

Diversity and Rights. Connecting Media Reform and Public Service Media

Diversidad y derechos. La conexión entre la reforma mediática y los medios públicos

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Abstract

This article addresses the gap between media reform movements and support for public service media (PSM). It argues that the “critical juncture” created by the challenges of digitalization has shifted the focus from diversity to communication rights as a central aim for media reform. It posits that rights-based approach would position PSM in the framework of different media reform movements, and hence foster new alliances by connecting it to media freedom and digital rights discourses. In addition, it suggests that media reform movements would benefit from supporting PSM as a tool for achieving democratic communication rights.

Resumen

El siguiente artículo aborda la distancia existente entre los movimientos que defienden la reforma de los medios y el propio apoyo a los medios públicos. En él, se defiende que el “momento crítico” que se ha generado a partir del reto de la digitalización ha acabado por desplazar el foco del tema de la diversidad a la concepción de la comunicación como derecho en tanto que aspiración central dentro de la reforma mediática. El texto argumenta que un

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acercamiento basado en la comunicación como derecho posicionaría a los medios públicos dentro del marco de acción de los movimientos pro-reforma y, por lo tanto, permitiría promover nuevas alianzas al conectar estos movimientos con discursos centrados en las ideas de la libertad mediática y los derechos digitales. Además, se sugiere que los movimientos pro-reforma pueden beneficiarse de su propia defensa de los medios públicos como herramienta de cara a lograr derechos democráticos asociados a la comunicación.

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1. Introduction: Critical Junctures

Mediated communication is at a “critical juncture” (McChesney, 2007). We are at a moment in history when old models, structures, and values are being challenged, and even changed, by intertwined commercial, political, and technological developments. The current juncture entails global phenomena such as polarized news coverage. We are witnessing rampant hate speech and viral misinformation, as well as the collapse of the old business models of quality journalism. While intermediaries such as search engines and social media platforms provide access and direct content to audiences they also create “filter bubbles” (Pariser, 2011). As several indices reveal¹, threats to both on- and offline freedom of expression are on the rise all around the world. These widely documented and discussed examples of trends in the media landscape have implications for traditional 20th century democratic ideals. We may be merely at the beginning of many of those changes – and they do not look promising for media and journalism as harbingers of democracy.

Media reform as a concept has generally been linked to these kinds of critical junctures and to attempts to address them (McChesney, 2016). As a movement, media reform is based on the idea of democratizing the media, specifically on the attempts by civil society actors and other non-profit organizations to work towards more democratic media access, content, and structures (e.g., Hackett & Carroll, 2006). Being responsive to the changes in the media landscape, the concept and practices of media reform are ever evolving. For example, some reforms have aimed to transform entire media systems (e.g., Price et al., 2000), address community radio licenses (Sassaman & Tridish 2016), research and advocate global Internet freedom issues (Franklin, 2016), or foster media literacy and journalistic training (Townson, 2016). It is important to note that media reform is not about “communication activism” (e.g., Barbas & Postill, 2017) where different communicative actions and technologies are used to organize and mobilize social movements; it is specifically about changing the media for better, not about change via the media.

¹ See, e.g., Reporters without Borders: https://rsf.org/en/ranking_list/analysis and Freedom House Freedom of the Net: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2017> [Accessed: 15/11/2017].

It is interesting that, apart from relatively few examples (e.g., Goldsmiths 2016), public service broadcasting (PSB) and its digital, multi-platform version public service media (PSM) have never been at the center of media reform activities, or related academic theorization and empirical analyses. In the case of mature PSM organizations, this may be because their presence has been fundamental and relatively secure. They have, de facto, been publicly funded manifestations of the work for media democratization. PSB and PSM have traditionally played a key role in informing, entertaining, and educating citizens. They have served to protect minority voices and ensure content diversity in terms of media markets.

Today, it could be argued that communication and the media have an even wider role in serving the public, and PSB/PSM are not tackling the task alone. The media ecosystem of content providers, platforms, and audiences looks very different than when PSB was first instituted. The so-called “legacy media” couple and compete with the Internet, social networks, and mobile communications.

At the same time, as Voltmer (2013) has observed, PSB all around the world are being threatened by commercial competitors and government pressures: they need to discover new ways to ensure their independence and inclusivity. The urgency of finding new strategies is relevant to (1) mature PSM organizations in globalizing marketplaces; as well as (2) contexts in which state media are being transformed into PSM (e.g., former Eastern Europe, some Asian countries, many Latin American countries); or (3) where public interest media (including PSB, community, and local media) face severe commercial competition and/or need to be revitalized. This is echoed by a statement released by the Council of Europe²: there exists an emerging trend of threats to the independence of public broadcasters or to their regulatory bodies, including political interference in the editorial line of public broadcasters, insufficient safeguards in the legislation against political bias, and the lack of appropriate funding to guarantee the independence of the public broadcasters. In addition, there are concerns about legislation and practices pertaining to the appointment, composition and dismissal of regulatory bodies or the management of public broadcasters.

2 See <http://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/public-service-broadcasting-under-threat-in-europe> [Accessed: 20/06/2017].

In this paper, we argue that, since the media reform movement in its different guises is striving to democratize the media landscape in an increasingly more complex environment, it should recognize the public service ideal and practices as ideas, models, and actions worth aligning with. Similarly, we claim that PSM are the institutional media form capable of engaging with media reform topics – from content diversity to privacy.

We recognize that media reform is not a single, uniform movement, but an array of ever-changing and evolving civic activities (e.g., Napoli, 2008). We also understand that PSM can have a very different makeup as to their organizational and regulatory structures, and their cultural, political, social, and economic contexts (see, e.g., Losifides, 2011; Terzis, 2007). Hence, in order to discuss the core goals and possible parallel strategies, we will employ very basic definitions. Media reform is understood here as a broad umbrella movement that is used to describe activities aimed at media democratization. So, PSM are understood (most often) as national institutions that offer citizens universal and comprehensive access to mediated content and services, for their information, education and even entertainment.

In this article, we will discuss one common feature that characterizes both media reform and PSM, i.e. the shift from a diversity-based mission and remit to that of a rights-based approach. We will first discuss the question of diversity, a normative goal that has justified the existence of PSM in 20th-century commercializing media markets and fueled many a media reform effort, ranging from alternative content to curbing concentration of ownership (e.g., Napoli & Aslama, 2011). We will then address the current context of multi-media, multiplatform communication environments. Since access to content and content diversity have arguably multiplied, if not exploded, what are the implications and concerns for media reform? Furthermore, how does this position PSM, institutions that were designed to guarantee access and fill the gaps in content diversity? To our mind, today's media landscape has given rise to the re-emergence of rights-based approaches to communication policies, as well as activism and even PSM (Aslama Horowitz & Nieminen, 2016). Lastly, we will discuss the implications of the concepts of diversity and rights as unifying principles for PSM and the media reform movement, and refer to the potential strategic implications both for media reform embracing PSM as a strategic focus.

2. Diversity: The Dilemma of the Mass Media Era

Assessing media systems is a fundamental dimension of the work of not only policy-makers and media scholars, but also of public media organizations and media reform activists and advocates. Media scholars, critics, and policy-makers have used the concept of diversity as a normative goal for democratic media. A well-functioning media system has frequently been associated with the extent to which it facilitates the dissemination of a large array of ideas and viewpoints from a diverse range of sources, in order to foster the existence of an informed citizenry, an environment of inclusiveness and, ultimately, stable and effective self-governance (Napoli, 2001).

Translating this so-called “diversity principle” into media system assessment has often taken the form of efforts to assess the range of sources and viewpoints represented in traditional mass media outlets (Napoli, 1999). Such efforts have guided policy-makers and have been the source of legal, methodological, definitional, and normative disputes for decades (Hellman, 2001; Napoli & Karppinen, 2013). The diversity principle has been one of the key arguments for PSB in the broadcasting era: its aim was to supply all citizens with a variety of content. Throughout the history of PSM institutions, diverse representations, genres, languages, and so on, were often included as a part of broadcasting and subsequent multimedia remits. During the times of commercialization, digitalization, and the resulting proliferation of channels in traditionally PSB-dominated contexts, diversity was used as a guiding principle of the role of PSM. It had the mandate to offer full service radio and TV channels or, at a minimum, bridge the gap in genres left by commercial operators (e.g., Aslama et al., 2004).

Diversity – including issues of ownership, representation, and locality – has also been a defining factor for many actions under the umbrella of media reform. As Hackett and Carroll (2006) observe, in their early seminal research on media reform movements in the US, Canada, and the UK, the core concern of the media’s “democratic deficit” was what they call public sphere failure, that is, people were given insufficient access to relevant civic information. In this connection, concentration and media monopolies, the unequal representation of minorities, as well as imbalances in terms of media content access and homogenization, all had a hand in that deficit. One underlying factor in this regard

has been the commercialization and privatization of common cultural products; in other words, the corporatization of the public commons of knowledge.

While many of these observations may still ring true, in today's increasingly participatory and fragmented media environment, the diversity of ideas and viewpoints can now be potentially driven more forcefully by increasingly more widespread citizen participation in the media system. Much has been written about how the barriers to entry in new media contexts are dramatically lower than those that characterized traditional counterparts; and in which opportunities to produce and distribute content are much more widely available (Benkler, 2007; Carpentier, 2011; Napoli, 2011). According to many cultural scholars (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2013), we are also spawning a culture of participation that enables us to showcase our individuated productions, while simultaneously creating "public" and "civic" value. The most optimistic scholars contend that digital media might have created "Democracy's Fourth Wave" in contexts such as that of the Arab Spring (Castells, 2012; Howard & Hussain, 2013). Could diversity be achieved by the proliferation of content and civic participation?

As mentioned in the introduction, we are at a paradoxical, critical juncture. Instead of an infinitely diverse networked public sphere that many predicted some decades ago (see, e.g., Erickson & Aslama, 2010), we are experiencing a media environment where access, ability and literacy, privacy, and "right to audiences" (Napoli & Syblis, 2007) are all potentially endangered. Where does that leave the diversity principle? Hackett and Carroll (2006) have already noted the gradual erosion of communication rights as one concern for media reform: apart from digital divides, the Web and mobile technologies also pose challenges such as privacy and surveillance.

3. Multimedia, Digital Era: The (Re-)Emergence of Rights-Based Approaches

Hackett and Carroll (2006) have identified a current trend: the concept of communication rights, evoked by the Global South in the 1970s to counter the Westernization of communication, is now generally employed in civil society manifests and international declarations to indicate the role of the individual in

the global digital media ecosystem (e.g., Karppinen, 2017). But how should we understand a rights-based approach in terms of media reform or PSM?

The first step, or layer, is to contextualize the media and communication in the framework of human rights. Arguably, human and communication rights are both elusive concepts: they have many context-based variations, have evolved over time, and are operating in the complex cusp of theory and praxis (Goodale, 2012). In addition, Sen (2004) has argued that human rights are not principally legal constructs, but rather associated with the freedoms that have a special significance for societies and individuals. He also underlines that human rights are related to “survivability in unobstructed discussion” (Sen, 2004, p. 320). Hence, their formulation alone requires a communicative right and freedom of expression, as well as the right to take part and be heard in a dialogue. The same digital ecosystem context that creates ever more mediatized societies facilitates borderless participation. This offers individuals new communicative opportunities, while also heightening challenges as regards freedom of expression, access to technologies and content, and privacy, as well as the very concept of authority in the digital era and the democratizing potential of the media in non-democratic contexts (e.g., Ziccardi, 2013).

Following this line of argumentation, basic human rights currently intersect with communication rights perhaps more than ever. Human rights that are most often mentioned in relation to communication include principles such as freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of information, popular education, and so on. Special emphasis is often placed on the rights of minorities and subaltern groups, including women, different ethnic and cultural groups, and people with disabilities. In the digital era, new rights such as that to be forgotten are being formalized. And, as in the case of broader human rights, communication rights are represented in a number of different approved and ratified conventions and agreements (Padovani & Calabrese, 2014, pp. 1-13). Drawing on those agreements, the Issue Paper by the Council of Europe (2011, p. 32) on PSB and human rights posits that a rights-based approach is a “conceptual framework for a process of development” that is based on international human rights standards and directed at promoting and protecting human rights. In essence, this process should pinpoint inequalities and address discriminatory practices of unjust distribution of power.

In addition to this “first layer”, that is, the framing of mediated communication within institutionalized human rights, there exists a “second

layer” that addresses particular rights pertaining to communication. There are several re-iterations of what communication rights may mean in practice. For instance, the International Panel on Social Progress at Princeton University (2017) understands and operationalizes communication rights as: the right to be a content creator; the right to free expression; the right to knowledge and information; and the right to privacy³.

Here, we understand specific communication rights as five distinct operational categories (see, Nieminen, 2009, pp. 14-15). Access is about citizens’ equal access to information, orientation, entertainment, and other rights-related content. Availability indicates that relevant content (as to information, orientation and entertainment, among others) should be equally available to citizens. Competence means that citizens should be educated in the skills and abilities that enable them to use the means and information available to them according to their own needs and desires. Dialogical rights go beyond the right to create content. They involve making public spaces available that enable citizens to publicly share information, experiences, views, and opinions on common issues, and the right to be heard by those in power. Finally, privacy indicates two different things: first, everybody’s private life has to be protected from unwanted publicity, unless its exposure is in the public interest or a person decides to make it public; and second, protection of personal data means that all information gathered by authorities or businesses must be treated as confidential.

3.1 Rights and Media Reform

The ideas discussed above are not new to the media reform movement. While diversity of content and ownership was the central aim of some major media reforms of the broadcast era during the 1990s and early 2000s, the evolution of communication rights can be said to have begun with the emphasis on the freedom of expression in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations (1948). During the decades that followed, media reform was widely discussed in a global context, in terms of more inclusive forms of communication such as the right to have access to information or the right to

3 <https://www.ipsp.org/> (accessed 15 November 2017).

communicate (e.g., Joergensen, 2014). With the normalization of the Internet in daily life, the rights-based approach to ICTs has become more critical on a global and national level alike. The recent years have witnessed political movements around the world (some of them loosely connected) which have been organized with the help of media technologies and user-generated content, from the Arab Spring to the Spanish October 15 Movement (Barbas & Postill, 2017; Howard & Hussain, 2013).

In addition, concerns about rights in the cyberspace (the abovementioned privacy, copyright, freedom of expression) point to the relationship between rights and the sociopolitical order. Access not only to diverse content but to production is key to this kind of political participation or that in the social, economic, and cultural spheres of many societies. It is no wonder that several countries, for instance Finland, have decided to legalize broadband access as a human right.⁴ The United Nations took the same stance in November 2011 (LaRue, 2011).

The media reform movement has embraced these changes and challenges, and rights-based approaches have now moved from the margins to its core. As Shade (2014, p. 152) argues, when depicting the US and Canadian media reform movements during this decade, there are a multitude of issues that different individuals, groups, and coalitions are trying to influence by leveraging media and communication technologies. These issues range from data retention to public and community broadcasting, under four main categories: Infrastructure, Content, Privacy-Surveillance, and Intellectual Property-Copyrights.

Indeed, as the recent international collection of academic and advocacy analyses on media reform (Freedman et al., 2016) illustrates, organizations focusing on reforming local and national media systems exist and are very much alive all over the world. But the research in question also illustrates the advent of many Internet-based movements that do not define themselves as national. Moreover, sometimes a national policy dilemma will provoke global reactions, as in the case of the US SOPA-PIPA legislative proposals (e.g., Benkler et al., 2013). Media reformists now range from those who identify with the so called “media justice” stance of media reform and discuss race, gender, sexuality,

4 http://www.yle.fi/uutiset/news/2009/10/1mb_broadband_access_becomes_legal_right_1080940.html (accessed 20 June 2017).

and class in relation to media and communication technologies (see, Shade, 2014), to advocates lobbying for specific technology policies, through hackers who create tools to safeguard the freedom of the Internet.

In sum, the “old media era” activists lobby for more regulation for media ownership and for better journalism⁵ and criticize the commercial advertising culture⁶, while in the “digital, multiplatform era” activists build mesh networks⁷ for those in need, crowdsource to do whistleblower work⁸, and help bloggers working in undemocratic circumstances to remain anonymous with circumvention tools⁹. Yet, the two approaches might need one another. For instance, social media networks and other Internet giants have created de facto global monopolies in several areas of our daily lives.

3.2 Rights and PSM

If the rights-based approach to communication stems from the global understanding of human rights, can we apply communication rights to traditionally national PSM and the ideals that they represent? As Helberger and Burri (2015, pp. 1319-1320) put it, “[t]he questions of whether media users are still exposed to a diversity of content and how to ensure the attainment of this diversity as a key public policy objective take on very different connotations.” Many would argue that there exists a certain conceptual rift between PSM and communication rights: in most related literature, public service in the media sector has been linked to democracy theories and, in practice, to democratic societies. While rights-based approaches “share a commitment to the ideal of equal political dignity for all”, and while the full realization of human rights requires democratic government, the ideals of democracy and rights point in different directions (Donnelly, 2013, pp. 222-223). The former is about collective empowerment, whereas the latter is about individuals. Associated with this is

5 E.g., <http://www.mediareform.org.uk/about> [Accessed: 20/06/2017].

6 E.g., <https://www.adbusters.org/> [Accessed: 20/06/2017].

7 E.g., <https://hyperboria.net/> [Accessed: 20/06/2017].

8 E.g., <https://freedom.press/> [Accessed: 20/06/2017].

9 E.g., https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/Censorship.pdf [Accessed: 20/06/2017].

the traditional practice of PSB: the paternalistic, one-way flow of communication from one center that disseminates information to anybody within its reach.

However, PSM might be more connected to the rights-based approach than first meets the eye. Donnelly (2013) contrasts the ideals of democracy and rights and thus seems to follow the division between communitarianism and liberalism, familiar to Anglo-American political philosophy. In the European tradition, however, citizens' rights are not primarily a question of individualization, as Donnelly seems to presume. Following T.H. Marshall's (1950) seminal contribution, civic rights are a prerequisite for democracy and the active participation of the citizenry in social life: without the former there can be no democracy. Even though different copies of the model are to be found the world over, PSB has been an inherently European institution from the very start. In practical terms, then, public service broadcasters have been used as vehicles to realize certain communication rights, not least that of access to information and other content.

Furthermore, since PSM coexist with their commercial competitors in the same space, this may lead to compromises in terms of intermediary liability, especially regarding privacy and freedom of expression (e.g., MacKinnon, 2012). In practical terms, national PSB companies are regulated under national legislation, but their activities in social media are (mostly) under US jurisdiction. And, conversely, as Ziccardi (2013, p. 39) observes, digital communication and its platforms may have the potential to enhance international human rights, but this process is continuously being hindered by nation-states and their interests. How would PSM organizations react to those challenges? Neither does diversity as a concept and policy principle adequately respond to such dilemmas, nor does it support the legitimacy of public broadcasters.

Rights-based approaches are implicitly at the core of PSM: if we take an overall look at the responsiveness of different actors to communication rights in the media ecosystem, PSM fare very well. For example, community media may not have the resources and commercial media the motivation to guarantee everyone access, availability, and dialogical opportunities. Spontaneous or temporary media phenomena, including citizen journalism, may require more competence than many citizens have – both to create, consume, and participate. In today's media ecology, privacy is famously compromised both by commercial legacy media companies (tabloids – celebrities) and commercial online platforms (user data). PSM could indeed be the trusted gatekeepers and pro-active creators of

communication rights. And because the concept is about PSM, and not merely broadcasting, the institutional public service is in a particularly powerful position to serve the communication rights of the digital era. The original (even if implicit) role of PSM in safeguarding communication rights is clearly present and can be enhanced. No other media outlet has had that kind of on-going, sustainable commitment and obligation.

4. Conclusion: Rights as a Common Foundation

We have established that both PSM institutions and the different media reform movements emerging in the mass media era were mostly about the democratic deficit as regards the lack of media (ownership, content, localism) diversity. With centralized, often nation-based media systems where few produced for the masses, this approach made great sense. However, more recent reform movements in the digital era are often framing their activism and advocacy in terms of human or communication rights. Many have noted not only the power of media organizations and platforms in terms of commercial dominance, but also their role in providing access and human rights – resisting censorship – and in fundamentally shaping how we communicate, what we know, and what we share.

This involves a major shift in the way we understand and govern media systems. Some 15 years ago, van Cuilenburg and McQuail (2003) already saw this transformation coming:

Along with the redirection of policy there are also changes in priorities attaching to underlying values, and some older values are losing their force. The main area where this is occurring is in respect of social responsibility requirements, public service and altruism (non-profit goals). The “public interest” is being significantly redefined to encompass economic and consumerist values. (...) There is certainly a political wish to incorporate as large a proportion of the population as possible within the scope of new communication services, but the motives have more to do with commerce and control than with

“social equality” as a valued end in itself, which had been an essential element (ostensibly at least) in the social welfare philosophy. The concepts of “digital divide” and “(widening) information gaps” still figure in the background discourse to policy, but in practice policy in this respect mainly seeks to maximize opportunity for consumers to have access to new media. (van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003, pp. 200-201).

It is no wonder then that many a consumer rights organization is engaged in media reform¹⁰. Just as unsurprising is the fact that, facing the multiple challenges relating to the current critical juncture of the media landscape, scholars and organizations such as the Council of Europe (CoE, 2011) have begun to frame PSM in the same way, i.e. as the organizations most capable of ensuring communication and human rights. Given the global multi-platform environment, some propose that public service functions can also be performed by what could be called “*de facto* public media”, ranging from community media to networked projects and events (e.g., Bajomi-Lazar et al., 2012). A commercial TV channel may have a particularly important and engaging political debate program or news website; a community radio station may address a region’s issues in greater depth than national public service broadcasters; and citizens may inform each other (and the world) on the social media about current affairs more effectively than any legacy media news outlet.

At the same time, even in the multi-platform era of user-generated content, ownership concentration still is a key concern. Some even talk about a new form of media concentration, a kind of ‘Platform Imperialism’ (Jin, 2013) of which Google and Facebook offer prime examples.

The diversity of content on the Internet does not translate to the diversity of reception. As Napoli (2011, p. 246) notes, “with all of the information outlets currently available, focusing on source and content diversity is becoming less important than understanding the information that is actually consumed by media users.” One of the key challenges, then, is to reconcile the mass media era focus on the system – diversity – and the newly re-emerged focus on the rights of the individual.

10 E.g., <http://www.consumersinternational.org/our-work/digital/> [Accessed: 20/06/2017].

This is precisely where media reform can offer its support as international, organized, systematic, and overarching advocacy for PSB. This is currently being done in and by the advocacy organizations of PSM institutions themselves, such as the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and the Public Media Alliance (PMA). In addition, media development advocacy organizations such as the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), as well as different organs of the United Nations system such as UNESCO, recognize PSM as a cornerstone of democracy. Civic activity revolving around PSM is much more modest, although it does indeed exist. Just as an example, the membership-based Voice of the Listener & Viewer in the UK aims at communicating consumers views to broadcasters and broadcasting policy-makers. It “strives to promote and maintain diversity and plurality in public service broadcasting in order to maintain local and national democracy, our cultural and democratic traditions”¹¹. In addition, the Media Reform Coalition in the UK is concerned about public interest media and media ownership, and addresses issues pertaining to public service. Other European countries, such as Germany and Spain, also have civic organizations that are proponents of PSM.

A radical proposition concerning the direct link between rights and PSM has been voiced in the White Paper on Public Service Media and Human Rights by the Council of Europe (CoE, 2011): public service media should be based on human rights treaties and legislation, and it should in particular guard issues related to human rights, both in its content and as an organization. A special feature of this model is that it would include a number of new stakeholders in the work of PSM: not only the institutions themselves, national governments and regulators play a crucial role in creating and monitoring PSM, but also audiences. Furthermore, international human rights bodies, as well as communities of human rights activists and advocates, would be stakeholders. This model would entail a networked media ecosystem of sorts, one with a specific focus on the rights of individuals. It would also automatically include digital rights media reformers in its sphere.

Yet, in general, the current support for PSM is not citizen, but institution-driven and often focuses on them from the perspective of institutional challenges; from political support to strategic management. For that reason, more involvement from media reform movements, from a civic standpoint, would be

¹¹ <http://www.vlv.org.uk/vlv/what-does-vlv-do.html> [Accessed: 20/06/2017].

welcomed in order to integrate citizen-consumer opinions and more participatory decision-making and content creation into the realm of PSM.

Communication rights are therefore a natural extension of the PSM mission and a unifying link to media reform. The communication rights concept is wider than that of media reform and overrides the institutionality of PSM. The relationship between rights and reform can be explained by stating that in order to realize citizens' communication rights, it is not enough to reform the media, as they are not the only institutions defending citizens' rights to information and communication. In this respect, the claim for communication rights is not directed exclusively at the media or media regulation/ownership, but at the liberal democratic system as a whole. Given the current global challenges, media reform as a movement may seem tentative and ambiguous, and even futile. Yet it remains an effective mobilizing paradigm and strategy (McChesney, 2016, p. 5) – one that can advance communication rights and is doing just that. Similarly, PSM are not only the gatekeepers of communication rights, but can also function as tools for realizing at least some communication rights; while their remit is based on an ideal of democratic communication.

Because of their past and recent foci, media reform movements would gain major allies and means and mechanisms by participating in re-envisioning what public media should be in a networked society in which both diversity and communication rights are being challenged. As Freedman and Obar (2016) note, the three core strategies of media reform are know, be, and change the media. PSB has traditionally included the elements of know and be in its mission to support democracy and informed citizenship. But as institutional, formal constructs, PSM have yet to take shape in a concrete manner. So would they now be a concept, ideal, vision, and/or aim at this critical juncture, in order to implement the third strategy, i.e. to change and truly democratize the media?

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