

## **Broadcasting as critical infrastructure. A story of European fine-tuning and techno-political interferences.**

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This paper aims at reflecting problems of scarcity and vulnerability of broadcasting as a critical infrastructure in a historical and European perspective. These reflections build on the concept of infrastructures as “mediating interfaces”. Viewing infrastructures as mediating interfaces in a number of interactions thus forces us to analyze them in their material, institutional and discursive complexity. These different levels “interact” in various forms. While political conceptions of Europe as a community of sovereign but legally committed nations have influenced the (fragmented) construction of a European broadcasting space, new broadcast technologies (for example short wave radio) have challenged the politicization of the ether and offered unexpected possibilities for civilian appropriations (amateurs) of Europe as a transnational communication space. European broadcasting infrastructures are a perfect mirror of these continuous tensions between the very nature of broadcasting as a transnational or transborder technology with its inevitable spill-over effects and its national and international forms of institutional and symbolic domestication and regulation. Focusing on the example of frequency allocations for radio broadcasting in the European spectrum in the 1920’s and 1930’s, this paper aims at analyzing the scarcity and vulnerability of broadcasting infrastructures in their material, institutional and symbolic nature. Depending on the ambition or the perspective of the narrator, the story of European broadcasting regulation could be told a transnational success story or as a succession of dashed hopes and sensitive setbacks. In fact, the most appropriate narrative structure is probably that of a soap opera. The international frequency conferences undoubtedly had something of a staged performance and more than once ended with a cliffhanger and a classical “to be continued...”.

The identification with the central characters of the story is relatively easy too, as the main actors performing on these highly ritualized venues show a surprising continuity on the stage. Building on an extensive archival research at the EBU archives in Geneva, this paper aims at problematizing the concepts of “technopolitics” and “regulatory regimes” by focusing on the activities a central “technopolitical mediator” in the regulatory system of the International Broadcasting Union: the Technical Committee of the IBU, and especially its Chairman and Director of the Technical Center in Brussels, Raymond Brailard.

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