-2014, based on Mediapulse data from 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>SRG SSR (total)</th>
<th>La1</th>
<th>La2</th>
<th>SF1</th>
<th>RTS Un</th>
<th>Non-SSR</th>
<th>Raiuno</th>
<th>Raidue</th>
<th>Raitre</th>
<th>Canale 5</th>
<th>Italia 1</th>
<th>Rete 4</th>
<th>La7</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Teleticino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<td>15%</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<td>12%</td>
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<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>64%</td>
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<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>64%</td>
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<td>6%</td>
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<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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Nota: The SRG SSR figure is the total market share achieved by Switzerland’s public service channels; SF1 is the first public service channel in German; RTS Un is the first in French.

Moving on from the consumption side to the programme offering, key TV content for the RSI public service channels includes both locally produced programmes and ready-made imports. On one hand, we could mention a great variety of genres, such as news and documentaries, game shows, TV magazines and talk shows (although, as Cola and Prario observe, the public service channels largely “intentionally renounce certain types of entertainment production”, not only for reasons connected with their mission but also because of specific competition with the Italian public and private channels)\textsuperscript{21}. On the other, US television series represent an important asset for both public service channels La1 and La2.

American television series, dubbed in Italian and available to Swiss audiences, are also important content for Italian networks. Raiuno, the main PSB Italian channel for adult and mature audiences, does not broadcast drama and sitcoms, but all the other networks do. In particular, Raidue, aimed at an audience of younger adults, has a long tradition of screening American crime dramas, especially at prime time (in 2014, the network offering included shows like *Navy NCIS*, *NCIS Los Angeles*, *Hawaii Five-0* and

\textsuperscript{20}“Market share” means the consumption of a broadcaster or programme as a percentage of total television consumption. Frame of reference: 324,000 individuals aged over three years (Mediapulse, *Jahresbericht – Rapport annuel – Rapporto annuale*, 2014)

\textsuperscript{21}Cola, Prario, “The Commercialisation of Television in Switzerland”, 127.
Criminal Minds); Canale 5, the main commercial network, targeted at family-centred audiences, has broadcast US series as soon as they have become popular enough to reach a wide audience, as with House MD, for example; Italia 1 traditionally includes crime and medical dramas (like CSI and its franchise’s various flavours, or the initial seasons of Grey’s Anatomy), sitcoms (like Will & Grace and How I Met your Mother) and other genres aimed at younger and teenage audiences; finally, La7 has broadcast one of the longest-lasting and most popular medical dramas in both Italy and Switzerland, Grey’s Anatomy.

As already mentioned, then, one of the most important imported (not locally produced) genres on Swiss public service broadcasting, on RSI La1 and La2 in particular, is US series, especially dramas and sitcoms. In this particular case, Switzerland’s Italian-speaking region is connected with international trends and global markets: US TV series are presented to foreign broadcasters during the screenings and up fronts week every May; they are shown and sold at international television markets; they are included in output deals and volume deals as the most valuable kinds of product; and then they can be included in national schedules and shown to local audiences22. On one hand, this phenomenon affects RSI and many other public and private broadcasters worldwide, with the same production practices and working routines. On the other, those importing foreign TV products, US TV series in particular, need to take into account Italian-speaking television’s complex landscape and therefore to consider that the very same series may also be shown on foreign Italian channels that can be freely viewed by Italian-speaking Swiss audiences, like the RAI and Mediaset ones. In some ways, the situation is akin to Canada’s relationship with the United States, once described by Marshall McLuhan23 as a “counter environment” that reacts in different tactical and strategic ways to its larger neighbour. Hence, US TV series broadcast by La1 and La2 have a sort of “double degree of foreignness”: the first degree can be described as the direct relationship with US production and distribution facilities; the second is a more indirect connection to Italian public and private networks, regarded as “strange competitors”.

Focusing on the Swiss public service broadcaster’s perspective, then, and on acquisition and scheduling departments’ working practices and habits in particular, this complex situation highlights various problems and questions that must be resolved, or at least considered carefully. The first issue is the presence of the same US titles in the Italian schedules. Not only can Italian broadcasters operate in the same international market as their Swiss counterpart, but often – because of their larger audience and bigger budgets – they are too strong a player to compete with. The Italian networks can follow their own traditions and approaches, competing directly with other national networks, often quite unaffected by RSI’s dealings on the television market. At the same time, however, RSI needs to shape its own strategies around the approach of Italian channels that can reach the same Italian-speaking Swiss audience that it itself aims to attract and – as part of the PSB goals – satisfy. A second, related issue involves the negotiations over license rights and potential bundles or deals. Major broadcasters and international distributors often consider Italian-speaking Switzerland as a single market, distinct from the Italian one; therefore, RSI must acquire rights specifically for the correct region. Yet a certain amount of border crossing is tolerated in both directions, and Italian channels acquiring

national-only rights in reality can also broadcast to the Swiss Italian-speaking region. As a result of this tolerance, some aspects of negotiating the two separate rights also becoming linked, and the weaker player on the market risks having to pay more. One last issue to consider is the possibility of watching US TV series via illegal means, such as streaming and downloading, with platforms like eMule or BitTorrent. Although not hugely popular in numerical terms, being limited to some elite or young niches, these forms of “convergent viewing” that circumvent the traditional networks are eroding imported scripted genres in particular, like US television series and sitcoms.

3. FOUR STRATEGIES FOR “LOCALISING” AMERICAN SERIES ON RSI CHANNELS

How does the Italian-language Swiss public service react to such issues and challenges? In what ways does this “counter environment” affect the offering and the consumption of that kind of cultural product?

We can start by analysing the case history of a single TV series, the US sitcom Friends – aired in the US on NBC from 1994 to 2004 – to see the different ways in which the same TV product arrived on RSI (then called TSI) and on the Italian public service networks Raitre and later Raidue. Thanks to its long life with ten seasons and subsequent frequent repeats, Friends is a very interesting example of historical developments and changing traditions, as I shall briefly explain. After discussing this particular case, I shall draw some conclusions of a more general nature on the strategies adopted by RSI when scheduling American-made television products on its own channels.

Table 2 - Broadcasting the sitcom Friends in the USA, Switzerland and Italy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season 1</th>
<th>Season 2</th>
<th>Season 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA (NBC)</td>
<td>September 1994-</td>
<td>September 1995-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May 1995</td>
<td>May 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland (Italian-speaking) (TSI)</td>
<td>March-April 1996</td>
<td>October-November 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy (Raitre then Raidue)</td>
<td>June-July 1997</td>
<td>July-September 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June-July 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nota: Prepared by the author based on the NBC, TSI, Raitre and Raidue network schedules.

From the dates of the first two Friends seasons and those of the tenth and final one (Table 2), first of all, it is clear how the Italian-speaking Swiss region could watch the episodes well before the Italian national audience. While that was true in the early seasons – with the Swiss audience waiting less than a year to see the Italian-dubbed episodes, whereas RAI could broadcast the first batch of episodes only after a couple years – the wait progressively reduces down the years. Indeed, season ten begins in Switzerland right after it ends in the States, although the delay in Italy is still quite long, at about another year. We can also see how the seasons were aired as seasons on the Swiss channels (albeit with just a few months’ break between them), whereas in Italy there was no break at all, the second season following straight after the first.

Another important difference lies in two process of “national mediation”. At least for the initial seasons, TSI (now RSI) decided to rename the series, translating its original...
title into Italian – *Amici* – and modifying its iconic logo and opening title sequence accordingly. In Italy, a different decision was made. As there was already a widely popular talk show called *Amici*, but also because there was less need to “Italianise” US television series, the original name was retained. The product’s increasing success with the US name later also forced the Swiss public service to revert to *Friends*.

I shall now make some general observations, looking beyond the specific case of *Friends*. The consideration of the issues and limits posed by the presence of Italian television, the needs of public service broadcasting, and the increasing role of other legal and illegal forms of digital distribution has gradually led Italian-speaking Swiss PSB to develop a complex set of practices and strategies to overcome the obstacles and to compete directly – as effectively as possible – with foreign Italian channels, including in the arena of US ready-made product and series. To summarise a system of traditions, habits, best practices and preconceived ideas about the intended audience, four main strategies can be highlighted.

The first is *selection*. To eke out a limited budget, especially compared to the resources available in Italy, the individually titles are carefully cherry-picked on the international market. Of course, not every US series or sitcom can fit into the RSI schedules; that decision must also take into account what is already being shown (and what will be shown) on Italian public and private channels. A careful selection process, then, is an essential precondition for the RSI public channels. So, for example, since 2012 RSI La1 chose to air the American crime dramas *The Glades* and *Unforgettable* that were not available on free-to-air Italian networks.

This point leads to the second important strategy: *relevance*. The possible series are whittled down not only according to budget limits and by evaluating the (indirect) competition but also by considering a wider idea of public service. On one hand, selecting the acquisitions according to an editorial stance and in order to build image, thus also giving room to series that can be termed “quality programming” (premium cable products), is vital for a public service broadcaster that must establish its role through its programming. On the other, reflecting the “regional taste” in genres or subgenres, the selection is shaped strongly by previous programming but is also often arrived at independently (and differently) from that for the Italian audience (hence the more important role of situation comedies, like *Two and a Half Men*).

A third strategy concerns *timing*. To “beat the stronger competition” from Italian channels, several US TV series are broadcast on La1 and La2 in advance through dedicated international-distribution agreements and a carefully crafted schedule. Most US series air on PSB, while in Italy they are still locked into the pay-TV window, thus diminishing the product’s power on Italian public or commercial channels. Sometimes the time lag is only a few weeks, but – considering ratings and broadcasters’ expectations – these methods seem to work very well in establishing a primal role for RSI. So, for example, in 2015 RSI LA2 aired the fifth season of the crime drama *Blue Blood* thus anticipating the scheduling on the Italian network Raidue.

The final strategy concerns *national mediation*. Another way to link US series strongly to Swiss public channels is the role played in their Italianisation, through translation, adaptation and dubbing as well as minor adjustments like changing the title or graphics. Especially at certain points in its history, Swiss PSB was able to take a role in some decisions, for instance in selecting the dubbing voices, translating particular jokes – one in *Friends* includes a reference to Campione d’Italia – or, as we have seen, the series title itself, thus carefully crafting and shaping the product not only for Italian-Swiss audiences, but also for the Italian national audience.
4. CONCLUSIONS

This article has sought to underline the ways in which RSI responds to a complex media and cultural landscape in order to reach their goals as a public service institution and, furthermore, to maintain its centrality. It also discusses the changes that have affected these strategies and tactics in the last two decades, which seem to confirm the RSI’s role as a “counter environment” while contributing to redefine it as part of an increasingly interconnected digital and convergent media and television landscape. As Ruth Hungerbühler has shown in her historical analysis of TSI-RSI strategies between 1982 and 2008, during the nineties the increasing competition predominantly from Italian PBS and commercial networks forced the Swiss public channels to start a stronger “counter-programming” that included a particular attention for American film and TV series. With the Italian adaptation of US TV series and other foreign products, the public service broadcaster in Italian-speaking Switzerland is not abdicating its role of reinforcing the culture and traditions of the society it serves; on the contrary, it is fulfilling its objectives, trying to keep its relevance in a more and more complex and competitive market. Indeed, the PSB must be central in the nation’s common discourses and common practices, positioning itself favourably against direct and indirect competition. In brief, it needs to get its audience: to quote Armin Walpen, director of the Swiss public service from 1996 to 2010, “ours is a public service, not a service without a public”. And the Italianised US series contribute to shaping the Swiss public service as well as its original productions in different genres (as in news, documentary, games and fiction); the US series are one example of the variety of approaches and programmes that must be used to beat the competition from foreign networks and digital outlets outside the box, too.