Dutch Media: Pillarization, Multiculturalism, and Cross-culturalism

‘Media and culture’ has been always a topic of interest and study, not only for scholars, but for policy makers and the general public as well. The topic is very broad. It includes defending cultural autonomy in face of the influences of globalized media, in addition to using media as a tool for preserving multiculturalism in societies and for integrating minorities.

This paper explores the media system of the Netherlands (the Low Countries), also known as Holland, through the phenomenon of ‘pillarization’ in the media and its development towards ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘cross-culturalism’. Furthermore, it sheds light on the influence of these developments on minorities in the Netherlands.

1. Introduction:

Why the Netherlands? The answer to this question requires stating some facts about the country.

Located in Western Europe, the Netherlands is a small country in terms of geographic size, but it is also among the largest in the Europe with regards to population density and wealth. It is one of the world’s most densely populated countries. Although associated with clogs, windmills and tulips, the country is known for its large economy, architecture, innovation, art and scientific achievements.
The Netherlands is a parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy. It is one of the most ‘post-materialist’ countries in the world, in terms of values, with perhaps the most liberal policies on euthanasia, LGBT civil rights, and soft drugs and prostitution, and its households are among the most environmentally conscious in the world (Semetko 139).

Puustinen, Thomas, and Pantti state that an overwhelming majority of the population regards its origin as ‘Dutch’. More recently, the Netherlands has witnessed increasing immigration from non-European countries, particularly from Turkey, Morocco, and, following independence, the former Dutch colony of Surinam (7).

Considering the country’s nature, being partly below sea level, people of the Netherlands had to depend on each other and cooperate in their battle against the sea. This resulted in what is called the ‘polder model’ which refers to the efforts of the different policy actors to cooperate and achieve consensus in spite of their differences. Bos, Ebben and te Velde, however, argue that “Polder mentality as key element of Dutch identity has been recently debunked as a myth” (qtd in Schrover 353). Despite this claim, compromises as an integral part of how the Dutch political system performs cannot go unnoticed.

Having said this, the Netherlands is an interesting example to examine regarding the relation between media and culture and how its media system developed as a consequence to such relation. This article poses the question of whether the developments in the Dutch media foster the integration of minorities in the society.

1.1 Pillarization, Multiculturalism and Cross-culturalism

Marlou Schrover states that pillarization, or verzuiling characterized the Dutch society between 1900 and 1960. It meant segmentation of society into religious and secular (332).
Pillars, or *zuilen*, along the lines of religious and ideological cleavages shaped one’s opportunities and experiences throughout life. There were religious, socialist, liberal, and secular pillars (Semetko 140).

Another definition of pillarization comes from K. Brants who describes it as “an arrangement of peaceful coexistence between disparate groups within a vertically segmented society living apart together in potentially conflictual ‘pillars’ based on religion and ideology” (qtd in Awad and Roth 403).

Cees van der Eijk refers to the evolution of pillarization saying that it has its origins in a series of protracted political conflicts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These conflicts involved mobilization of common people on an unprecedented scale, thus giving rise to strongly organized blocks that manifested themselves in multiple social domains that are commonly labeled ‘pillars’ (304). Each group used to have its own ideology and its own organizations: political parties, labor unions, employers’ associations, farmers’ groups, newspapers, radio and television organizations, and schools—from kindergarten to university (Lijphart 1).

Such a socially and ideologically fragmented system would suggest that antagonism and extremism were spread and not cooperation and moderation. But the Netherlands is usually referred to as a successful democracy. Arend Lijphart explains this paradox in his book *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in The Netherlands* first published in 1968. His views on Dutch politics served as the foundation for the so-called theory of ‘consociational democracy’.

On a policy level, Marlou Schrover explains that through pillarization groups can apply for government funding for their organizations such as schools and places of worship (333).
Since the 1960s, developments in the media landscape have been the manifestation of the profound transformations in the Dutch society and politics known as ‘depillarization’ (Van der Eijk 303). Holli A. Semetko claims that no single reason can explain why pillarization came to an abrupt end in the mid-1960s (140). Interestingly, there is a popular debate on the effect of the homogenizing message of the television on the diminishing of the pillarized loyalty. Dutch media trainer and director of ‘Al Sawt al Hurr’ NGO Petrus Schothorst, in a discussion with the author of this paper, mentioned that the increased secularization in the society and the increase in wealth in the 1960s are also reasons of depillarization.

There is still, however, remnants of pillarization in the Dutch society, especially after the rise of the number of Muslim migrants to the Netherlands. Places of worship can still receive subsidies from the state and so religious schools (Schrover 349). Some scholars might disagree stating that the current subsidies are part of the development towards multiculturalism.

Maarten P. Vink noted that until a few years ago it was commonplace to categorize the Netherlands as one of the few European countries with an integration model that comes closest to the multicultural ideal-type. This ideal-type entailed government endorsement of the principle of cultural diversity and the active support of the right of different cultural and ethnic groups to retain their distinctive cultural identities (337).

Multiculturalism was pursued as a policy following the rise in the number of immigrants from different countries, including the initially guest workers from Mediterranean countries who arrived in the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards and then settled in the country.

Awad and Roth, on the other hand, argue that the Dutch multiculturalism has been replaced in the recent years with ‘integration’ due to concerns by some, including Paul Scheffer,
that policies to support group identity have resulted in a clash of cultures instead of integration (403–404).

Contributing to the heated discussion on integration, the 2002 murder of the popular populist Dutch parliamentarian Pim Fortuyn shook society. It was the first political murder in many decades. The assassin, Volkert van der Graaf, who is an environmentalist and animal-rights activist, claimed he committed the crime to protect the Dutch Muslim minority from Fortuyn who called Islam “backward” (Osborn). This was followed by the 2005 killing of filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a Dutch citizen of Moroccan origin. Such incidents fostered debate about how journalists cover crime and social issues involving the growing presence of recent immigrants to the Netherlands (Scott 204).

As a result to such concerns over social fragmentation, changes occurred in recent years in media policy and cultural diversity in the Netherlands towards the substitution of media programs for specific minority groups with cross-cultural programming (Awad and Roth 401). The later programs are in Dutch language aiming at addressing all social groups or at least a combination of minority groups (406).

2. Development of the Media System:

Cees van der Eijk suggests that the mass circulation newspapers were developed around the same time of the introduction of the pillar system (305). He adds that the guaranteed freedom of the press allowed the different groups in the society to issue their own newspapers as integral parts of their pillars. This did not mean necessarily that all newspapers were affiliated to specific pillars. But the newspapers that were unequivocally linked to the different groups/subcultures were sufficiently large and influential to set the tone for the entire newspaper industry (Van der Eijk 306).
Puustinen, Thomas, and Pantti agree with Van der Eijk arguing that the history of the Dutch media system is closely tied to the history of the Dutch Nation-State in the 19th and 20th centuries, with pillarization as its most significant aspect (10). They even go further to observe that the legacy of pillarization in the Dutch media system is still apparent through the continuing identification of particular publications with a traditional group/subculture, though such connection may be more historical than real in the current media production and consumption. In terms of broadcasting, the continuing presence of broadcasting associations and the absence of national state owned television or radio station can be attributed to pillarization (11).

Radio was then introduced in the Netherlands in 1919. Bakker and Vasterman claim that the first radio program broadcast that year was a private commercial operation. It was then replaced in the 1920s with a government-controlled system whereby public organizations, affiliated to the different ideological or religious pillars, took over. This system continues to operate, although there are now many more organizations with a broadcasting license (Bakker and Vasterman).

Denis McQuail points out to the fact that there were consequences for the structure and contents of the public service broadcasting, considering that it evolved from the Dutch pillarization tradition (qtd in Semetko 143). For example, Cees van der Eijk refers to the regulations enacted in 1930 to manage the broadcast industry, which started from the premise that broadcasting should be the province of private organizations that had to satisfy two requirements. First, they had to serve “manifest cultural or religious needs in the society,” which meant, in reality, that they have to be affiliated to one of the pillars in the society. Second, they had to provide comprehensive programming that satisfied a wide range of cultural, educational, and recreational demands (306).
Pillarization, as discussed earlier, came to an end in the 1960s. The implications of depillarization did not only affect the society and politics in general, but had profound consequences on the media as well (Van der Eijk 312). The regulated, non-competitive media system gave way to market forces.

Newspapers were among the first that had to cope with the effects of the declining influence of the power of pillars. In the 1950s, 30 newspapers defined themselves as Catholics. Today there are none (Semetko 143). Newspapers affiliated to pillars began losing their readers to nonpillarized competitors that had in the past limited share in the market. Most newspapers couldn’t survive and disappeared. Others moved away from their pillars and redefined themselves along other lines.

Two other factors that also led to the profound consequences in the newspaper industry are the decline in revenues due to competition from broadcast advertising, and the decline in consumers’ interest because of the rapid spread of television, in addition to the need to invest heavily in new technologies (Van der Eijk 312).

Broadcast industry was less affected by depillarization. It had, however, to learn new techniques and practices in order not to lose audience and thus broadcast time (Van der Eijk 312), since it was until recently that the amount of time for each public broadcasting organizations was determined by the proportion of the membership.

But the introduction of commercial broadcasting in the Netherlands in 1988, along with the cable systems offering indigenous channels from many other countries, led to intense competition for viewers (Semetko 144). Byron T. Scott notes, for example, that the share of the Dutch public television has diminished from two-thirds to about one-third of the audience since commercial broadcasting has been allowed (204).
The increasing commercialization in the Dutch media scene had several effects, including the disappearance of party political newspapers, the abolition of a telecommunication monopoly, and the increasing concentration of media ownership, which interestingly has not yet given rise to the emergence of media tycoons such as Murdoch or Berlusconi in Italy (Puustinen, Thomas, and Pantti 11).

Following depillarization and the rise in the number of immigrants, a new policy that addresses minorities took place. Multiculturalism succeeded the pillarization system. The impact of the new policy in the media scene is mainly on radio and television.

Awad and Roth label the period of 1960s–1980s as the “era of ‘migrant’ media” (406). This period was characterized by programs on the public radio and television which targeted migrants in general, and each minority group in particular, using its own language and appealing to its own tastes. J. Breimer reflects on this saying that the public radio had transmissions for 10 different minority audiences by the beginning of the 1980s (qtd in Awad and Roth 406). Migrant programs were also broadcast on local and national television during the 1980s.

The policy on multiculturalism in media has been under debate regarding whether minority programs help in integrating them in the society. Some commentators accused such programs of increasing the isolation of the minorities. A story published in 1995 in the newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* indicated that, for some, targeted programs were unjustifiable, since they allegedly addressed only a shrinking number of first generation viewers whose Dutch language was not good enough to watch other programs (qtd in Awad and Roth 407).

Awad and Roth argue that such debate resulted in a shift in the media policy targeting minorities towards cross-cultural media starting from the 1990s and culminating in 2008 (401). They add that the substitution process of minority programs with cross-cultural ones took place
first at the national television, then transferred to local radio and television, and finally to the national public radio (Awad and Roth 407–409).

Both scholars mention three general factors shaping cross-cultural programming. The first factor deals with the changes in the media industry with the growing competition in the European media landscape due to its liberalization and implementation of new communication technologies. Such technologies already provide a significant offer of transnational media for minority groups. The second factor addresses the changes in the minority population. The second generation of immigrants is very much different from its parents. The third and final factor, according to Awad and Roth, is the relation between media use and integration. A study in this regard was commissioned in 2002 by the Dutch public broadcaster and the Dutch government’s information agency showing that ‘more integrated’ minorities use Dutch media more than those who are ‘less integrated’ who rely more on media from their ‘motherland’ (409–411).

It is, however, the conclusion of Awad and Roth that the current approach to diversity in the media does not foster democratic inclusion. They explain this by arguing that the policy that “neglects the importance of group-based media undermines minority groups’ political participation by impeding the development and strengthening of minority counter-publics” (401).

3. Regulations:

Journalists in the Netherlands function in one of Europe’s most rapidly changing media environments (Scott 204). But they also have the privilege of working in one of the top countries that respect media freedom. Freedom of expression, including freedom of the press, is guaranteed by the Dutch constitution (Grondwet voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden). Paragraph 2 of Article 7 states that “radio and television will be regulated by law”. Paragraph 3 of the same article extends these rights to non-traditional media. Thus, the Dutch media operates
with a minimal government interference regarding content. The Media Law regulates radio and television. There is no prior state censorship regarding the content of broadcast programs (Puustinen, Thomas and Pantti 12). Advertising is excluded from this freedom of speech. There are laws prohibiting or limiting advertising, for instance, of tobacco and alcohol (Bakker and Vasterman).

Such freedom is evident in the reports of Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders. The 2013 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders ranks the Netherlands second after Finland and followed by Norway. This position is consistent with the 2013 global press freedom rankings of Freedom House in which the Netherlands comes third along with Belgium and Finland. This comes amidst deterioration in the rankings of some Western European countries in the 2013 report of Freedom House such as Greece which moved into the Partly Free category.

Following the incident in 2006 in which two journalists with the daily De Telegraaf were jailed for several days after refusing to reveal their sources for a story about a leak in the Dutch intelligence service (Scott 204), the right of non-disclosure for journalists was incorporated in the Dutch law in 2009. But this right is not absolute. It may be suspended if a more important interest is at stake. Decision in such cases lies with the courts (Bakker and Vasterman).

Media regulation in the Netherlands is mainly self-regulation by the industry itself or its consumers (Puustinen, Thomas, and Pantti 13). Press has been always based on self-regulation by the sector.

Bakker and Vasterman argue that the media policy in the Netherlands is mainly broadcasting policy, defining the organization of the public broadcasting system. The
government’s policy regarding print media is focused on preventing disruptions of the free market due to vertical and horizontal media concentration.

The Netherlands pursued a defensive media policy that resulted in preventing commercial competitors from entering the broadcast market for many years. The situation changed over the years, especially with the adoption of the EU Directive ‘Television Without Frontiers’ which is fully integrated in the Dutch legislation. The Directive adopted in 1989 rests on two basic principles: the free movement of European television programs within the internal market, and the requirement for TV channels to reserve, whenever possible, more than half of their transmission time for European works. It also safeguards certain important public interest objectives, such as cultural diversity, the protection of minors and the right of reply. The Directive was first amended in 1997 and then revised in 2007 and renamed to the ‘Audiovisual Media Services Without Frontiers’ Directive. According to the Directive, the main objective of this revision is to take account of technological developments and changes in the structure of the audiovisual market. A further objective is to ease the regulatory burden on providers of audiovisual services while facilitating the financing of European audiovisual content (EUROPA.eu).

The Dutch Media Authority (Commissariaat voor de Media) supervises the implementation of the media law in both public and commercial television and radio, as well as cable operators. The Authority allocates broadcasting time to national, regional and local public media. It also grants licenses to commercial stations. Moreover, the Authority monitors the financial situation of public broadcasting. It also monitors compliance with the rules on quotas, advertising, and protection of minors. It has the authorization to issue warnings, impose fines and suspend or revoke a license (CvdM.nl).
The structure of the national Dutch public broadcasting system is complex and consists of many independent broadcasting associations (Burg, Lauf, and Negenborn 7). There are guidelines for granting licenses to local, regional and national public broadcasting. At national level, the establishment of an association requires recruitment of 50,000 paying members for the first five years and 300,000 paying members for the following concession periods (Burg, Lauf, and Negenborn 42-43). Public broadcasting associations have to carry out the requirements of the media law to broadcast a prescribed amount of programs in categories such as information, culture and education. They also have to produce a certain share of domestic programs (Bakker and Vasterman). It is the task of the Dutch Media Authority to ensure that these broadcasters act in compliance with the rules and regulations of the Media Act and the Media Decree (MediaMonitor.nl).

To guarantee diversity and independence, the Netherlands Competition Authority (NMa) investigates and sanctions cartels and misuse of economic power in the media and other sectors, in addition to assessing mergers and acquisitions. On several occasions, the NMa took action against mergers and acquisitions of newspapers and broadcasting channels. The government has limited concentration in the newspaper market to a maximum share of 35 percent. Cross-ownership in newspaper and television is now less restricted than before.

The accountability systems in the Dutch media will be discussed in the overview on the Dutch media landscape with its different organizations. It is to be noted here, since this section covers regulations, that due to pressures for self-regulation within the audio-visual industry, the Kijkwijzer (Watch guide) was issued in 1997 aiming at protecting young viewers against possible harmful effects. It classifies films, TV programs, videos, and games, to give advice to
parents. By using pictograms the public is warned for content with violence, fear, sex, bad language, alcohol and drug abuse or discrimination (Bakker and Vasterman 154).

4. Media Landscape:

To further understand the Dutch media, here is an overview on its landscape. It has to be noted, unless otherwise indicated, that this background information draws heavily from the thorough work of Bakker and Vasterman (see Works Cited).

4.1 Traditional Media

4.1.1 Print Media

The Netherlands enjoys a high readership of newspapers, although it has been declining as in almost every other western country. The newspaper market in the Netherlands is relatively strong with thirty newspapers per 100 residents. Dailies reach about 70 percent of the population, a large majority of which spends more than half an hour a day reading a daily paper.

More than half of the paid circulation in the Netherlands consists of national newspapers. According to data issued in 2011 by the Dutch Media Authority (Commissariaat voor de Media), the national popular broadsheet De Telegraaf is market leader followed by Algemeen Dagblad, quality paper de Volkskrant, and evening quality broadsheet NRC Handelsblad.

Unlike many countries, the Netherlands no longer have partisan press or specialized sports newspapers. The Dutch media landscape lacks also sensational tabloids such as Bild in Germany and The Sun in the UK.

Free dailies were first introduced in the Netherlands in 1999. In June of that year, Metro and Spits were published. Both papers increased their circulation over the last decade.
Less than 15 independent regional newspapers are published in 2009, against more than 24 ten years ago, due to the consolidation of publishers and newspaper mergers. Paid national dailies are mainly distributed in the four major cities: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht and the areas around that. Regional papers are stronger in the rest of the country. The largest regional dailies are *De Gelderlander*, *Noordhollands Dagblad*, *Dagblad de Limburger*, *De Stentor* and *Brabants Dagblad*.

Apart from daily newspapers, some paid non-dailies, mostly weeklies, exist. There are about 50 titles with a joint circulation of less than 250,000. More common are local weeklies, distributed free of charge in almost every part of the country (Bakker and Vasterman).

There are no Sunday papers in the Netherlands. Regional paper *TC / Tubantia* and *De Telegraaf* both introduced a Sunday edition in 2004; but these were terminated in 2008 and 2009. The majority of the Dutch papers are now printed in tabloid format (Bakker and Vasterman).

Ownership is very concentrated in the Netherlands with three companies dominating more than 90 percent of the paid market. De Persgroep (formerly PCM) owns four national dailies: *de Volkskrant*, *Algemeen Dagblad*, *Trouw* and Amsterdam daily *Het Parool*; total market share in the daily newspaper market in 2011 is almost 21 percent. Telegraaf Media Groep and Mecom are the other two main publishers. In this regard, it is interesting to highlight the fact that the majority of the Dutch newspapers are owned by foreign companies. Mecom is British and De Persgroep is Belgian. The free daily Metro is Swedish.

There are more than 9,000 different magazines titles distributed in the country. Segments with the highest circulation are TV-guides, and youth; gossip and women’s magazines. This market is also very concentrated with the Finnish-owned Sanoma publishing more than 70 titles, and dominating the market for weekly magazines. However, quite recently, several sources
reported that Sanoma intends to cut considerable amount of its Dutch magazine titles and jobs due to fall in revenue.

Dutch bookshops (including the ones on the Internet) sold in 2008 ‘general’ books that amount for 645 million euro, which was an increase of 2.3 percent compared to the previous year. In numbers, this meant 51 million books (Bakker and Vasterman). Book publishing in the Netherlands has remained relatively independent from major players in other media sectors (Puustinen, Thomas, and Pantti 17).

4.1.2 Radio

Radio as a medium is popular in the Netherlands. In 1987 the total listening time was an average of 170 minutes per day. This increased by more than half in 2011 to 203 minutes (MediaMonitor.nl).

Dutch media historians claim that the first radio program ever was broadcast from Scheveningen in the Netherlands in 1919 as a private commercial operation. A government-controlled system whereby public organizations, organized along party and religious lines, replaced it in the 1920s. This system is still operating, although there are now many more organizations with a broadcasting license.

The two public radio networks from the 1920s expanded over the years to five stations, four with FM frequency, one only on AM, and a sixth online-only program. Radio 1 is for news and information, Radio 2 for family listening, 3 FM is the rock radio targeting youth, Radio 4 broadcasts classical music and cultural programs, while Radio 5 is for spoken word, minorities and education. Internet channel Radio 6 focuses on non-mainstream music (Bakker and Vasterman).
No legal commercial radio broadcasters were active on the Dutch market until 1988 due to restrictions by law. Radio Veronica, which began broadcasting in 1960, was the first ‘offshore radio’ station. Transmissions were made from a ship off the coast of the Netherlands just outside territorial waters, which prevented the Dutch government from acting effectively. Radio Veronica was the first broadcaster with programming fully dedicated to pop music (Burg, Lauf, and Negenborn 71).

Concerning content, commercial radio in the Netherlands focuses mainly on music, with an exception of a news-only commercial radio station which is BNR (Business News Radio), connected to financial daily Het Financieele Dagblad.

The 12 Dutch provinces have their own public regional radio and television stations. Almost all local communities also have their own local station, subsidized by a levy on the community tax. About 300 local radio stations are operating, broadcasting in more than 400 communities. Some regional and local commercial stations exist, but these usually have a marginal existence because of heavy competition and low advertising rates (Bakker and Vasterman).

4.1.3 Television

With an average viewing time of more than three hours a day, television is a very popular medium in the Netherlands. Twenty years ago, before the introduction of commercial television, the Dutch spent just over two hours on television. In 2003 this was increased to three hours. Not everybody, however, has been watching more television over the years. There is a clear trend that the younger generation watches less while the older generation watches more.
Until 1988 the television market for the Netherlands consisted of only two channels supplied by the Dutch public broadcaster NPO: Nederland 1 which began in 1951 and Nederland 2 in 1965 (Burg, Lauf, and Negenborn 64). Consequently, the NPO held a monopoly position on the television market for many years. This situation came to an end following legislation of commercial broadcasting in 1988 (Puustinen, Thomas, and Pantti 16), and the changes to the Media Act in 1992, which led to an influx of commercial players in the market starting from 1995 onwards (MediaMonitor.nl).

Watching television in the Netherlands means having the choice between 30 channels at least, considering that the country is almost totally cabled (Bakker and Vasterman). Cable penetration, most of it broadband, exceeds 95 percent, while broadcasting went completely digital at the end of 2006 (Scott 204). Almost all programs are broadcast in the original language, with subtitles in Dutch (Semetko 144).

Dutch public television occupies the first three channels with Nederland 1, 2 and 3. Nederland 1 is meant for family programs, including sports. The second channel is dedicated for news, information and culture, while Nederland 3 focuses on programs for the younger audience and is meant to be more innovative in its programming (Bakker and Vasterman).

The public broadcasting associations, which originated from the pillarized system, share time to transmit programming on these three publicly funded channels (Semetko 144). New groups and organizations claiming to represent a part of society that was not yet provided for on television have been added to the roster over the years (Bakker and Vaterman). A number of public broadcasters have appeared whose programs reflect a spiritual viewpoint or religious background. In 2010 there were public broadcasters for the following groups: Buddhists, Humanists, Muslims, Hindus, Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jews (MediaMonitor.nl).
There are two competing commercial broadcasters with foreign origins. The German-owned RTL group based in Luxemburg operates RTL 4 (family), RTL 5 (youth), RTL 7 (business, men) and RTL 8 (mostly US-series and soaps). The USA-owned SBS group has three channels: SBS6 (family), Net 5 (women), and Veronica (youth). Apart from those ten channels, there is MTV (youth), TMF (music), Discovery Channel, National Geographic, Eurosport, and at least one regional and in most cases one local channel; all of these broadcast in Dutch or have Dutch subtitles (Bakker and Vasterman).

On top of the above mentioned channels, two channels supplied by the Belgian public broadcaster are also in Dutch, which is the language spoken in the Flanders in Belgium. Furthermore, BBC 1, BBC 2, one or two German channels, and often a French, Italian, Spanish or Arabic channel are also offered. With such a variety, switching to digital television is not a real necessity for many viewers (Bakker and Vasterman).

The market share of the public channels has dropped from almost 100 percent in 1989 to less than 40 in 2009. Nederland 1 and 2, RTL 4 and SBS6 are the most popular public and commercial channels (Bakker and Vasterman).

The three Dutch public TV channels have advertising as an extra revenue source – apart from the regular tax-based public funding. The three national public channels received around 200 million euro from advertising in 2008. This revenue stream is criticized by the commercial broadcasters and newspaper publishers who argue that this means unfair competition for commercial parties (Bakker and Vasterman).

The Dutch radio and television landscape is now inhabited by dozens of different broadcasters/production companies; some of them only airing a ten minute program every two weeks, others filling several hours a day. The largest broadcaster is NOS, a foundation that is
responsible for the news broadcasts of the public broadcaster NPO to this day (Burg, Lauf and Negenborn 42).

4.1.4 News Agencies

Only few news agencies are active on the market in the Netherlands. Traditionally, the most important news agency is ANP (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau), which was founded by the Association of the Dutch Daily Press (De Nederlandse Dagbladpers, NDP) in 1934. In 2000, ANP became an independent company, and in 2003 an investment company (Bakker and Vasterman).

Almost all Dutch news media subscribe to the news feeds of ANP. The press agency also sells news to online news websites such as Nu.nl. ANP has offices in The Hague, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Brussels. It represents foreign news agencies like AFP, EFE, DPA, and Belga in the Netherlands (Bakker and Vasterman).

Founded in 1936, the news agency GPD (Geassocieerde Pers Diensten) delivers news for 17 regional newspapers. Novum (2001) is the smallest, Amsterdam-based, news agency. All press agencies are struggling to survive the competition of all the free news on the Internet. In December 2009 ANP and GPD announced a close cooperation to reduce the costs of news coverage (Bakker and Vasterman).

4.2 New Media

The Netherlands has become a leader for new media and technology in Europe, because of the government’s willingness to embrace new ideas, consider suggestions from those involved in using the new technology, and provide subsidies when necessary (Semetko 145).
With 94 percent in 2011 (versus 78 percent in 2005), the Netherlands has had the highest proportion of households with access to the Internet from home for years on end in Europe (CBS.nl). According to Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, CBS), about 90 percent in the Dutch population aged 12 years and older used the internet in 2012 and 70 percent of them were active on social media. Facebook and Twitter are the most popular social networks.

Ousting laptops, smartphones are now the most popular devices for mobile internet access in the Netherlands. The use of mobile internet access in the Netherlands is well above the average in the EU (CBS.nl).

Internet is used for all kinds of activities such as web searches, email, gaming, downloading music, communities, banking, and shopping. In 2008 more than 50 percent of the Internet users watched television and listened to radio via the Internet. Almost half of the users read or download news from newspaper websites (Bakker and Vasterman).

Traditional media is not absent from the digital scene. Newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting organizations offer a wide range of interactive websites. The public broadcasting provides its audience with the ‘program missed’ option allowing the viewing of an already broadcast program on personal computers.

4.3 Media Organizations

There are several professional organizations and syndicates in the Netherlands. The Netherlands Union of Journalists (Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten, NVJ) is a combination of a trade union and a professional organization. The Amsterdam-based NVJ has around 9,000 members. It defines itself as an organization with an ideological aim: the protection
of the freedom of press. It also claims to represent the material and immaterial interests of journalists.

Reporters covering parliament in The Hague can join the Parliamentary Press Association (Parlementaire Pers Vereniging, PVV). Established in 1925, the Foreign Press Association of the Netherlands (Buitenlandse Persvereniging in Nederland, BPV) is a professional organization representing up to 90 foreign journalists who cover the Netherlands for foreign media. The Dutch Society of Chief Editors (Nederlands Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren) issued a journalistic code in 1995, and functions as an important platform for debate (Bakker and Vasterman 152).

The Dutch Publishers Association (Nederlands Uitgeversverbond) organizes publishers of daily newspapers, magazines, professional and scientific journals, and books. Publishers of weekly and bi-weekly newspapers and cable news are part of the Dutch Association of Local Newspapers (Nederlandse Nieuwsbladpers, NNP).

Founded in 1952, the Dutch Association of Film and Television Workers (Beroepsvereniging van Film- en Televisiemakers, NBF) encompasses professionals working in the film and television industry. The production companies in this field are represented by the Dutch Trade Association of Independent Television Producers (OTP, Onafhankelijke Televisie Producenten). Local and regional media are united in the Dutch Federation of Local Public Broadcasters (Organisatie van Lokale Omroepen in Nederland, Olon).

Advertisers established the Association of Dutch Advertisers (BVA, Bond van Adverteerders). Advertising agencies, however, are part of the Union of Communication Consultancy Agencies (VEA, Vereniging van Communicatie-adviesbureaus).
When it comes to complaints against press, it is interesting to note that unlike other neighboring countries, the Netherlands does not have a national press ombudsman. Readers, however, have the possibility to file complaints to the newspapers themselves, to the courts, or to the Press Council (Raad voor de Journalistiek). The Press Council is charged with the examination of complaints against violations of good journalistic practice. Its verdicts are published in the bi-weekly magazine of the Dutch Association of Journalists and on the website of the Press Council.

On its website, the Council states that it is established and maintained by a foundation called Stichting Raad voor de Journalistiek. Important media organizations are enrolled in the foundation, such as: the Netherlands Union of Journalists, the Dutch Society of Chief-Editors, and (coordinating) organizations of public and commercial broadcasting (RvdJ.nl). It is of importance to mention that because of the freedom of speech, the Press Council is not able to force anyone to render account over his/her publications or to impose any sanctions such as rectification (Bakker and Vasterman 153).

Complaints against advertising are also possible through the Advertising Code Commission (Reclame Code Commissie). The advertising code is available in English on the website of the Advertising Code Commission.

There are organizations that provide subsidies for media projects. The Dutch Cultural Media Fund (Het Media Fonds) promotes the development and production of high-quality artistic programs by the national and regional public broadcasting corporations. Bakker and Vasterman shed light on another foundation which subsidizes media projects. The Foundation for Special Journalistic Projects (Fonds Bijzondere Journalistieke Projecten) supports journalists who want to realize special research projects (153).
Furthermore, the Dutch Press Fund preserves media diversity in the Netherlands; a key objective of the media policy in the country (Puustinen, Thomas, and Pantti 13). The Press Fund provides loans and subsidies to newspapers, magazines and websites. It also supports research projects and joint efforts to improve minorities’ access to the media.

5. Conclusion

Exploration of the somehow unique Dutch media system shows that the media and culture in the country are very much connected, especially recently with regards to the issue of minorities and their integration in the society. The pillarization model in the media is not yet absent. The focus of the recent Dutch governments, however, is on how to have cross-cultural media programs that target all Dutch citizens regardless of their origins. Will such a policy succeed in achieving its goals?

Awad and Roth are a bit skeptical about this new policy claiming that it does not foster democratic inclusion. Such a hypothesis needs further study and interdisciplinary research. It is indeed a fact that the right-wing politicians in the Netherlands have been gaining a strong position in the recent years. Freedom party (Partij voor de Vrijheid) led by Geert Wilders, known for his criticism against Islam and migrants, was supporting the former Dutch coalition government as part of an agreement to guarantee its majority in the parliament. But it is also true that the mayor of Rotterdam, which has the largest port in Europe, is a Muslim who was born in Morocco.

The question that should be examined is whether minorities are present in the media or are they excluded. This brings us back to the issue of diversity, which could be achieved through different ways; whether through multiculturalism or cross-culturalism in the media. After all, the
Netherlands does not prevent programs in the local language of minorities or that appeal to them. It is just not subsidizing such programs, in favor of the cross-cultural ones.
Works Cited


