

# UNIVERSALISM IN PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA



RIPE @ 2019

Edited by:  
Philip Savage, Mercedes Medina, & Gregory Ferrell Lowe

NORDICOM

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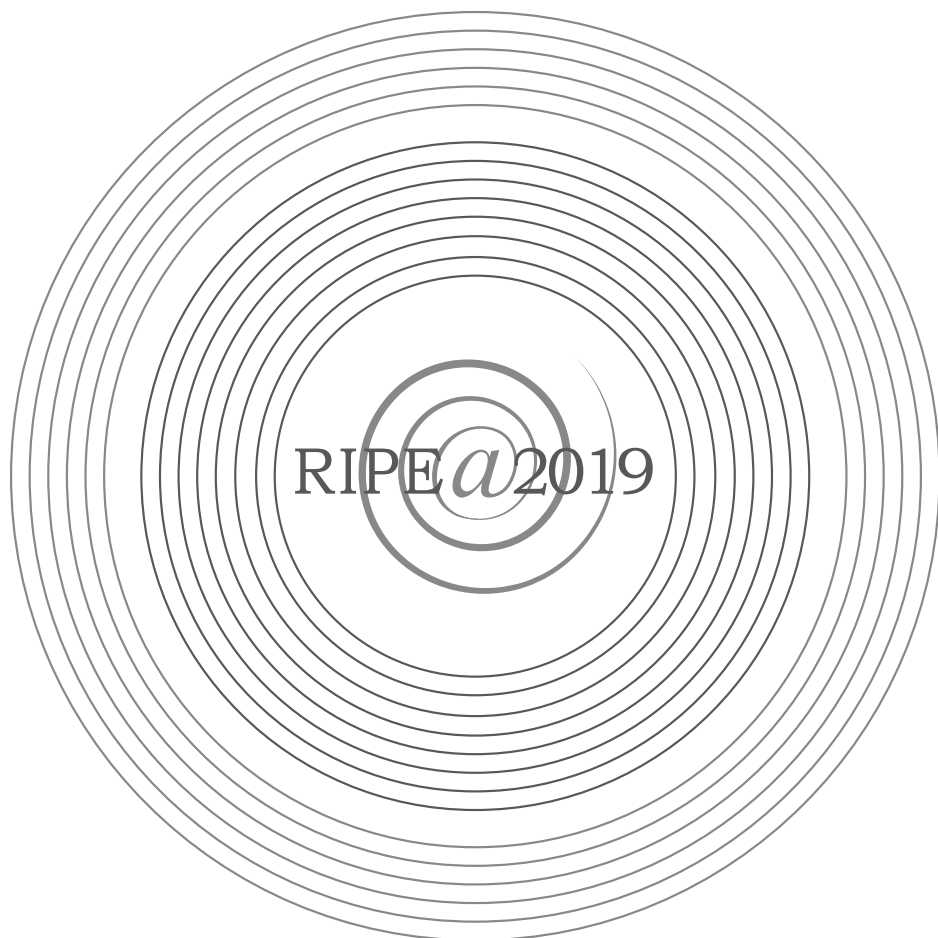
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## Preface

The RIPE@2018 Conference was a milestone for the initiative as the first conference hosted and held in southern Europe. The School of Communication at the University of Navarra was pleased to host the event, and did so in conjunction with CICOM 34, an annual International Communication Conference organised by the School. The RIPE initiative is committed to deepening fruitful relations between academic researchers and educators and the practitioner community in public service media (PSM), especially strategic managers. Our 2018 conference was sponsored by Corporación de Radio y Televisión Española (RTVE), Spain's PSM television company. Conference participants visited the new facilities at RTVE because the conference was conducted in Madrid. The RIPE leadership team and conference participants are grateful for the considerable work and investment from the University of Navarra that made the 2018 conference a success.

RTVE's commitment to sponsor the conference was not exempt from uncertainty, because a 2018 change in government caused complications. But the senior management team of RTVE took care to ensure the conference went forward, and RTVE's professionals added the practical component necessary to ground conference discussions in operational reality. The RTVE digital and innovation manager, Ignacio Gómez, provided an insightful overview of the Spanish media market and the challenges it poses for RTVE in the new digital consumption context. The technologic strategic and digital innovation manager, Pere Vila, demonstrated RTVE's leading role in Spain's digital transformation and emphasised relations with audiences and producing new contents for new devices. Pablo García Blanco, commissioner for corporate public affairs, clarified the European vision of PSM and explained how building support and public affairs work. Finally, Roberto Suarez, head of strategy and media intelligence for the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), discussed the supreme importance of ensuring PSM's contribution to society to secure the future of the enterprise in Europe, taking into account powerful transnational competitors that include Amazon, Apple, Disney, Google, and Netflix. The organisers and participants appreciate the contributions from RTVE and the EBU.

The RIPE@2018 Conference theme was universalism and public service media. The theme focused attention on challenges and opportunities involved with achieving the historic and continuing universal service mission for PSM in today's era of media abundance. The conference theme has been more fully

developed in the work undertaken to produce this book, the RIPE@2019 Reader – ninth in the series published by Nordicom. In the age of channel scarcity, universalism was not easy to achieve, but it was inarguably easier than today. As mass media, radio, and television enjoyed universal growth and reach in the period of monopolies and oligopolies (depending on the country), the same programmes were watched and heard by millions of people in each country at the same time.

In the 1960s and 1970s, broadcasting shortened distances and strengthened ties between distant people. Television played a formative role in the universalisation of human relations and the sharing of knowledge. This mission had pronounced importance in Europe, because from its start, broadcasting was conceived as a public service mandate that included a legal requirement to provide a universal service. This was correlated with the pursuit of cultivating enlightenment, promoting social cohesion, and providing a fair, full, and equitable range of media services (UNESCO, 2005).

Nowadays, the “mass media” of yesteryear has been substituted by “a mass” of media channels across an expanding range of digital platforms. Access to information, culture, and entertaining has become greater and easier thanks to the Internet and social media. Public companies have developed their digital departments as online services too. But the Internet is a global media platform (Albarran & Goff, 2000) not only because it is connected around the world but also because it does not have a specific geographic constituency. In addition, more or less any activity of human interest is available on the web and anyone can create content to share. That is why the concept of universalism must be reconsidered, reimagined, and renewed.

PSM has been severely challenged by deepening crisis for the past 20 years, at least. As Richeri (1994) suggested, the crisis has three dimensions: 1) it is a *legitimacy* crisis because private media can perform many of the same functions as public media – this dimension has been compounded by problems for public media as nationalist and state media enterprises, cultivating political connotations that are difficult to reconcile with public service; 2) it is a *financial* crisis as growth of competition has led to steep decreases in income and an increase in production costs, higher costs for acquisition of rights, and complications for human resources that has made financing difficult, especially for managers that have had a bureaucratic mindset rather than a business orientation; and 3) and it is also an *identity* crisis, where the commercialism of media systems has created market dynamics that are a key driver in managerial decision-making.

The debate on the future of public television features differing solutions, but no single option is appropriate for all. Each dimension requires distinctive solutions, and all three must be tackled as a package. But the principles that legitimate the public service mission for this enterprise continue to emphasise universalism, diversity, independence, and distinctiveness. The universal ser-

vice obligation means PSM must somehow guarantee that the majority of the population have access to services regardless of geographic and financial constraints (Born & Prosser, 2001). Universality refers not only to physical availability but also to issues of language, understanding, and interest (Sakr, 2012). Consequently, they must be diverse, that is to say, the audience targets, types of programmes, and subjects taken into account must be broad and varied. To do so, they should be independent from political or economic power and not biased by any ideological influence. The contributions comprising this collection treat many of the most important issues related to this set of concerns and mandated requirements, and do so with a critical orientation that examines the past and future of the concept as a viable practice.

I want to close by thanking Gregory Ferrell Lowe, a founder of the initiative and the RIPE continuity director, for supporting our university, myself, and many of my colleagues, in our efforts to organise the 2018 conference in Madrid. We are pleased to have contributed to the inaugural effort to expand RIPE's efforts in the southern part of Europe, and beyond. I am personally grateful, as well, for the opportunity to participate in editing this volume. Much thanks to Philip Savage at McMaster University in Canada, our co-editor, and to our colleagues at Nordicom for supporting this publication once again. Finally, we thank everyone who contributed to the conference in various roles, especially the workgroup chairs, and to the reviewers of the chapters included in this RIPE Reader.

*Mercedes Medina*

Navarra, 21 March 2020

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## Chapter 1

# Universalism in public service media

## *Paradoxes, challenges, and development*

Gregory Ferrell Lowe & Philip Savage

From the beginning of radio as a social medium in the 1930s, the notion of universalism was a foundational principle for legitimating broadcasting as a public trust (Barnouw, 1966). Until media deregulation became the preferred paradigm in the 1980s, the principle was bedrock to the broadcasting mission and a mandate for public service roles and functions (Wu, 2010). Even in the US, where commercial financing and private ownership were the preferred arrangement for operationalising radio (despite opposition), the Radio Act of 1927 required broadcasting to “serve the public interest, convenience and necessity” (US Congress, 1925: n.p.). There was near universal agreement that broadcasting should serve everyone.

In the late twentieth century this ideal was deliberately abandoned. Caught up in a deregulatory frenzy that impacted many industries, governments increasingly embraced the commercial exploitation of broadcasting even in countries that had long resisted, as had been the case in Scandinavia (Ala-Fossi, forthcoming). Societies were promised more competition, more innovation, and vigorous economic growth for media industries. Some of this came to be true, but what was lost also matters. The explosive growth of online media enabled by advances in digitalisation and sped-up globalisation has unraveled domestic efforts to regulate media.

Today’s growing distrust in media is partly rooted in these dynamics and often justified by the illusion that more media in more platforms will ensure better media in all platforms. There seems to be more of everything on offer except social responsibility. Universalism is no longer much discussed in popular, political, or academic circles. When announced as the theme for the RIPE@2018 conference in Madrid, the response was muted and perplexed. The organisers were challenged to secure enough participation because many public service media (PSM) scholars consider the topic outdated and reactionary. The initial idea had been to focus only on the problems faced by PSM companies in their efforts to attract the attention and support of youth audiences. In formulating

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Lowe, G. F., & Savage, P. (2020). Universalism in public service media: Paradoxes, challenges, and development. In P. Savage, M. Medina, & G. F. Lowe (Eds.), *Universalism in public service media* (pp. 11–24). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

the theme, we came to see this as one important part of a broader set of challenges involved with attracting all sorts of people who comprise the publics that PSM are still mandated to serve. Essentially, the animating issue is what to do with and about the fading prospects to achieve universalism mandates for PSM in market-based contexts characterised by media-society relationships that are increasingly fragmented and unstable.

This RIPE anthology interrogates the historic universalism mission and investigates aspects of continuing relevance in the enactment of public service as a primary purpose of media performance. Our departure point is critical in orientation because we do not presume all was cozy and rosy in the bygone days of broadcasting monopolies and oligopolies when universalism was a more realistic and accepted proposition than it is in the 2020s. But the collection recognises the principled importance of universalism as an aspirational quest – a project worth pursuing because of the social value its accomplishment can provide, even if only ever partial in scope and scale. At best, that quest can be inspirational as well.

The quest for universal service involves two key dimensions: reach and genre. Its pursuit encourages PSM managers, programmers, and content-makers to think about more than markets and to understand programme content as more than products created to achieve competitive advantage. Both are important, but the pursuit of universalism requires an abiding commitment to provide services for publics that address the shared needs people have in a society and other communities, which are more than an amalgamation of individual preferences and “taste markets”. The pursuit also requires investment in new platforms and content that can extend both the reach and range of services with due respect for the diversity of needs and the unique affordances that the varied platforms can provide.

The universalism mission has never been easy or entirely fulfilled. There have always been considerable difficulties in its pursuit that indicate persistent sociocultural biases that must be squarely faced. But the pursuit of universalism matters to the extent that people still value a sufficient degree of cohesion, trustworthiness, fairness, and inclusion that can be partly facilitated by media – or not. The latter is the “scary part” because we live in communities at multiple levels: national, regional, and local (with implications for PSM in all three). To that end, this introductory chapter situates the contributions to this volume and provides a grounding for readers to survey and grapple with a contemporary discourse about universalism as a principled pursuit that has, is, and is likely to remain, both difficult to achieve in practice and in need of serious public debate and reconsideration.

## Roots of the universalism ideal in broadcasting

As an ideal, universalism is rooted in the Enlightenment movement of European history from the late seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. The Age of Reason, as often described, produced a flowering of philosophy on the nature of humanity and the importance of the individual as a rational being possessed of “inalienable” rights. This suggests a dialectical tension between the general (humanity as a whole) and the specific (individual rights). The Enlightenment cultivated much that the Western world has cherished, celebrated, and advocated as identity markers – especially democracy, capitalism, and science.

The chapter from Barbara Thomass within this collection treats the early development, background, and application of universalism as “a principle positing the equal moral worth of all persons”. The ethical nature of the concept is normative but, as noted, indicates a dialectical tension. On the one hand, the principle posits a shared heritage of presumed universal value in believing all people inherit a fundamental set of rights by virtue of being human. Famously, the American Declaration of Independence declares that “all men are created equal”. The French Revolution proclaimed “liberty, equality, and fraternity” for all. Leaving aside the problem of gender bias and demonstrated class bias in the periods when Western democracies were constructed, and the thorny issue of colonialism and slavery that remain a festering sore, the essential point is that humans have rights that are universal in scope and essential in nature.

At the same time, however, the universalism principle prioritises the individual to varying degrees, depending on constitutions, legislation, policy, and other adaptations. In the US, each individual has the Constitutional right to pursue “life, liberty, and happiness”. So, universalism is both a shared human right and an individual affordance. In other liberal democratic countries, universalist rights also speak to broadly shared community rights and protections, extending the universal right to minority language and cultural communities (c.f. Canadian or Belgian minority language rights). And the suffragette movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the civil rights movement in the US since the 1960s, have significant importance.

The universalism ideal has been fundamental to the designs and intentions of welfare states, also called welfare societies. This is a comparatively recent application. According to Renwick (2018), until the late 1800s, most believed the welfare of individual citizens was nothing the state should be overly concerned with. Arguments against states “meddling” with the public welfare feature themes that are frequently articulated by conservative constituencies to this day: The poor should not be “coddled” because they need to own their situations to change; the state should not interfere with market dynamics; the costs for ensuring a safety net of public services such as education and health will bankrupt the national treasury; and so forth.

The grim realities of living conditions and life expectancy for the working class in Western nations (Renwick focuses on Britain, but the same would apply elsewhere) gradually and cumulatively encouraged social movements advocating change. The rationale was certainly argued on moral grounds (e.g., the unreasonable use of the “poor house” to incarcerate those who could not repay debts), but also on pragmatic grounds – the cost of malnutrition, disease, and lack of education was a drag on national economies. Positions for and against became increasingly volatile around the turn of the twentieth century with struggles for unionisation, civil rights, and extending the voting franchise to women. This came to a head in the 1930s as a consequence of the economic collapse of Western economies during the Great Depression (Domhoff, 2013) and was cemented by the scale of need to deal with monumental recovery efforts after World War II.

In the 1930s–1980s, the scale of social interest, concern, and prioritisation of universalism paralleled development of the mass society paradigm (Buechler, 2013). Even earlier, universalism was trumpeted in the development of mass production and distribution in many industries: American Telephone and Telegraph (1885), General Electric (1892), General Motors (1908), Radio Corporation of America (1919), Universal Studios (1912), British Broadcasting Company (1922), and National Broadcasting Company (1926). These familiar corporate names emphasise the importance of scale and reach, with an obvious affection (or affectation) for national pride.

Although the mass society paradigm was rooted in fears about potential alienation and isolation as a consequence of rapid urbanisation and advancing industrialisation, it had a brighter side in reflections on the potential for the new media of the day (broadcasting) to elevate public taste, improve general education, and strengthen national solidarity. This was especially pronounced in the philosophy of public service broadcasting as articulated in 1924 by John Reith, the first director general of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), in a book he titled *Broadcast Over Britain* – a curious phrase reflecting both an interest in universal reach in Britain and what Reith later described as “the brute force of monopoly” (Briggs, 1995: 217), which he considered essential to accomplish the public service broadcasting (PSB) enlightenment mission. As Hendy (2013: 13) observed, under this rubric broadcasting could be construed as a gift economy – something offered to all without the expectation of reciprocation with the “hope that in the process ordinary life might be made more interesting, more peaceful and more pleasurable”.

As the chapter by Minna Aslama Horowitz and Gregory Ferrell Lowe illustrates, the principle of universalism was a foundational ideal for PSB and a continuing normative mandate assigned to PSM by key stakeholders who demonstrate considerable uniformity in expectations. This is evident in documents published by the European Broadcasting Union, the Public Media Alliance, the



Council of Europe, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The pursuit of universalism remains a cornerstone of the public service mission in media. This being the case, two important questions immediately arise: 1) what are the key dimensions of universalism in practice, and 2) how achievable is the mission?

### Dimensions and complications in achieving universalism

Peter Goodwin, in his chapter “Universal – but not necessarily useful”, explores the history and legacy of PSB in Britain. Much of his discussion enjoys general application to other countries where PSB has long enjoyed an important presence. As elsewhere (if perhaps there first), in the UK universalist principles have mainly applied to “geographical universality” and “universality of appeal”. As he notes, these are fairly narrow concerns, and their definition has always been vague and bounded by numerous caveats.

This view is supported in the analysis by Barbara Thomass in her chapter, “Universalism in history, modern statehood, and public service media”. Her analysis extends the dimensions somewhat on the basis of earlier work by Paddy Scannell (1989) about operational aspects for doing public service in media. Scannell posited four dimensions of universalism in public broadcasting: 1) access and reach (corresponding with geographical universality); 2) genres and services; 3) relevance and impact (both 2 and 3 are aspects for universality of appeal); and 4) financing and attendant obligations.

The research by Karen Donders and Hilde Van den Bulck confirms these as core dimensions of the universalism mission in PSB across Europe. As they observe, from their start, public broadcasters have been required to provide the same quality and availability of services to every citizen at a national level. This legitimates an important asset for PSB, that is the justification to receive public funding. But it faces complications that have become critical with the growth of international media conglomerates and the splintering of national audiences into segmented communities of interest.

In the analogue era, universal reach was easier than universal appeal. Broadcasting companies had monopolies or oligopolies in the era of media scarcity. Matters of personal preference and taste publics were never easy to accommodate with one or a few generalist channels. This goes some distance in explaining the explosive growth of commercial broadcasting in Europe in the 1990s. Today, both aspects of universal service are difficult to ensure, not only because over-the-air is declining and on-demand is growing, but also because many countries have privatised transmission networks (as also noted by Goodwin in his chapter). And today’s realities indicate pressing concerns about overcoming a stubborn digital divide.

As for universal appeal, public broadcasters have primarily addressed national populations as a collective community – although never entirely and typically with a “high rail” bias (Lowe et al., 2016). The need to serve everyone on an equitable basis pleased few on a continual basis, but it did ensure a mixture of programmed genres in efforts to serve diverse interests and population demographics (Van den Bulck, 2001). The pursuit of universal appeal remains relevant for PSM companies but is ever more difficult to achieve in an environment characterised by media abundance as platforms and channels multiply (Donders, 2012). Arguably, the most difficult and costly achievement today is producing a mass audience. The value of that has risen sharply as its production has become scarcer (Doyle, 2013), one important reason accounting for soaring costs to obtain distribution rights for sports programming – one of the few genres that can still produce a mass audience (Mahon, 2017).

The universal service obligation is even more challenging in the digital media environment, a reality that is thematic in this collection. As Goodwin notes in his chapter, increasingly pervasive distribution of content over the Internet has largely undone the principle of geographical universality, and mixed genre general channels are no longer very popular due to the proliferation of niche options that undermine the universality of appeal. Universalism has fallen out of favour in part because it is less achievable.

This suggests problems beyond difficulties, perhaps impossibilities, with fulfilling the two key dimensions treated so far, problems that are keyed to making the transition from PSB to PSM (Lowe & Bardoel, 2007). This collection addresses some of critical importance.

## Contextual limitations in the pursuit of universalism

A variety of contextual factors have made it increasingly difficult to pursue the universalism mission as historically conceived. Several chapters in this collection address important contextual factors, including geography and population characteristics of a country, the dynamics of media market competition, challenges related to ex ante evaluation, questions about the public value of PSM, and issues related to purview.

Regarding the first factor, David Skinner analyses the evolution of mandated universalism requirements for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in “Historical dimensions of universalism at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation: Some implications for today”. The pursuit of this mission has persistently challenged the CBC due to its operational context. Canada is among the largest and most diverse countries in the world, consisting of 13 provinces and territories with two official languages (English and French) and a broad range of Aboriginal populations that are widely spread and speak as

many as 60 languages – representing just under a quarter of million speakers (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Since its origins in the 1930s, the CBC has been legislatively mandated to provide programming for all Canadians. Skinner’s analysis highlights limitations in the potential to fulfill the universalism mission that hinge on the complex interaction of geographic and population characteristics combined with stubborn financial constraints. Canadian legislation requires the CBC to provide comprehensive content that is, among other characteristics: predominantly and distinctively Canadian, regionally reflective, culturally expressive, contributing to shared national consciousness and identity, multicultural, multiracial, and should be widely available (Broadcasting Act, 1991: part 1, section 3m). While the universalism principle is comprehensively encapsulated in the legislation, and effectively unchanged from the Act’s passing in 1991 to the present day, fully realising this mandate in practice has been a nearly impossible mission, as is the case for many PSM organisations around the world. The universalism mission is especially challenging in Canada due to its enormity in geographic territory and the degree of multicultural complexity. Much smaller territories like the UK (comprised of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) and Germany (with great differences between populations in the east and west as well as the north and south) are severely challenged as well.

Julie Münter Lassen, in “Multichannel strategy, universalism, and the challenge of audience fragmentation”, tackles complications posed by PSM’s need to adapt to competition in commercial media markets, which is another broadly characteristic contextual factor today. As she makes clear, PSM companies need to achieve competitive success and this has encouraged a range of adaptations in approaches and priorities that are characteristic of the private commercial approach. In her analysis of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) and the Danish media market, she observes that upwards of 45 domestic television channels are available for a market of less than six-million people. Every PSB company in Europe has added new radio and television channels since the early 1990s that are profiled to reach targeted audiences that are variously defined. Some are intended to appeal to particular age groups, especially children (see the chapter by Donders & Hilde Van den Bulck) and teenagers or young adults. Some are defined by genre, especially channels for news and sports. And some are intended to serve the multicultural interests of increasingly diverse populations.

As Münter Lassen observes, this explosion of choices seems to “tick the box” for improving the potential to achieve universality in reach and appeal. But while this has some merit, she critiques “multichannelism” for contributing to the fragmentation of audiences and segmentation of publics – a point made earlier by Scannell (1990), as she notes. She further observes that the increasing focus on PSM instead of PSB encourages a multiplication of channels across an expanding array of platforms.

While this has potential instrumental value for pursuing the universal mission, it undoubtedly contributes to an increasing focus on personal tastes and individual preferences rather than the *raison d'être* for PSB, which is to serve a general public and society's collective needs and interests. We again observe the embedded dialectic. Her primary concern is whether DR's strategic response to compete effectively by attracting enough audiences to legitimate its importance as a PSM provider might not, paradoxically, undermine that very legitimacy. She doesn't see any realistic alternative to offering more channels as a portfolio, but encourages deeper thought about how to orient and operate the portfolio "as a unified offer or a series of discrete channels".

The chapter by Christina Gransow, "A question of value or further restriction? Public value as a core concept", investigates the impact of public value testing on five PSM providers in Europe, with a focus on how they have implemented new services intended to extend universal provision in the digital media environment. She shares the concerns of Münter Lassen that the multiplication of channels by PSB providers could undermine the universalism mission in a paradoxical way because, although intended to reach everyone with some channel or channels, their multiplication divides audiences into niches that PSM companies are producing. Her assessment of public value tests highlights a number of complicated questions: What universal values are centrally involved in serving the democratic, social, and cultural needs of a society? How are these values measured and by whom? Is the public involved, and if so, how much and with what impact? As treated in an earlier RIPE Reader (Martin & Lowe, 2014), PSM is caught in the dilemma of being required to serve everyone on an equitable basis without disturbing or distorting commercial markets. But as Christiana Gransow observes in her chapter, the universalist mission of public service media must consider larger principles; "essentially, the democratic, social, and cultural structure of a country is crucial to determining public value".

Karen Donders and Hilde Van den Bulck have done considerable earlier work on *ex ante* evaluation. In their contribution for this collection, "Universality of public service media and preschool audiences: The choice against a dedicated television channel in Flanders", they focus on an important case for Belgium's Vlaamse Radio en Televisieomroeporganisatie (VRT) in its efforts to provide services for Flemish-speaking children. They thoroughly analyse the degree to which the universalism argument that was made by VRT, to justify whether the initiative was considered and treated as credible by the Flemish public regulator. They found the regulator privileged the commercial logic of private sector competitors instead, although the opinions of commercial broadcasters were not substantiated by evidence. The private sector's interests disproportionately impacted the regulator's assessment of VRT's proposal and eventually resulted in a negative decision despite evidence from the PSM company that the market

impact would be quite limited and the public interest motivation was quite high. The authors conclude that although the universalism mandate is highlighted in Dutch media policy as a principle, in practice it is not taken seriously and decisions are “based on opaque, qualitative assessments of arguments”. In consequence, “overall, the entire process created the illusion of serving the public while being an exercise to have public broadcasters serve the media market rather than society and its citizens”.

An extreme case of public service, apparently at the service of the market but with unitary state incentives to temper both the market interests and the non-government public interests, is discussed in the chapter by Olga Dovbysh and Tatiana Belyuga: “Whose voices and what values? State grants for significant public content in the Russian media model”. Analysing the structure of current Russian media funding, this research investigates how forms of state support lead to paternalistic effects on media decisions. The research demonstrates that the mechanism of grants itself has some limitations in serving public needs. Two main groups of topics were found: typical public-related ones (culture, history, etc.) and the topics related to the official agenda of the government. The structure of state incentives means that public service topics are defined by journalists in ways that anticipate which topics and angles will be relevant to and supported by political officials. As such, they argue, only those voices that do not contradict the official political agenda receive public funding support.

Finally, as regards issues of purview, we have already touched on constraints posed by virtue of PSM’s national purview. Although the ethos and intentions of public service provision in media are arguably universal in merit and the sector is internationally affiliated through nongovernmental organisations (e.g., the European Broadcasting Union and the Public Media Alliance), the operational focus and locus of control for PSM is national. International services have been provided by several companies, including the BBC in Britain and Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (NHK) in Japan, but recent years have seen sharp declines in investment and prioritisation of such services (Plunkett, 2015). Even so, within national boundaries, PSB has long struggled to serve local communities on a universal basis and with the same quality and variety of services.

This issue is addressed in the chapter by Aleksandar Kocic and Jelena Milicev, “Challenges for public service radio in small nations: Lessons from Scotland”. Their analysis of BBC Radio Scotland indicates that the provider offers only a limited Scottish news service for regional interests, or perhaps Scotland’s national interests, depending on one’s perspective in the post-Brexit context. Local and community news provision is available only online, which they found does not include “local hard news” or “civic affairs news”, which help inform the political activity of citizens. Their argument resonates in other countries with strong regional identities, diverse languages, and multicultural identities.

Such services can be quite popular, as with Radio Suomi – a regional network of services provided by Yleisradio Oy (Yle), the Finnish public service media company (Finnpanel, 2019). Yle radio overall reaches about one-third of Finns on a daily basis and a little more than 50 per cent weekly. Of the total, Radio Suomi accounts for 20 per cent of the total daily reach and nearly one-third of the weekly. But here, as elsewhere, the risk of dwindling support for local and regional PSM is high, as documented in a 2016 report published by the European Audiovisual Observatory (Cappello, 2016).

PSM companies have long been criticised for an elitist view of their publics and for having a capitol-centric perspective (Lowe & Hujanen, 2003). This accounts for significant investments in regional service operations over the years. The justification has been premised on fulfilling the universalism mission at regional and local levels. With varying degrees of success and in myriad ways, PSB has sought to create a better balance between the national audience and regional voices and perspectives. Worrisomely, the resources and efforts to continue this have been declining in broadcasting and increasingly pushed to online platforms. Kocic and Milicev treat the issues in useful detail.

Thus far, we have discussed historic challenges and contemporary constraints in fulfilling mandates for the universalism mission in PSM. There are also interesting developments that encourage a conceptual reframing of the mission. Several contributions in this volume address aspects of growing importance in that pursuit.

## New dimensions of universalism in concept and practice

The universalism mission would arguably be better served if public involvement were better facilitated across a range of strategic and tactical areas. This is not a new insight. Indeed, *The Public in Public Service Media* was the title and focus of an earlier conference and RIPE Reader (Lowe, 2009). At issue here is how to stimulate and incorporate proactive public participation not only as a resource for content and source of political support, but also in strategic planning practice.

The chapter by Donders and Van den Bulck calls for a more universal and accessible public service orientation in regulatory processes and decision-making to create a more open and even playing field for public involvement in the sector. This touches on a thorny problem that has persisted since the mid-2000s: how to ensure a sufficiency of value to a large enough proportion of a national public to legitimate the cost of PSM? In principle, the value of services needs to be sufficiently universal to justify the expense for the public. Securing sufficiency of value at an adequate degree of universality is no mean feat in today's increasingly fragmented media markets where political support is uncertain at best and often antagonistic.

The chapter by Horowitz and Lowe emphasises the importance of collaborating with diverse stakeholders to represent a reasonable scope of universality. This is important not only to support PSM institutions as such, but to actively, effectively, and rapidly respond to threats posed by the proliferation of false information, siloed information habits, and growing distrust in the media. These are among the most alarming challenges for digital media markets everywhere today and indicate escalating complications which the authors treat as “information disorder”. These phenomena impact trust in media at all societal levels – global, regional, national, and local – and are enabled by the interaction of sociocultural and technological transformations that have destabilised media systems. Regaining trust must involve a broad cross section of stakeholders, not only PSM organisations and NGOs but also commercial, governmental, and civic agencies. The capabilities of PSM organisations to counter these phenomena requires a new approach to universalism that prioritises and operationalises collaboration by all.

The good news, they observe, is that in Europe those involved with making media policy often mention PSM – and sometimes prioritise it – as a vitally important part of the solution toolkit. The bad news is, unfortunately, PSM is not strongly supported in most of the world and is taking hits even in Europe where the legacy of PSB is comparatively strong. The evidence suggests growing ambivalence about public media. The problem of “media capture” by authoritarian governments is an added complication. This is why Horowitz and Lowe advocate a more inclusive understanding of who is responsible for, and able to provide, public services in media. They emphasise perspectives from media scholars and policy makers that public services are delivered by varied sources and all of them are needed today. Some are PSM organisations that function as legally mandated institutions – that is, public service from the *de jure* perspective (in law). But many public services in media are not institutionally designed and mandated operations – they are *de facto* providers. These examples provide ample evidence that collaboration can produce effective solutions for addressing information disorder and an argument that, in doing so, these providers pave a way forward to accomplish a renewed universalism mission.

In his contribution, “Personalised universalism in the age of algorithms”, Jannick Kirk Sørensen addresses the paradoxical relationship between the universalism principle in the analogue era of media scarcity with personalisation in the digital era of abundance. He wonders how the principle of universalism can be maintained as a core value proposition given a sweeping “return” to individual communication, which actually characterised early intentions for radio that did not materialise. Sørensen argues that today we have a “globalised technical universalism” – a form of universalism subject to algorithmic programming and protocol rules that are outside the control of PSM content creators, and mostly also for national regulators. The language of coding and for web and app design interfaces provide the rules that are the most truly universal

things in media today. This, he argues, means that “the contents and services offered on popular platforms can only be universally accessed if they adhere to the general coding and design requirements that pertain to a platform”, most of which are commercial.

Sørensen proposes the pursuit of “personalised enlightenment” as having universal value for individuals to improve collective understandings and encourage mutual respect. He observes the need for a shared platform offering a range of content and formats that facilitate participation at diverse levels of education. This seems a worthy objective for PSM institutions, but as he observes, one problem that needs resolution is a tension between “professionals who are responsible for creating meaning by producing programmes” and platform operators who are responsible for “optimising the potential for exposure – that is, data scientists, data curators, and marketing departments”. This problem has become increasingly evident inside PSM organisations in their efforts to become tri-media companies, and is a cross-sector complication because content makers and digital network operators are not in the same “business”.

The chapter by Lizzie Jackson rounds out our collection. In “Datafication, fluidity, and organisational change: Towards a universal PSM 3.0”, she reviews a range of organisational structures that are now necessary to deliver datafied and nuanced content to a variety of taste publics and audience formations. Today, digital content must be capable of delivery to mass audiences, to groups of various size in varying types, and to individuals to accommodate personal preferences in the on-demand environment. Her chapter draws on the results of 150 interviews in an international four-year funded study about PSM in the digital environment. (2015–2019). The project explores for the first time the internal organisational cultures and knowledge exchange mechanisms of ten high-technology clusters in North America and Europe, including Toronto, which she highlighted in her chapter.

Analysis of the level of engagement between high technology firms and “in proximity” PSMs was included in the study, which strongly supports understanding the importance of PSM on the basis of maintaining the fluidity needed to evolve in a highly unstable and dynamic set of media industries. This is essential for achieving visibility and building relevance for the broadest cross section of publics as audiences and users. In this view, universalism in the digital environment can be operationalised by embracing three strategic priorities: 1) datafication to enable the automated nuancing of content; 2) increased collaborative production via networked technologists; and 3) creating more agile organisational structures that are not only less rigid internally, but with porous boundaries to encourage robust external involvement.



## Conclusion: Paradoxes, challenges, and development

This anthology provides a timely discourse on the universalism mission in the twenty-first century, making a case for continuing relevance while acknowledging an enormous range and degree of complication in realising the mission in practice. Far from being an anachronistic conceit, the mission has both ethical and instrumental importance today. It has ethical importance for the normative justification of the public service orientation in the digital media environment. It has instrumental importance for pursuing every reasonable avenue for enabling that orientation to achieve legal mandates to ensure every citizen is fairly served by contemporary media systems. This is especially important given the downgrading of social responsibility as a principled priority in media systems as whole.

Thematic to the collection is an essential paradox we have highlighted in this introductory chapter as a persistent tension between collective needs and individual rights – between the societal and the individual. The two are inseparable in practice and can thus be described as a dialectical tension. The contributions to this anthology treat that paradox from varied perspectives that are useful for developing theory and supporting practice; the first in normative conceptualisation and the latter in strategic legitimation.

At the same time, the collection makes clear that the universalism mission is more than an idea – it is an ideal, a conceptualisation of something most suitable, even perfect. As such, the universalism mission has never been as fully achieved as ideally conceived and desired. That does not lessen its importance. The pursuit of universal public service is aspirational, and for those who embrace this, it is also inspirational.

Universalism is a complex ideal, a complicated pursuit, and a considerable challenge – more so today than before the digitalisation of media systems and products. It is also a new frontier ripe for redevelopment in both conceptual and operational terms.

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## Chapter 2

# Universalism in history, modern statehood, and public service media

Barbara Thomass

### Abstract

Starting from a brief explanation of universalistic thinking, this contribution investigates the philosophical origins and dimensions of universalism and its historical development. It reveals contradictory implications of the concept and shows how it became a significant influence in philosophy about the state. It sketches the development from the Greek polis and the Roman Empire, via the philosophy of Enlightenment and the French Revolution to the twentieth century and the debate about universal human rights. The concept of universalism is presented as one of the grounds for welfare state policies. This establishes a background and framework for understanding the universal service obligation that remains fundamental to the legitimacy of public service media.

**Keywords:** human rights, Western values, Enlightenment, universal service obligation, particularism, welfare state

### Introduction

“One Policy, One System, Universal Service” was the claim made by AT&T (American Telephone and Telegraph) in 1907 (Lasar, 2011). In return for monopoly status, AT&T promised that every user of a telephone device would be able to reach anyone else with a telephone device. Universal access and service – for a price, of course. Use did not require membership in several networks. The rationale and approach has a background that points in two directions: to the past and to the future. To the past because the principle of universal service harkens back to a complex philosophical realm about the concept of universalism. In its practical and broadly statutory implementation, the universal service obligation became the role model for many services the modern welfare state provides citizens. The universal service obligation is both a challenge and an open question for today’s digital society.

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This contribution investigates the philosophical origins and dimensions of universalism and its historical development. It reveals contradictory implications of the concept and shows how it became a significant influence in philosophy about the state. The concept is one of the grounds for welfare state policies. This establishes a background and framework for understanding the universal service obligation that remains fundamental to the legitimacy of public service media (PSM).

## What is universalism?

Universalism is derived from the Latin word *universalis*, which means “general”. This ideal indicates an assumption and claim that all the diversity of reality as a whole can be traced to a single principle or law of order. From this, it follows, that ideas, ideals, rights, and obligations apply in principle to all human beings. Universalism is therefore a perspective that prioritises the whole of an entity above singularity, and generality above specificity. The concept contends that some principles and norms are valid for all human beings.

In societal application, universalism is operationalised in rules and practices that have general widespread value. To work properly, these rules must be generally accepted by society and internalised by its members. When effective, universally applicable rules are a proper basis for the pursuit of justice and provide clarity about conditions and obligations that apply to each and all. Good relations are secondary to fairness and equity. Exceptions to the rules are resisted.

Universalism can be observed in individualistic societies, as is clearly the case for many Western societies. The prevailing emphasis on social justice, maintaining order, and being able to plan in a thoughtful, rational way are based on respect for values that are presumed to be universal and are considered positive and beneficial for the welfare of all. The disadvantages are keyed to degrees of inflexibility and rigidity in patterns of required adherence to values and rules. Defenders of universalism have been accused of ignoring cultural differences and promoting Western values, which indicate an attitude of ethnocentrism (Benhabib, 1994; Donnelly, 2003; Marko, 2012; Namli, 2018; Vattimo, 2007).

This brief overview of universalism hints towards a complex development of thinking about “the universal” that spans from ancient Greece to the French Revolution and beyond. The ideal that some fundamental things are universal and should be respected as such is cornerstone to significant codifications pertaining to the rights and liberties of free peoples. This is evident, for example, in the American Declaration of Independence that claims “all men are created equal”. Thus, the context of universalism has been usefully applied from the broadest and most fundamental claims of universal rights to technical systems

of communication, transportation, and other matters of social welfare. It is timeless in principle because universalism claims that, once identified, universal values are all-encompassing and always valid.

Today such claims are less often accepted as valid and are often challenged. The all-embracing pretension of universalism has been challenged by its conceptual counterpart: particularism – the attitude that underlines the specifics of single cases, the uniqueness of a given culture, or the individuality of a person. The degree to which universalism is universal is arguable. The claim has limits because in application the practice excludes certain groups – typically minorities – and the disadvantaged in various ways. The principle is more transcendent than the practice. As hinted in the American claim above, the universalism of human rights excluded women until they won their rights through struggle.

After this short explanation of the concept of universalism, we will see how the development of universalist thinking became an influential intellectual abstraction about the nature and value of the human being that has inspired political philosophers and the political shaping of societies.

## How did universalism emerge and develop?

Universalism emerged not as a fact in the real world but rather as an intellectual reality or construct. The principle of *quod semper, quod ubique, quod omnibus* (Toennies, 2001) – forever, everywhere, for everybody – postulated that, from a distanced viewpoint, all human beings are equal. This thought became a manifestation of material power.

In their search for principles for the good conduct of living, Plato and Aristotle articulated guidelines for a fair and just government. These Greek philosophers were early advocates of universalism. They constructed views of an ideal state in which every free man (only) is empowered and appointed to discuss and decide public affairs in open debate. The Greek polis corresponds to this phenomenon that contains a germ of universalism.

The Roman philosopher Seneca addressed the tension between those included in the universal and those excluded: “Although everything is permitted against a slave, there is something that is not permitted by the common right of every living being against a human being, because he is the same nature as you” (as cited by Toennies, 2001: 66). Later in ancient Rome, there was a fundamental shift in their legal system. The legal rights of the *paterfamilias* – the head of a greater family – were extended to every Roman citizen, to the effect that every man was at liberty to act on his own rights. This grounds a point that Talcott Parsons stipulated: “Modern society originated only in a single evolutionary arena, the West, i.e. essentially in Europe, which inherited the legacy of the western half of the Roman Empire” (Parsons, 1971: 10). This aligns with the

views of Max Weber (1930) who, in his work on *The Protestant Ethic*, posited that cultural phenomena occurred on the soil of the Occident which were of universal significance and validity in a developmental direction.

This strand of philosophic history suggests a noble ideal, but also indicates good reason for associating universalism with the critique of imperialism. All too willingly, Western thinking has claimed for too long and too exclusively advances in human progress for itself, and has relegated other societies and cultures as backward and in deficit by its own self-acclaimed standards. While valid, any outline of the history of universalism requires acknowledging the significance of the Greek polis and the Roman empire.

Toennies describes the origins of universalism as endeavouring to legitimate the claims of a group (i.e., the particular and not all groups), amid competing claims by other groups in differentiating society (Toennies, 1995). This aligns with Schweppenhaeuser (1998) who claims that early stages of bourgeois self-knowledge were characterised by the will to assert oneself as a particular social group fighting for the preservation of their prerogatives against the central power of a community and the nobility of a given time.

The idea and ideal of unalienable individual rights emerged in the Enlightenment, which created the basis for the modern notion of universalism that is based on a recognition of the power of the human spirit. Since the reign of Cromwell in Britain, individual rights were articulated in this modern sense. Locke articulated an understanding of universalism as the constitutional right of all individuals. These and other philosophers of Enlightenment, including Hobbes, aimed to identify general laws for all mankind and to follow them as such.

All of this explains why universal is not manifest in the material world, but is an influential intellectual abstraction about the nature and value of the human spirit. The French Revolution converted these intellectual claims into a basis for real power in the timeless triad of “liberty, equality, and fraternity”. The proclamations of a revolutionary bourgeoisie, especially the Declaration of Human and Civil Rights of 1789 and the French Constitution of 1791, transformed the particular bourgeois interest into a universal human interest. The constitutions of modern societies almost universally believe *citoyens* in democracies have the same freedom rights and the right of self-preservation.

Nonetheless, the foregoing has already noted the persistent problem that universalistic thought, since its inception, has never referred to everyone in practice but always to select groups. Beyond this privileged selection, the same “universal” rights were not accorded to large groups of people: slaves, women, colonised peoples, children, and so forth. Societies have made corrective progress, however, and today the universalism principle is being extended to the idea of animal protection, the rights of animals, and also the rights of nature. The universal is becoming more universal than before.

But the underlying problem persists. François Noël Babeuf, an agitator during the French Revolution and founder of the Conspiracy of the Equals, was among the first to point out the inherent contradiction of universalism – a philosophic claim of rights for all that in practice excludes many. He took the French Revolution’s idea of equality to a radically serious degree and, with his notion that all people are factually equal and should enjoy equal rights and conditions also in economic terms, created the first attempt to realise the concept of a classless society in political practice (Buonarroti, 1909). Later socialists referred to him.

Karl Marx, author of the seminal *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* and of the political pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto*, defended the idea of a classless society in which no one should have privileges resulting from possession of the means of production. While he had claimed to turn the philosophical thinking of Hegel upside down – which means to ascribe to it a material base – we can state that Marx has turned universalism upside down, as he spelled out the material prerequisites of equality.

## Universalism in the twentieth century

In the twentieth century, individual rights as a universal enfranchisement were codified in the International Declaration of Human Rights. This was the result of a long process in which the idea of human rights gained a symbolic and politically fundamental significance for thinking about how to create a more peaceful world order. The profound crises experienced in the international order during the second half of the twentieth century inspired reflection on how to create a fairer world order.

These crises include the devastation of World War II, independence for former colonies and the often messy aftermath, an awareness of the interdependence of states that spread in the 1970s, and the dissolution of Soviet power with the collapse of socialist states in the 1990s. Also important, after 1945, was the question of how to organise the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals. This revived the debate as to whether there were inalienable rights that would validate the intervention of the international community. The judgments handed down in the Nuremberg Trials were based on the conviction that individuals – regardless of respective national legislation – had a range of universal rights that warranted the conviction of war criminals on this basis (Sands, 2016).

The creation of the United Nations (UN), whose founding documents include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was a grandiose step forward in the codification of universal rights and the confession that they apply universally to all individuals on earth. This did not emerge from a vacuum. In the 1920s, international law scholars and internationally oriented lawyers had given

thought to the meaning and possibility of international human rights. From 1948 onwards, the concept has been a persistent and foundational aspect of the human rights system that grounds the UN. This establishment of the UN was linked to the question of how more effective mechanisms of international security and peacekeeping could be established (Eckel, 2019). This was followed by the confirmation of a human rights regime in the Council of Europe, adopted as a corresponding convention in 1950.

The leaders of anti-colonial struggle relied on the promise of human rights to legitimate their cause, but did not shy away from noting the persistent problem of a hypocritical Western deception which they had experienced for centuries. Human rights were not universal in the practice of the colonial masters (Nkrumah, 1962). In the United Nations General Assembly, in which the former colonial states had the same voting rights as all members, past human rights violations were discussed. In escalations of the Cold War, the culprits of the most violent abuses of human rights were accused. This also contributed to the instrumentalisation of human rights discourse for respective international interests (Westad, 2007).

Significant advances are evident in the Declaration on the Grant of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples in 1960, the inclusion of the right to self-determination of peoples in UN rules in 1966, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1965 (Jensen, 2016). These are milestones on the road to universal rights in the international order (UN, 1994). The attempt of the former colonial states to wrest the commitment to a new world economic order from the industrialised West in the 1970s was also based on the idea of human rights and their universality. Although this did not bring any immediate result, and was hotly contested by the US in particular, a right to development was proclaimed in 1986 (OHCHR, 1986).

In the 1970s, there emerged a new and growing awareness of environmental hazards caused by humans as a consequence of industrialisation. The importance of resource management and the need for sustainability has grown in the decades since, accompanied by the idea of a universal claim across generations to an intact environment (Kaiser & Meyer, 2016; Macekura, 2015).

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) process in Europe, the activities of opponents of dictatorship in Latin America, and dissidents in Eastern Europe, as well as the growing emphasis on human rights in the Global South, dramatically demonstrate the diversity of national, cultural, and historic contexts in which protagonists of universal rights operate. These also demonstrate the volatility and difficulty of advancing a unified political project. Nevertheless, universal human rights have become a persistent issue and is now a foreign policy reference point for many Western governments (and beyond).

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of dictatorships in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, the Philippines, and South Korea, as well as Greece, Portugal,



and Spain, and the fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa, have given rise to the hope that universal human rights could be enforced worldwide. At the 1993 UN Human Rights Conference, 171 states declared their support for the universal application of human rights (OHCHR, 1993). The question is not in the principle but rather the practice: How should and would this be implemented, and should international interventions to enforce rights be universally recognised? That is the subject of ongoing debates in the face of diverse conflict situations.

In postmodern thought, universalism is subject to a variety of criticisms. The most far-reaching critique is drawn from the impossibility of achievement because the world and its inhabitants are too diverse to be subsumed under a universal view. Another powerful critique from the cultural perspective links this to the problem of relativism. Perhaps less is universal than particular because everything is relative to varying degrees. Moreover, who are the protagonists of Western societies that they should be allowed to proclaim their values as having general validity? European human rights concepts arise from a specifically European civil, liberal, and secular historical project, as earlier indicated in our brief look at Greek and Roman philosophers. Therefore – so the argument goes – they cannot easily (or at all!) be “transferred” to other cultures.

Another serious critique stems from a multiculturalist perspective. As Juergen Habermas keenly observed, “behind universalistic legal claims are concealed the particular assertiveness of a particular collective on a regular basis” [translated] (Habermas, 1997: n.p.). Habermas believes the moral universe extends to all natural persons, however, and in that light has been regarded as perhaps the most famous living “universalist” (Koehl, 2003).

The fact that all existing societies do not grant universal rights to all people does not make the idea obsolete or invalid. The problem in the formulation of human rights, and especially in their establishment as rights for all humans, hinges on factors that prevent their realisation, and these are constitutively inscribed (Schweppenhaeuser, 1998). Property, security, and freedom are the central criteria of universal human rights but also equated with individual rights, especially in antagonistic competitive societies that do not question the appropriateness of a capitalist orientation. This creates a contradictory situation: The foundation of human rights – which has a universal claim to validity – and the worldwide establishment of social conditions that would not only permit this formulation, but almost require it, at the same time blocking their realisation.

The continuation of freedom and property rights based on universal human rights has enormous implications for the media sector in democratic societies and for democratic rights as such, which are also based on universalism but are in conflict. I address this next.

## Universalism in modern statehood and its significance for public service media

The step from universalism as a philosophical tradition of thought to the universal claim of citizens to certain state services of general interest is enormous. It is generally explained with reference to the construction of a welfare state. The principle of equality, which is so important for democratic states, has never been fully realised, as noted above. This is mainly due to prevailing ownership structures and discrepancies between rich and poor citizens. In an ongoing struggle over conflicting ideas on how to reconcile freedom and equality, modern democracies have increasingly set themselves the task of providing at least equal opportunities for all citizens to live in dignity and have an essential degree of social security.

This is how the modern welfare state was created, with the essential task of subsidising certain meritorious goods that the market does not or cannot provide due to the need for profitability. Perhaps some degree of supply is provided by the market, but not to a sufficient extent in relation to the need for these goods. Such merit goods include education, security (including social security), public infrastructure, and culture. These are services that benefit everyone in a society, that is, the public at large. Hence, they must be provided as public services. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mediated social communication was defined as a merit good.

The principle that media are merit goods that can and should be made available to every citizen to the same extent and at the same quality is the core value of the universal service obligation. The obligation implies a universal human right and requires societies to provide an adequate infrastructure for their delivery and performance. Everyone should be reached by postal services, everyone should be supplied with electricity, everyone has a right to clean water and air, and all people need access to a telephone connection – and today, access to the Internet. People who are not able to access online media suffer a “digital deficit” that puts them, and their life chances, at risk, compared with people who have access. This is especially true for the citizen’s right to be informed. Golding (2017) argues that despite the abundance of information available online, there is a growing inequality of access to quality information. This deficit of access to high quality online services can, when it comes to deficits of quality of information, translate into a citizen detriment (Thomass, 2019).

The debate about the implementation of universal services has always centred on the scope and quality of service. Today, for example, the question in modern industrial societies is not only whether Internet access exists, but also whether it meets the requirements of broadband connection.

The invention of public service broadcasting (PSB) had its origins almost 100 years ago and was established in many countries that were structured by policy

and practice to provide universal services as social welfare states. This orientation recognises a valid demand for universality of infrastructure, culture, and social communication via media as an institution whose central characteristic and obligation is the pursuit of universality of service. In 1986, the then London-based think tank Broadcasting Research Unit defined PSB with the following characteristics, in which the notion of universality has a central place (1986):

- Universality (geographic) – broadcast programmes should be available to the whole population.
- Universality (of appeal) – broadcast programmes should cater to all interests and tastes.
- Universality (of payment) – one main instrument of broadcasting should be directly funded by the corpus of users.
- Minorities, especially disadvantaged minorities, should receive particular provision.
- Broadcasters should recognise their special relationship to the sense of national identity and community.
- Broadcasting should be distanced from all vested interests, and in particular from those of the government of the day.
- Broadcasting should be structured so as to encourage competition in good programming rather than competition for numbers.
- The public guidelines for broadcasting should be designed to liberate rather than restrict the programme makers.

Universal availability plays a central role and has social, technical, and economic components. Universalism is fundamental to the provision of broadcasting as a merit good in the public interest. The other essential element is a broad spectrum of different programmes, formats, genres, and so forth on a channel –in short, diversity (Scannell, 1992). In this light, the principle of universalism has four dimensions in broadcasting: 1) access and reach; 2) genres and services; 3) relevance and impact; and 4) financing with attendant obligations. Providing universal service has been and remains a legal requirement for PSB and, more recently, PSM. This has crucial importance for the potential of media to cultivate enlightenment, encourage social cohesion, and provide a fair, full, and equitable range of media services.

There is another line of important argumentation that still legitimates universalism in media that has significant implications today. This is the argument for media responsibility – the social responsibility of media – to strengthen democracy. Universalism is a prerequisite for realising that mandate as a project of addressing universal rights. From this perspective, citizens' communication and

information rights are the focus of discussion: “The logic is simple. Democracy needs citizens who are equally informed; thus, they must be guaranteed equal access to all relevant information” (Nieminen, 2019: 58). This makes the case for citizens’ communication and information rights explicit. The basic elements are derived from, among others, international treaties and conventions such as the UN Declarations of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Nieminen & Aslama Horowitz, 2016). Nieminen proposes five areas of communication and information rights, which all refer to the universalist claim of rights: rights to access, availability, critical competence, dialogue, and privacy (Nieminen, 2019: 58).

Mandates for mediated social communication via PSM that is accessible to all citizens acquires its special significance and legitimacy as a subsequent effect of the principles of freedom and property. The freedom – by no means given to everyone – to express and disseminate one’s opinion through the media has led, in the absence of effective media concentration regulations, to enormous media conglomerates dominating the content and flow of information and entertainment. This threatens comprehensive, freely accessible information from a wide variety of sources. PSM is needed as a counterweight and to enforce the principles of universalism in media supply.

## Conclusion

PSM is not conceivable without the encompassing idea of universalism. The history of the concept is an ongoing attempt to determine what is universal for all people and to embed that in norms. Since the Enlightenment, universalism has been fundamental to Western state constitutions, later adopted by many countries around the world. Universalist claims to validity, however, have always been criticised because of the presumption of comprehensive applicability, especially when the application has excluded so many who are also entitled to claim the right. As articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, universalist ideas have become the model for the international order. An essential component of human rights, the freedom of communication has achieved decisive importance for the media order of pluralistic states. PSM are based on universalist ideas because they want to make the accessibility of information and social communication equally available to all citizens. However, as the promise of human rights freedom also refers to the right to property, and this right has enabled the emergence of media conglomerates in global media markets, PSM are also an attempt to preserve universal freedom of communication.

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## Chapter 3

# Universal – but not necessarily useful

Peter Goodwin

### Abstract

This chapter scrutinises the universal service aspect of public service broadcasting historically. It argues that it was always limited to two quite narrow principles: geographical universality and universality of appeal. Both principles were, from the beginning, vague or ambiguous in definition and operated with caveats and exceptions. Even in the rough and ready fashion in which they did operate, both principles have become increasingly irrelevant in practice. Therefore, the universal service mission is an anachronistic starting point for addressing the very real challenges and opportunities that advocates of public service media must address today.

**Keywords:** public service broadcasting, communication history, universal service, BBC, geographical universality, universality of appeal

### Introduction

The aim of this collection, and the conference from which it stemmed, is to examine challenges and opportunities in achieving the universal service mission for public service media (PSM) in the era of media abundance. Underlying this aim is, I presume, the assumption that the universal service mission has always been an important pillar of public service broadcasting (PSB) and therefore advocates of PSM today must address how to maintain that pillar. This chapter takes issue with this assumption, arguing,

- a) the universal service aspect of PSB was always limited to two quite narrow principles;
- b) both of these principles were, from the beginning, vague or ambiguous in definition and operated with all sorts of caveats and exceptions;
- c) but even in the rough and ready fashion in which they did operate, both of these principles have become increasingly irrelevant in practice;

- d) therefore, the universal service mission is an anachronistic starting point for addressing the very real challenges and opportunities that advocates of PSM must address today.

### Public service and universalism

Tight definitions of what the “public service” in public service broadcasting meant have been notoriously difficult to come by. Writing in the mid-1980s, the British Committee on the Financing of the British Broadcasting Corporation (more commonly known as the Peacock Committee, after the name of its chairman), bemoaned, “but what is public service broadcasting? We found that there was no simple dictionary definition. This is not surprising, since previous committees have found it difficult to define this concept” (Peacock Committee, 1986: 6).

As their report went on to make clear, the Committee was going to define (or at least operationalise) “public service broadcasting” in a considerably narrower sense than had been traditionally held to be the case. For the Committee, “public service broadcasting” was to be effectively the residuum that might be collectively desired after commercial provision had satisfied the sum of individual consumer wants (Goodwin, 2016; Peacock Committee, 1986). The Peacock Committee was, nevertheless, right about its predecessors (Annan Committee, 1977; Pilkington Committee, 1962).

The Broadcasting Research Unit (BRU) provided the Peacock Committee with one apparently precise exposition of public service broadcasting, whose eight principles embodied the PSB idea. The Peacock Committee (1986) summarised this in their report, although they ended up effectively disagreeing with them. The BRU definition was produced with the awareness that the political climate surrounding the appointment of the Peacock Committee extolled market mechanisms in broadcasting now that spectrum scarcity was or was about to be overcome by cable and satellite. The BRU argued in the pamphlet expanding its points the burden of its eight principles:

The purposes served by the main provisions of public service broadcasting in Britain go far beyond the policing of shortage, serve far more important, democratic aims, and that, though the structure we have is not perfect nor perfectly operated, in general it has served us extremely well. (BRU, 1986: i)

However, while many outlets or delivery systems were brought into existence, the BRU continued, these aims of PSB could not be ensured simply by market mechanisms, and they needed to be kept.

The BRU described its work as defining “those main elements of public service broadcasting as it has evolved in Britain which, it is argued, should be retained” (BRU 1986: i). Its method was to invite a number of people “from



various backgrounds, but all known to be interested in the idea of public service broadcasting, to set down briefly what they think are its essential elements” (BRU, 1986: ii; the people participating in the exercise are listed on p. iii). The eight elements distilled by the BRU were those “most commonly proposed by the writers” (BRU, 1986: ii).

One might quibble about the methodology, and one might debate whether the BRU definition was a normative exercise or an inspired (but little evidenced) sketch of the traditions and then current state of British analogue terrestrial television and radio broadcasting in the mid-1980s. The BRU itself concluded that its analysis “has something of the character of an ideal type” (1986: 23). But whatever the quibbles, few appear to have quarrelled with that second descriptive side of it (even if, like Peacock, they wanted to change the normative side). Michael Tracey (who, as director of the BRU at the time, may well have had some hand in the original) later generalised the eight-point definition beyond the UK in his 1998 book *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting* (Tracey, 1998).

So, in the BRU document and in Tracey we have the two concrete “universal service missions” of PSB precisely formulated in a way in which no-one else had seemingly been able to do. True, they were initially formulated about the UK and later reformulated by a British academic (although one who, by that stage, was based in an American university). Would any public service broadcaster or supporter of PSB in the 1980s or 1990s have rushed to dispute them? Although it may well turn out other parts of the BRU definition are more useful as a guide to current policies, for our immediate purposes the two most important of the BRU’s eight principles are the first two:

1. Universality (geographic) – broadcast programmes should be available to the whole population.
2. Universality (of appeal) – broadcast programmes should cater for all interests and tastes.

We will discuss each in turn.

## Geographical universality

As far as television and radio were concerned, the principle of geographical universality (or as Tracey calls it, universality of availability) meant that the reception of broadcast services was to be provided for everyone within a certain universe (generally the nation – but more on this later) regardless of the cost of doing so. To the best of my knowledge, in the UK this was never written in either legislation or in the Charter of the BBC – it was accepted as a given. The Committee on Broadcasting 1960, chaired by Harry Pilkington, observed:

The concept of the comprehensive service applies not only to programme content, but also to the geographical range or coverage of the transmissions. It has never been accepted that services of broadcasting should be available only to those for whom they can be provided easily or economically. Both the BBC and the ITA regarded it as their duty, as public corporations, to see that their existing services are as nearly as possible available to everybody in the whole of the country. (Pilkington Committee, 1962: 9)

ITA was the Independent Television Authority – the public corporation then broadcasting and overseeing commercial television in the UK. A decade and a half later, the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting, chaired by Lord Annan, reiterated the message:

The Pilkington Committee [...] noted that in Britain the broadcasters considered it to be their duty to make available the same services to all parts of the country, so far as was possible, and not merely to the urban areas where services can be provided cheaply. (Annan Committee, 1977: 9)

This was something that Lord Annan took as read for broadcasting as a public service – and remember that in the UK in 1977 *all* broadcasting, both BBC and ITV, was legally a public service. Public service broadcasters (PSBs) didn't stop at a few transmitters in large urban areas, each of which could cover millions of people, they built transmitters to reach even thousands in remote rural areas – something which a purely commercial broadcaster would not have found financially worthwhile.

For anyone who wants to trace the roots of this principle back to the beginnings of PSB, the evidence is provided in the book *Broadcast over Britain* that John Reith, the BBC's first director general wrote in 1924 when the BBC was still the British Broadcast *Company* and supported by the radio equipment manufacturers (it became the British Broadcast *Corporation* at the beginning of 1927):

The country was to be served by broadcasting, and eight stations were originally considered sufficient, and this was all that the Company had undertaken to provide. These stations were soon in working order, but naturally large tracts of the country were left with facilities only available to those who were in a position to buy comparatively powerful, and therefore expensive, apparatus. The company early announced its willingness to extend its operations so as to make that which was broadcast receivable in the greatest possible number of homes. Here is a very important principle, and involves a radical departure from the original scheme, and on this account it was not altogether appreciated by certain sections of the trade, their manufacturing and selling programmes having already been planned on the old basis, involving high-powered apparatus. (Reith, 1924: 61–62)

Geographical universality is a concept with other important applications in communications – above all in postal services and telephone networks. Each application is worth briefly examining for the light they shed on geographical universality as it applied to PSB.

The reforms undertaken in the British postal service by Rowland Hill from 1839 most famously resulted in the first postage stamps (the Penny Black in 1841). But more important for our purposes was the introduction in 1840 of a uniform penny postal service whereby a letter could be sent from anywhere to anywhere in the UK for the same low price (as against previous arrangements which involved charges relating to distance). This was the principle of geographical universality (although no one then called it that) at work eighty years before the birth of broadcasting (Robinson, 1953).

The first use of the actual term universal service in the context of communication is generally attributed to Theodore Vail – President of American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) from 1885–1889 and again from 1907–1919 – in the context of AT&T negotiations with the US Federal Government to secure a publicly regulated private monopoly. Vail probably meant something different (universal interconnectivity – preferably to AT&T, if one were to be cynical) from what the phrase later came to mean. It took on its more modern meaning in 1934 with the establishment of the FCC (Federal Communications Commission). Horwitz (1989: 132) observed:

In return [for effectively granting AT&T a monopoly in long distance PG], regulation was able to “extract” from telephone companies the public interest obligation of service to all – “universal service”. Universal service meant that telephone service must be made available to and generally affordable by everyone.

The term became part of the debate on the re-regulation of former state and new telecom services in the last decades of the twentieth century. It is in that context that Nicholas Garnham (1997: 199) offered a slightly sceptical explanation:

There is now widespread agreement on a definition of universal service in telecom which in the words of OFTEL [the then UK telecom regulator] in the UK, is the provision of “affordable access to basic voice telephony or its equivalent for all those reasonably requesting it, regardless of where they live”. The problem for the regulator is that neither affordability nor reasonableness are terms that can be defined with scientific precision. They remain a matter for subjective judgement by the regulator. The EC Draft Interconnection Directive defines universal service more narrowly as “the provision of service throughout a specified geographical area, including – where required – geographical averaged prices for the provision of that service,” but introduces the additional concept of common tariffs.

As Garnham continues, the term could also be extended more widely to other services considered socially desirable, such as public payphones.

So, the concept of geographical universality has a serious pedigree in other forms of communication. But that pedigree also illustrates a number of problems with the concept which have relevance to the principle of geographical universality as applied to broadcasting. Four, in particular, are worth noting.

First, although universal service in broadcasting has been generally interpreted as meaning *free* service, that is certainly not the case in either post or telephony. Both were charged for, although in the case of the early postal service in Britain conscious efforts (the universal *penny* post) were made to bring the basic cost of a letter within the budget of a worker, and in the US (unlike much of the rest of the world) *local* (but not long-distance) calls were free.

Second, although the service might be *provided* universally, *ability* to afford the equipment to take advantage of that service was far from universal. So, in the US and most other high-income countries (not to mention low-income ones), a large proportion of the population did not have a domestic phone until the 1970s. Similarly, in the early decades of radio and television, a large proportion of the population did not have a radio or a television set; these were expensive items for many working-class people. Interestingly, it was only authoritarian regimes (e.g., the Nazis) which subsidised them – presumably with a propaganda purpose in mind.

Third, universal service was only provided where “reasonable”, and what was considered reasonable was distinctly subjective (or financially or politically determined). What was clear was at the extremes: If you lived at the end of a peninsula or on an island in a sparsely populated rural area, you would not get a landline or perhaps a daily postal delivery, and if you happened to live behind a mountain you would probably not get an adequate terrestrial broadcasting service. In Britain, during much of the period of public service dominance, terrestrial signals were sufficiently bad in some areas for hundreds of thousands of people to enable a lucrative commercial cable industry based on retransmission of good signals (and a cheaper receiver). Furthermore, no one suggested that it was unreasonable for some parts of the (generally national) “universe” to wait for new services during roll out – something which might take decades.

Fourth, the “universe” of universal service was always assumed to be the nation. If you were sending a letter outside the UK in the nineteenth century it cost more, and similarly if you were phoning outside the US in the twentieth (in that case much, much more). Similarly in broadcasting, the BBC’s universal service was one provided in the UK. Outside their own country, PSBs might broadcast for “soft-power” reasons (funded by their government) or to earn extra money for their domestic operations, but no one suggested the geographical universe of geographical universal service extended beyond national borders.

## Universality of appeal

This second universality principle was limited to broadcasting and has no clear parallels in previous communication technologies. That is, quite simply, because it is about content. Broadcasters provided content; postal and telephone services did not – for these media, each user provided her or his own content. What has later been termed universality of appeal was present from the start as part of the argument for broadcasting as a public service, again made most notably by John Reith. Reith’s approach is neatly summed up by Andrew Crisell (2006: 19):

[The BBC’s] output was intended to be *universal* both in consisting of a comprehensive diet of information, education and entertainment created to the highest possible standard, and in being targeted at everybody in the nation who wished to listen, irrespective of their status or location. It would take the form not of branded or streamed output but of *mixed programming* – a miscellany of genres in which every listener could find his or her particular interests. [...] The company also aimed to introduce an element of serendipity and thus *expand* the interests of the individual listener.

It should be noted that this goal of producing “something for everyone” was not a goal of providing something that everyone actually wanted. Rather it should be understood alongside Reith’s famous pronouncement that “few know what they want, and very few know what they need. [...] In any case it is better to over-estimate the mentality of the public than to under-estimate it” (Reith, 1924: 34).

A more prosaic early articulation of this public service universality of appeal principle, and a clear indicator of some of the problems inherent in it, was provided by the BBC’s (and Reith’s) first organiser of programmes C. A. Lewis (1924: 48):

What, then, is the general policy by which our programme organisation is run? Broadly speaking, I think it is to keep on the upper side of public taste, and to cater for the majority 75% of the time, the remainder being definitely set apart for certain important minorities.

Many of the problems of what universality of appeal actually amounts to shine out from Lewis’s pioneering remarks. This was catering for “the majority” most of the time (not quite the same as everyone!), and not always what the majority wanted, but what was good for it. Lewis (1924: 48–50) amplified:

What is meant by the “upper side” of public taste? Well we strive, as far as possible, to avoid certain things, desirable or undesirable according to the point of view, which are readily or more fully obtained elsewhere. Such things, for instance, as sensational murder details, or unsavoury divorce cases [...].

Of course, we could probably increase the number of our subscribers in a few weeks by changing our policy on these things, but it would leave us open to attack from many quarters.

So, the notoriously Reithian viewpoint of giving the listeners what was good for them rather than what they wanted seems from the outset to have been inseparable from universal appeal. As for the “certain important minorities”, who were they? What made them “important”? And why 25 per cent? All this smacks of course not only of an easily personalised “Reithianism”, but of the more general elite assumptions of the interwar period. By the 1970s, in Britain and elsewhere, these were being questioned even in elite circles – for instance in the UK by the Annan Committee in 1977.

But what we should also note is that these “universalist” injunctions are about running a single broadcast channel – and much of them applied whether that channel was public service or not. Broadcasting, both radio and television, developed as a mass, popular medium with a limited number of channels. Whether funded by advertising or public funds, whether state owned, heavily regulated, or unregulated, radio and television broadcasters appealed to the mass (to the “majority of the population” with provision for “significant minorities”). Whether public service or commercial, broadcasting for most of the twentieth century was most certainly *not* a niche medium. Public service or commercial, the characteristic form of radio in its early days, and even more of television, was the generalist channel with a carefully planned schedule covering a mix of genres. That became particularly clear after the arrival of commercial competition to previously public service television monopolies, where PSBs often simply mimicked their generalist commercial rivals (Achille & Mieke, 1994).

When more than one channel was available to PSB, then the universality of appeal approach became increasingly stretched. This can be seen even when PSB still had a monopoly. During the World War II, the BBC (which until the mid-1970s had a monopoly of radio broadcasting in the UK) shifted from providing one (high-minded but “universal”) radio network by supplementing it with a second, more “popular” network called the Forces Programme (Crisell, 2002: 59). After the war, the multi-channel approach was consolidated in a division in BBC radio between three radio networks: the (middlebrow) Home Service; the Light Programme (repurposing the more popular approach of the Forces Programme); and the (distinctly highbrow) Third Programme. Andrew Crisell (2002: 67) observes:

This tripartite system was an attempt to respond to popular tastes and provide the listener with an element of choice without sacrificing the old Reithian seriousness of purpose [...]. Like its predecessors it would provide “something for everyone” – but across the *entirety* of its networks rather than within any one of them.

But that had consequences, as Crisell (2002: 68) explained:

The failure to cater for the full range of interests within any single network meant that the second and perhaps more important of Reith's original aims – to provide “everything for someone” – was being dropped [...]. Henceforth, thanks to stratified programming the listener would be exposed to no more surprises.

It should also be added that if “something for everyone” really was being provided by the new tripartite arrangement, it was being done by dividing the population into three “intellectual” categories: highbrow (the Third Programme), middlebrow (the Home Service) and populist (the Light Programme). Leave aside the tenuous nature of this sort of division, there were plenty of other ways of slicing the “universal audience” into three.

In television, PSBs faced this sort of dilemma immediately when they gained more than one television channel, which happened in analogue terrestrial television from the sixties onwards. From their first acquisition of an extra television channel, one response of PSBs was to keep their main channel more “popular” – often competing directly with the leading commercial rival – while the extra channel (or channels) was more “highbrow” (Achille & Miege, 1994). So, just as with the division of BBC's radio output in the 1940s, although it might be claimed that the channels in totality provided “something for everyone”, as we have just seen in Crisell's observation about BBC radio, from then on in public service television too there would be no more surprises. And that developed even more with the arrival of still more channels, particularly as a result of the advent of digital terrestrial broadcasting from the 1990s onwards. Now, “something for everyone” was being provided across a range of channels catering not merely for the low-, middle-, and highbrow, but for arts enthusiasts, young (our youngish) people, children, news junkies, and so forth.

By describing these developments, I do not want to in any way disparage any of the many new channel initiatives taken by PSBs over the last 60 (and even more in the last 20) years – although some may indeed have turned out to be misjudged. What I want to stress is that over this long period, decisions have been made (and have had to be made) which had nothing to do with observing some sort of principle of universality of appeal. These decisions were by public broadcasters about broadcast distribution. They predated the primacy of Internet distribution.

### The end of the two universality principles

What I have discussed suggests that the only two universality principles which had a real bearing on PSB had some very serious issues – both logical and prac-

tical – from the start. But each stood up, in a rough and ready way, so long as PSB was confined to a limited number of channels broadcast terrestrially. That time is long past. So, what does that mean for these two universality principles today as implications for PSM?

If we take as read that PSM is already, and will increasingly be, distributed over the Internet, then there is nothing left of the principle of geographical universality. Any content which any PSM organisation (either an established legacy PSB or a newcomer) cares to put on the web can in principle be received by anyone anywhere. Of course, one might argue that some areas have less adequate broadband or mobile reception than others, that to access different types of content adequately requires expenditure on reception equipment that is beyond the budget or expertise of many of the population, or that the new devices or forms of reception for which the PSM content is being aimed are, as yet, of limited take up. But, as we have seen, all these arguments applied to geographical universal service from the earliest days of broadcasting, and before and alongside that, in telephony.

The one difference from the present is that for much of their history, PSBs were responsible for their own distribution infrastructure, but today PSM are not. Perhaps they should be, or to me more obviously, perhaps that infrastructure should be a general public responsibility and publicly provided. And perhaps the income inequalities which lead to some people not being able to afford the devices (and expertise) necessary to participate fully in the digital world should be eliminated. I would completely agree – but that takes us into a quite different (although in my view centrally important) argument about the relationship between PSM and public provision and social structure in general.

Regarding the second principle of universality – universality of appeal – as we have seen from the very start this presented serious problems of both (elitist) assumption and operationalisation – or at least in justifying that operationalisation by reference to any principle. In practice, it meant a mixed-genre channel with a rather subjectively judged “something for everyone”. And that was not that different from what commercial radio – or even more, what commercial television – did with their single channels. What distinguished PSBs was not primarily their universality of appeal (commercial ones were pretty good at that, and they weren’t niche broadcasters) but PSB’s extra and quality news and current affairs, challenging drama, stimulating children’s programmes, and so forth (although we should not necessarily romanticise what they did on these scores, both under the pressure of conservative establishments and commercial competition).

In that light, are either of the only historically established two universal service missions likely to provide meaningful guidance to PSM practice today?



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## Chapter 4

# Universality of public service media and preschool audiences

## *The choice against a dedicated television channel in Flanders*

Karen Donders & Hilde Van den Bulck

### Abstract

In 2017, Flemish public broadcaster Vlaamse Radio en Televisieorganisatie (VRT), that serves the approximately 6.5 million people of the Flemish community in Belgium, proposed launching a separate television channel for preschool children, making use of existing brand Ketnet Jr. VRT argued such a service was necessary given the different needs of preschoolers compared with older children, and the limited reach of their online offers within certain social-political strata. A universality rationale thus underlined VRT's plans. This chapter analyses the process, contents, and outcome of the public value test procedure applied to this proposal. The focus of the analysis is on whether universality arguments were seriously taken into account by the regulator and government, or made subordinate to competitors' logic. Our document analysis makes it clear that the opinion of commercial broadcasters, rarely substantiated by evidence, disproportionately impacted the regulator's assessment, and eventually resulted in a negative decision on a service of which the market impact was in fact limited and the public interest motivation high.

**Keywords:** public service media, public value test, preschool television, children's television, universality

## Introduction

Public broadcasters across Europe have the task to reach all citizens. Most are obliged to pay attention to special groups like children, next to a large quantity of animation that is available and valorised through transnational media markets. Compared to this commercial content, the children's offer of public broadcasters such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO, Dutch public broadcaster), and Vlaamse Radio en Televisieorganisatie (VRT, Flemish public broadcaster) tends to be more varied in terms of genres offered and highly valued by both children and their parents.

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In 2017, VRT, that serves the approximately 6.5 million people of the Flemish community in Belgium, proposed launching a separate television channel for preschool children, making use of the existing brand Ketnet Jr. VRT argued such a service was necessary given the different needs of preschoolers compared with older children and the limited reach of their online offers within certain social-political strata. A universality rationale thus underlined VRT's plans. A public value test was carried out by the Flemish independent media regulator, Vlaamse Regulator voor de Media (VRM), that resulted, essentially, in neutral advice. Subsequently, the Flemish government, solely competent in this field, took a negative decision. In a highly commercialised market for children's television content, that outcome was odd – to say the least – yet unsurprising given the fierce lobbying from commercial media such as Nickelodeon and Flemish commercial broadcaster Medialaan (now DPG Media). While, in the end, VRT managed to introduce a partial Ketnet Jr. channel on one of its other linear channels for several hours per day, the original decision warrants close attention, as it points to the impact of regulatory (European Commission driven *ex ante* test for new services' requirements) and decision-making processes (multistakeholderism) on actual policymaking in crucial areas of public service media (PSM).

In this chapter, we analyse the decision-making process that resulted in the dismissal of Ketnet Jr. as a linear television channel. We focus, on the one hand, on the inclusion of a variety of stakeholders in the process as a proxy for how universality is reflected in multistakeholderism. On the other hand, we analyse the extent to which universality of audience reach was a relevant factor in the regulator and Flemish government's assessments of the proposed service. To this end, we develop a theoretical framework that discusses recent trends in (media) policymaking and multistakeholderism and the historic role of PSM organisations in providing content for young children as part of the goal of universality. These sections result in more operational, specific research questions. After describing our methodology, we present the findings of our analysis.

A case study such as this can only say so much as it involves just one event (the attempted launch of a children's channel) in one community (Flanders) at a particular point in time (2017). Yet, it is this combination of a substantial, spatial, and temporal limitation that gives meaning to a case study, as it allows an understanding of very specific processes and functions through detailed de- and re-construction. Furthermore, the findings provide insights that have relevance beyond understanding the particulars of this case for several reasons. First, VRT's position and media context is prototypical for many public broadcasters in Europe and beyond, caught between strict demands for added public value and a government and commercial competition doubting their legitimacy and role. Second, the *ex ante* test for new PSM services is an EU-wide phenom-

enon. While the particularity of procedures differs between member states, the principle in itself – the issues that surround it and the implications for PSM’s functioning in the contemporary media ecology – goes beyond this case. Finally, the issues and problems involved in PSM’s role in providing content for very young audiences transcend the Flemish, and even a European, context. For all these reasons – which will be elaborated on throughout the text – we believe our single case study has relevance for anyone interested in the contemporary functioning of PSM institutions.

### Trends in the process of media policymaking

In Europe, structures and processes in contemporary policymaking – in the area of media in general and PSM in particular – have changed following the growing interference of a common European policy framework and of national governments’ move to new public management and public value (Donders, 2012; Van den Bulck, 2015). This has resulted in a number of key changes. First, governments have externalised policy and watchdog roles, introducing independent policy advising, regulatory, and controlling bodies. While this has led to professionalisation and, sometimes, to more evidence-based policies, these bodies have been criticised for being insufficiently independent from government, non-transparent, too focused on economic considerations, and not enough forward-looking (Barnett, 2003; Klimkiewicz, 2013; Meier, 2007). This raises the research question: Has VRM played its role as an independent regulator in the process assessing Ketnet Jr.? That is, how evidence-based was its advice? Did it engage in a transparent process? Did it make conclusions in an independent manner?

Second, and related, governments are embracing multistakeholderism, that is, involving a range of stakeholders in developing media policy and regulation (Donders & Raats, 2012). Deliberation based in stakeholder participation is regarded as a key building block of a successful democratic process (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). The underlying assumption is that “systematic attempts to include those affected by government policies in defining problems, collecting data and identifying possible solutions, results in more responsive and sustainable policymaking” (Donders et al., 2018: 2; see also Hintz & Milan, 2009; Walter, 2009). As such, the trend towards multistakeholderism is considered a positive, inclusive development. However, earlier empirical analysis (Donders et al., 2018) of instances of multistakeholderism in media policy development suggests that this is not unproblematic and, in fact, emerges as a new façade behind which old power relations remain dominant. This results in the research question: Did the adoption of a multistakeholderism approach bring about more inclusive decision-making?

Finally, specific to PSM organisations, there has been a shift in the fora these institutions are to account for and a growth in accountability arrangements and measures (Van den Bulck, 2015). Most notable is the so-called *ex ante* test as a requirement for expansions of public media services (European Commission, 2009: para. 84). Every significantly new service, before being introduced, must be evaluated for its public value and market impact. The test must be executed by a body independent from the public broadcaster; the consultation with regards to Ketnet Jr. is an instance hereof (Donders, 2012; Van den Bulck, 2011). Studies of *ex ante* testing for new public broadcasters' services show, in many cases, that these tests come down to greater interference from, and compliance with, demands from commercial players in the media market (see contributions in Donders & Moe, 2011). This results in the research question: Did the *ex ante* test favour priorities of commercial competitors over an inclusive consideration of all stakeholders' views?

### The fragility of children's television

VRT's plans for a linear television channel for preschoolers must be understood in the context of public broadcasters' long history of children's programming as part of the goal of universality. As Born and Prosser (2001) show, notions of public service changed over time, yet certain key normative criteria survived – including the notion of universality. The concept of universality originated as a multilayered ideal (Van den Bulck, 2001) referring to “universal access”: Public broadcasters' services must be available to every member of the community, regardless of economic, social, or geographical position. In the analogue era, this mainly referred to the availability of the signal in the far corners of the country. Today, it is interpreted against the background of persistent digital divides and the provision of services for those left behind in commercial digital media markets (cf. Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018). Universality also refers to “universal appeal”: Public broadcasters must provide a wide range of informative, entertaining, cultural, and inspirational programmes that appeal to the diverse interests of the young and old and the highly and less-educated across the community, allowing all members of the community to take part in a shared culture and identity (Grip-srud, 2002). Traditionally, this is achieved by providing a mix of information, inspiration, and entertainment for every age and social group (Van den Bulck, 2001), an interpretation adhered to up until today, despite pressures towards a market-failure approach (Donders, 2012). At the same time, universal appeal implies catering to every specific taste, even outside of the mainstream – that is, to minority interests, including high culture and educational programmes. This is reflected in public broadcasters providing various radio and television channels and online platforms to accommodate all tastes.

From the beginning of PSM, children's programming was very much part of this notion of universality – in various ways. Children's programmes were considered a legitimate and necessary part of the diverse programming of public broadcasters, and within the category of children's content, the aim was to provide a wide range of genres and programmes for all ages. Even in the early days of television, when technical and financial means were limited, most public broadcasters, including VRT, provided a diverse range of children's programmes for the very young and the somewhat older, covering entertainment, news, and education (Van den Bulck, 2001). Crucially, a majority hereof consisted of original programming in the children's own language and cultural context, presented in a non-commercial context. As television grew in popularity in the 1970s, so did concerns regarding the negative impact of commercialism, internationalisation, and homogenisation of children's content. For a long time, these concerns confirmed the need for children's programmes created from a public service perspective, outside of the commercial market (Fisch, 2004; Huston et al., 1989; Lesser, 1974), with a mix of linear and post-linear offerings to ensure reaching all children (cf. Rutherford & Brown, 2013).

Contradictory, growing academic and public concerns about how the growing dominance of a few major international players strengthened the homogenisation and commercialisation of content for children, especially for preschoolers (Borzekowski, 2001; Coon & Tucker, 2002), coincided with the undermining of the legitimacy of public broadcasters' position within this market by budget cuts, lobbying from commercial competitors, and general assaults on PSM (Stemers, 2010, 2013, 2016; Stemers & D'Arma, 2012). As a result, children's television is increasingly steered by consolidation of a few commercial providers of children's content. This results in the research question: Was universality, in terms of reach and appeal, an important consideration when evaluating the Ketnet Jr. proposal?

## Methodology

The case discussed in this chapter is the analysis of the public value test carried out regarding the proposal of Flemish public broadcaster VRT to launch a linear television channel for children up to six years old. It focuses on four questions, identified in the preceding sections:

1. Has VRM played its role as an independent regulator in the process assessing Ketnet Jr.?
2. Did the adoption of a multistakeholderism approach bring about more inclusive decision-making?

3. Did the *ex ante* test favour priorities of commercial competitors over an inclusive consideration of all stakeholders' views?
4. Was universality, in terms of access and appeal, an important consideration when evaluating the Ketnet Jr. proposal?

The data gathered concern the period from proposal submission (mid-December 2016) until its rejection by the Flemish government (September 2017) and largely consist of the following documents: All documents submitted by VRT; all available documents submitted by stakeholders to the Flemish Regulator for the Media on Ketnet Jr. ( $n = 45$ ); all assessment documents of VRM ( $n = 9$ ); and the Flemish government's decision ( $n = 1$ ). Complementarily, both authors informally discussed the case with a variety of stakeholders involved directly or indirectly in the procedure. One of the authors was part of the VRT team negotiating the Ketnet Jr. proposal and, in that capacity, had insight into internal discussions and external relations with stakeholders, the Flemish government, and the Flemish Parliament.

The document analysis is based on a descriptive quantitative part and a combined descriptive and interpretative qualitative part. The former is mainly concerned with the numeric use of stakeholder input by VRM; the latter with the nature of the arguments made by VRM and the different stakeholders, and the way in which universality of access and appeal was (not) considered a relevant argument.

### VRT's Ketnet Jr. proposal

Before presenting our findings, we elaborate on the proposal of VRT to launch Ketnet Jr., an additional children's television channel next to the existing Ketnet channel. At the time of the Ketnet Jr. proposal, Ketnet's market share was 21.2 per cent, reflecting a five-year decline. Other children's offerings included local commercial channels VTMKzoom and Kadet (MediaLaan Group) with a market share of 5–5.6 per cent, and Studio 100 Television (just under 5%), the free-to-air television channel of a major, Flemish-based but internationally active children's production company. Bigger than these local companies are Nickelodeon and Disney, taking just over 20 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively, of the Flemish children's television market through multiple channels, differentiating between preschoolers and older children. The international channels mainly offer fictional content and animation, mostly dubbed in Dutch by voice actors from the Netherlands (i.e., not Flanders). They generate income from advertising revenue collected by local, commercial broadcasters. MediaLaan, for example, is in charge of Nickelodeon's advertising sales. Few of these companies have an extensive online presence. In contrast, as a multiplatform brand, Ketnet offers audiovisual



content across platforms – including app-based – in a safe, advertising-free environment with guidance from Ketnet staff and parental involvement. Ketnet’s social media environment is highly popular, teaching children not yet allowed on Facebook how to deal with social media. The brand is reputable, as most people appreciate its educational yet fun programming and inclusive approach. The value of Ketnet is addressed on a regular basis, for example, in newspaper articles on new initiatives and programmes (VRT, 2016).

VRT’s proposal to launch a linear channel in a digital age stems from a combination of market, pedagogy, universality, and wider public-value related factors. First, VRT showed concern regarding its reach of a diverse audience (cf. universality of PSM offers, as explained above), based on the observation that nearly 25 per cent of the target audience (children up to six) do not have regular access to the Internet or a device (e.g., a tablet) that enables them access. These children can watch Ketnet, but this channel mainly targets older (6–12) children. It has some Ketnet Jr.-branded blocks of preschool content but, according to VRT, parents find this confusing in terms of brand positioning and want a more stable, full-day offer of public service programmes. While Disney Jr. and Nick Jr. offer preschool content, according to VRT, these mainly broadcast animation, de-localised and dubbed in Dutch by voice actors from the Netherlands. Ketnet aspires to offer various genres, making use of “real people” that speak Flemish Dutch and cover local habits, customs, and issues, thus fitting requirements relating to pedagogy and public added value of their children’s programming. Should the additional channel be approved, VRT promised to invest additional means in local production.

In line with the principle of technology neutrality, some VRT managers argued that, since Ketnet and Ketnet Jr. were already existing PSM brands, an extension of Ketnet Jr. from some linear television offerings and an online video player to a full linear television channel was covered by the existing management contract. The latter contains all obligations of VRT for a five-year period (Vlaamse Gemeenschap & VRT, 2015). However, part of VRT’s Board of Directors, in charge of strategic issues and made up of political representatives, disagreed, resulting in a push for a public value test, supported at governmental level.

### The lengthy public value test process in Flanders

VRT submitted its Ketnet Jr. proposal in mid-December 2016 and published it online. There were no guidelines on what had to be included, other than the vague stipulations in the Flemish media decree to assess new services vis à vis their contribution to Flemish society, culture, and market development, taking into account technological and international evolutions. The regulator refused

to provide additional instructions. VRT's proposal focused on the ways in which Ketnet Jr., as a linear television channel, would further public interest objectives for all preschool children and also elaborated on what they considered a limited market impact. According to VRT, Ketnet Jr. would offer a public-service driven alternative to commercial channels Disney Jr. and Nick Jr. for preschoolers. In collaboration with a Ph.D. in children's psychology (employed full-time by VRT), a schedule for the linear television channel was developed, providing a mix of programmes made for preschoolers and contributing to social, political, and cultural citizenship. These were designed to interact closely with digital offers to encourage children to move flexibly between the television and digital offers of Ketnet Jr., aiming to lessen the digital gap. Content would largely be Flemish (gradually increasing to 80% of broadcast volume), spoken in Flemish Dutch and relating to Flemish culture (such as the use of Flemish children's literature). The channel would be advertisement free. The VRT thus wanted to offer a service distinct from commercial offerings and societally relevant from a public interest point of view. Not surprisingly, they argued that market impact would be limited, estimating a modest (below 1% decrease of market share) loss of advertising revenue for commercial competitors.

The media regulator never provided any details on how it analysed VRT's proposal. At the end of January 2017, VRM published an open consultation structured around the identification of the respondent, the market economic situation of the Flemish media, changes in the media offers in the market, changes in technological evolutions, changes in international trends, protection and promotion of Flemish culture and identity, and the expectations and needs of media users. The general public was not consulted. Respondents could provide arguments (with or without evidence) and, at the end of each section, tick one of two boxes; that is, whether they – “yes” or “no” – supported the service. No other option was provided. From a methodological perspective, the regulator's questionnaire was problematic on three counts. First, questions were worded in very legalistic language, making it hard to understand them. In fact, after its publication, VRT received several questions from certain stakeholders complaining they were unsure how to approach things. Second, the elements covered by the questionnaire, while reflecting the areas indicated by the media decree, were not distinguished according to type of issue. Several elements (e.g., state of play of the Flemish media market, technical evolutions, and international trends) are contextual whereas Flemish culture and identity, market impact, and expectations of media users refer to expected impact of the service. This distinction was not made nor explained. Third, forcing respondents to give a final yes-or-no answer suggests a world divided into proponents and opponents of a PSM proposal, setting the debate in binary, oppositional terms.

The regulator decided to score all topics on a scale: - - (very negative); - (negative); 0 (neutral); + (positive); ++ (very positive). It did not elaborate on

how a score was determined, though. It appears that decisions were based on opaque, qualitative assessments of arguments in favour or against the service. For example, the regulator assumed a negative impact on other broadcasters saying, “the regulator has difficulties in accepting that the introduction of an additional, linear children’s channel would have no negative impact on the market shares of the other children’s channels”, (VRM, 2017: 20) without providing evidence of how it came to that conclusion.

The outcome of the procedure was that VRM stated it could not reach a conclusion. It decided neutral on all aspects except two: market impact, for which it concluded a negative impact on broadcasters; and Flemish culture, for which it observed a likely positive impact. It did not weigh arguments towards a final conclusion but, instead, left this to the Flemish government.

### Analysing an assessment that was not a real assessment

We conducted an analysis of the regulator’s advice, focusing on the attention in the advice devoted to the different aspects, the stakeholders mentioned, and the consideration of universality as an argument for or against Ketnet Jr. as a linear television channel.

First, there is a clear imbalance in the amount of attention (in terms of space) devoted to each of the various issues. Topics related to the market received notably more attention (33 pages) than topics such as protection and promotion of Flemish culture and identity (eight pages). The latter, by the way, is the only exclusively public interest related criterion the regulator looked at. Two annexes to the advice also concern market economic aspects. This suggests a disproportionate attention to market economic aspects to the detriment of public interest considerations, despite VRT’s proposal elaborating on them quite extensively.

Second, analysis of how often VRM uses input from particular stakeholders reveals that considerably more attention is devoted to the opinion of stakeholders with a distinct interest in blocking the proposal, that is, commercial broadcasters that offer children’s television. Furthermore, the regulator itself reached out to several stakeholders to submit an opinion (VRM, 2017), including to six advertising agencies, six author rights’ agencies, eight distributors of television services, nine civil society organisations, three broadcasters, ten educational organisations, nine production companies, and some interest groups or sector organisations. Stakeholders such as youth movements, schools making use of the Ketnet offer, organisations involved in preschooler’s care, or academics, amongst others, were not invited. The consultation was, of course, open to anyone who wanted to submit something but, as said, many stakeholders perceived the technicality of the questionnaire as an obstacle.

A total of 45 stakeholders submitted a response, 20 of which were on their own initiative rather than the regulator's invitation, suggesting considerable involvement from stakeholders other than those on the regulator's radar. Overall, more "market stakeholders" submitted a response than stakeholders motivated by public interest. All broadcasters and most television distributors submitted a response. Broadcasters such as Medialaan and Nickelodeon were opposed to the launch of Ketnet Jr. while SBS was somewhat more prudent. All production companies were in favour of Ketnet Jr. except for Studio 100, which was somewhat conflicted since it produces content for VRT but also has its own broadcast channel Studio 100 TV. Educational publisher WPG Uitgevers submitted a response in favour of Ketnet Jr., while author rights' organisations emphasised the need for being compensated for an additional channel. Television distributors mainly argued that the additional space required in their package for a new channel would reduce their revenue if Ketnet Jr. was granted a must-carry status and claimed there was no legal agreement between them and VRT to transmit such a channel. The regulator used the latter as an argument against the children's channel even though, clearly, it would be odd and possibly unlawful for VRT to have signed distribution contracts before the service was approved. Amongst the stakeholders with a public interest orientation that responded to the questionnaire, the main educational organisations' responses expressed very explicit support for Ketnet Jr. While not supporting television viewing in general, they considered the public service project of Ketnet and Ketnet Jr. as beneficial to preschoolers and older children. All other stakeholders with a public interest orientation supported VRT's plans, as did the four experts, two of whom were academics, that submitted a response.

Next to stakeholder identification, we analysed the relative weight of stakeholders' responses in the regulator's decision. To this end, for each issue we identified which stakeholder was referred to by the regulator when making a particular argument in favour or against Ketnet Jr. Results show that the regulator's (negative) evaluation of the market economic situation and the impact of Ketnet Jr. mentions the opinion of eleven stakeholders, two public interest (Screen Flanders and Kom Op Tegen Kanker), and nine (out of 26 submitted) market stakeholders. Interestingly, VRM refers to production companies (although without identifying them) but does not follow their – mostly positive – evaluation, as VRM dismisses VRT's suggestion that Ketnet Jr. will result in more investments in children's content (VRM, 2017). Medialaan, VRT's closest competitor in the Flemish market, gets four mentions in this section. Medialaan and Nickelodeon both are negative with regards to market impact, as are distributors who fear the potential must-carry status of the new channel.

The second assessment criterion of impact on children's television offerings in the media market was evaluated by the regulator as neutral. Several public interest-oriented stakeholders, specifically those occupied with children's

wellbeing, argued for a preschool channel without advertising and with locally produced content. They observed such a channel is not present in Flanders and, hence, would be a positive addition to existing offers. Broadcasters Medialaan and Nickelodeon, as well as advertising broker Transfer (working for international children's channels like Disney targeting the Flemish media market), argued against, saying VRT exaggerated the difference between commercial and public service television for children. On the basis of these conflicting arguments, the regulator concludes there is neither a negative nor a positive impact on the Flemish media market for children's programmes. So, not only does VRM not evaluate claims made, it also treats as equal the assessment of the distinctiveness and public value of this offer by commercial competitors that only offer animation of American origin, on the one hand, and by academic experts and civil society organisations that argue in the public interest, on the other hand.

The section on technological trends is very brief. Several stakeholders maintained that a linear channel is not innovative and that children increasingly can be reached on-demand. VRM refers to competing broadcasters and distributors that – unsurprisingly – are in favour of a paying, on-demand model. The regulator does not accept the argument of digital exclusion, making reference to studies that claim up to 90 per cent of children have regular access to new media devices. Young children indeed have access to, for instance, Netflix, yet that does not provide domestic children's content and, overlooked by VRM, the YouTube Kids app that broadcasters referred to was not available in Flanders at the time. The regulator further mentions specialised children's channels developed by commercial broadcasters and claims public broadcasters have no incentive to do so since they are not driven by commercial motives (VRM, 2017). There appears a flawed logic: Commercial channels are allowed to make more targeted children's channels because they can earn money in doing so. Public broadcasters cannot make money with a more specialised offer that could benefit preschoolers and other children and, therefore, should not offer more than one children's channel. This logic goes against public broadcasters' aim for universal access and appeal.

The section on international trends is based entirely on the regulator's own assessment. No reference to stakeholder submissions is provided. The regulator largely goes against the assumption that the market for children's television is internationalising. Nonetheless, a 2017 study of the European Audiovisual Observatory, concerning most EU Member States, clearly shows the internationalisation – and, notably, the Americanisation – of the children's television market (Ene, 2017).

Not surprisingly, the regulator concludes that the impact of the service on Flemish culture and identity is positive. The channel offers a considerable amount of domestic programming; there is a commitment of VRT to increase

the share of local content investments in local content from the independent production sector. The channel is also embedded in the local context and can relate to societal issues in Flanders better than international channels. The regulator concludes on a + and not a ++ because several commercial broadcasters argued that they, too, invest in local content and that VRT exaggerated the difference between public service and commercial content. Interestingly, the regulator claims that commercial broadcaster Studio 100 TV is more Flemish in nature than VRT's Ketnet channel, as it broadcasts nearly 85 per cent of Flemish programming whereas Ketnet broadcasts less than 50 per cent. To put this in context: Studio 100 produces a considerable amount of content for Ketnet and re-broadcasts this content on its own television channel. More importantly, most of its programming consists of music videos, thus providing a limited variety of programme genres. It is worth noting that the regulator refers to market stakeholders when discussing the public interest parameter of Flemish culture and identity, whereas for market impact, virtually no reference is made to opinions of public interest-oriented stakeholders, even though they commented on it. By and large, they claimed that market-driven arguments should not drive any decision regarding the approval of a children's channel. The regulator refers to none of these arguments.

Finally, the section on audience's needs and expectations makes little reference to stakeholder opinions. The two academic experts supported the proposal. They argued that too much television viewing may not be healthy for children, but television viewing within a safe environment and setting out from a clear pedagogical project is better than commercial offers. The regulator mainly refers to studies advising against television viewing below the age of 18 months. However, Ketnet Jr. targets preschool children until the age of six. The regulator is unclear about the added value of the channel for children aged 18 months to six years. The regulator, furthermore, dismisses the fact that there is a commercial offer for preschoolers, also for the group below 18 months, and that this target group makes use of this offer. This is surprising, as that offer suggests that the issue is whether a public service offer has its place next to (or is to be preferred over) a commercial, animation-dominated offering.

### Analysing an advice that was not really an advice

It remains by and large unclear what tools and benchmarks the regulator used to analyse stakeholder claims (several hundreds of pages in total). Why was some information aggregated? Why was the opinion of some stakeholders singled out? The reasons why the regulator analysed opinions A and B to come to conclusion C are not (made) clear. No independent assessment of claims is made. Instead, the regulator seems to rely on an intuitive weighing of arguments, going against

its rhetoric of adhering to evidence-based policies reflected at several points in the advice in statements such as the following:

Ketnet Jr. will, *according to VRT's proposal*, be an offer not yet available in the Flemish children's television market. *One can assume*, in line with the agreements made in the management contract between the Flemish government and VRT, that the channel will comply with certain quality requirements. Ketnet Jr. will not consist of a completely new offer, but will make the current offer for preschool children more accessible. VRT gives no information on how the offer on the regular Ketnet channel will evolve as a consequence. They merely say that some preschool offer will remain available on Ketnet, mainly with an eye on smoothening the transition for children from Ketnet Jr. to Ketnet. *The commercial channels say* that the difference between their offer and the offer of VRT is exaggerated. They fear that the introduction of *Ketnet Jr.* will weaken their own Flemish content offering. *On the basis of these arguments, the VRM assigns the following score* for the parameter "general media offering in Flanders": neutral [translated and emphasis added]. (VRM, 2017: 33)

On several occasions, the regulator seems overly reluctant to accept a positive impact of the new service on the market, relying on disclaimers such as "difficult to believe", "plausible", "unlikely", and "logical". There are few indications of checking, testing, and critically evaluating claims. For example, "the VRM *has difficulties to believe* that the introduction of a new linear channel would not have a negative impact on the market shares of other children's channels [translated and emphasis added]" (VRM, 2017: 20). And, "even if some production companies assert that revenues increases are possible, *it seems not very plausible* that the introduction of Ketnet Jr. will have a positive impact on all production companies and faciliatory companies [translated and emphasis added]" (VRM, 2017: 20).

Next to poor argumentation and random use of stakeholder input, the advice stands out for its inconsistency. According to VRM, the initiative is characterised by its contribution to Flemish culture and identity, yet would not constitute a significant change in the market offerings. Moreover, there are indications that the regulator did not fully analyse the information provided, as arguments are accepted as factual or reasonable quite easily. For example, the reference to YouTube Kids – a service not offered in the Flemish market – as a viable alternative for Ketnet Jr. is considered a reality. Mediaaan's investments in children's content are treated as a given, while several production companies say the commercial broadcaster hardly invests in Flemish children's content.

## What universality?

This final part analyses the consideration of universality in the public value test. VRT started from the observation that it did not reach all preschool children with its public service offer and assigned it to the target group's fragmented nature. In essence, these elements relate to universality from a perspective of access and appeal as discussed in the theoretical framework. VRT argues that its remit is to deliver its content to all children, not only to those with a tablet and high-speed Internet access. For VRT, this is part of its remit to provide such an offer because the preschool group in Flanders is targeted only by non-local, commercial channels Nickelodeon and Disney. At the time of the proposal, VRT's Ketnet Jr. app reached about 8,500 children and the Ketnet website had about 38,000 unique visitors per day. These numbers are considerable, but less than the reach of its linear channel, which is above 90,000 daily viewers. Moreover, VRT research shows that less than 50 per cent of Flemish children use their parents' smartphone to watch television, while this amounts to just 33 per cent for computers and 75 per cent for tablets. This means that considerable amounts of preschool children do not use the devices necessary to access Ketnet Jr. online. For Ketnet television, the penetration rate is 97 per cent. So, from a universality perspective – and knowing that the intensity of use (1.9 hours a day for 2–5-year-olds via television vs. 0.6 hours per day for tablets [VRT, 2016]) is higher for television than for other devices – VRT states it makes sense to provide for preschool audiences that are now reached by a separate, international, and commercial offer.

The regulator dismisses this idea, referring to studies that mainly deal with access to technologies, and dismisses that these studies point to 10–15 per cent of preschoolers that have no access to new technologies. According to the regulator, this group will be included in the future, adhering to a rather technologically optimistic view. Interestingly, while the regulator argues for Ketnet Jr. as a digital-only service, it refers to increased penetration rates of new technologies to forecast a negative impact of a Ketnet Jr. linear channel on commercial broadcasters. This would be unlikely in the regulator's own logic of an expected drop in linear viewing, as the impact of the new channel on other channels would be limited.

Next to universality of access, VRT (2017) argues in favour of a linear Ketnet Jr. channel based on universality as content geared to special groups. VRT argues that the needs of the preschool audience are completely different from children over the age of six regarding storytelling, graphical issues, language use, and so forth. Content for older children is not necessarily suitable for a preschool audience because it is more complex, targets different development goals, adopts more advanced language, and has a different format and duration. However – and despite the distinct public service logic underlying it – the regulator's advice completely ignores this argument of content universality.



## The Flemish government's decision not to approve

Faced with an advice that, essentially, was not an advice, the Flemish government had to decide on the service itself rather than on the regulator's evaluation. The largest political party in Flanders, the Nationalist New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), was opposed to the idea from before the actual procedure, supporting Flemish commercial broadcaster Medialaan. The Liberal Party (Open Vld) that provided the minister of media had an ambiguous position and, to the surprise of the production companies, decided against the service, but only after the advice of the regulator. Christian Democrats (CD&V) were in favour before, during, and after the procedure of the regulator and when the Flemish government wanted to reject the service before the 2017 summer recess, they managed to postpone the decision until after recess, hoping public broadcaster VRT could intensify its lobbying activities and convince (at least one of) the other parties.

Regardless, in October 2017, the Flemish government rejected Ketnet Jr. In its decision, the government argued digital trends would ensure all children would be able to access Ketnet Jr.'s online offer. Hence, there was no need for a linear preschool channel. The government did not elaborate on market or public interest effects, ignoring the considerable body of research that shows children from specific sociocultural and socioeconomic groups are excluded from regular use of the Internet, have no regular access to tablets or other devices, and lack the skills to use them. Universality did not feature in the government's decision, in the sense that the government denied a problem in this area.

## Discussion and conclusions

This chapter set out to answer four research questions. First, did the VRM act in its capacity as an independent regulator? The answer to that question is not a simple yes or no. The analysis shows that the regulator was essentially unprepared to do the *ex ante* test, unable to adopt objective methodologies to evaluate the contribution of the service to public interest and market objectives. It was confronted with opposing views from the public broadcaster and its main competitors and, in the end, was unwilling to provide any advice to the Flemish government. The fact that the regulator came to the conclusion that the contribution to Flemish culture was positive, to the market negative, and on all other elements neutral, suggests that the regulator was hesitant, to say the least, to come to an advice that would be difficult for the Flemish government to put aside. This is not to say that the regulator and the Flemish government agreed on the contents of the advice; there is no scientific evidence for that, but insights into the procedure suggest some kind of collusion.

Second, was the multistakeholderism approach of VRM inclusive in nature? The answer to that question is no. Even though, in principle all stakeholders had an opportunity to submit an answer to the open questionnaire, the regulator's use of legal and technical language in the survey created a real disadvantage for several less professionalised organisations and for stakeholders with less means or expertise in the field of media law. It discouraged several stakeholders from submitting answers. Moreover, the analysis of the regulator is not transparent about how stakeholder submissions were used.

Third, were concerns of economic stakeholders prioritised over public interest considerations? The answer is complex, as it appears that the interests of a specific group of economic stakeholders were prioritised over the interests of other economic stakeholders and stakeholders taking a public interest approach. As said, commercial broadcasters and distributors were mentioned significantly more and had more impact on the negative, positive, or neutral score. Competing broadcasters opposed the service, fearing children and their parents would prefer Flemish, advertising-free content over their offer of predominantly Anglo-Saxon children's content with advertising; distributors were unwilling to include another must-carry channel in their offer. Other economic interests were ignored. Most notably, production companies were very positive about the proposal, arguing that the public broadcaster is, in fact, the only company investing in local children's content. Their support was dismissed as abstract, with the regulator considering it unlikely that VRT would invest extra in local content. These doubts were expressed by politicians during the procedure, resulting in VRT publishing a paper to make explicit how much additional money it would invest on top of its ongoing engagement in children's content. The regulator refused to accept this document in an ongoing procedure and continued to insist that VRT's dossier was unclear on this point, despite not having provided VRT with any guidance regarding what elements to discuss in its application. Civil society opinions were included only in the part on the contribution of Ketnet Jr. to Flemish culture. Several stakeholders were not mentioned at all, even though they submitted elaborate responses on the educational and inclusive approach of Ketnet. From this follows that VRM valued opinions of certain stakeholders over those of others, aggravated and even enabled by a complete lack of an analytical, objectifying tool for evaluation.

Fourth, was universality an important consideration when evaluating the Ketnet Jr. proposal? No. The argument of digital exclusion was not accepted. Ignoring all scientific evidence regarding the remaining divide between "haves" and "have nots", also within younger age groups (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007), the regulator and, later on, the government, said that an online offer was sufficient to meet the demands of the youngest children and their parents. A linear channel was a thing of the past. Again, if that were the case, then why the fierce opposition from competitors? Why, during the Covid-19 crisis three

years later, the rushed government policies to give laptops and Internet access to a significant amount of children, if the digital divide was supposed to have been resolved?

The entire ex ante test and its outcome demonstrates a gap between the theory and reality of multistakeholderism in PSM policymaking. First and foremost, the idea of inclusive policymaking is an illusion (Donders et al., 2018). While VRM provided a list of nearly 50 stakeholders that submitted an answer to its questionnaire on Ketnet Jr., it does not refer to or quote over half of these stakeholders in its advice. In particular, its assessment rarely mentions arguments of educational organisations and individual professionals working with children in favour of commercial stakeholders' considerations. Furthermore, the regulator appeared driven by an attempt to find simplistic opposing views, as its questionnaire only provided opinions in favour or against the preschool channel. There were no questions asking stakeholders what conditions or modifications would make the VRT's proposal more or less desirable (VRM, 2017). Overall, the entire process created the illusion of serving the public while being an exercise to have public broadcasters serve the media market rather than society and its citizens. Needless to say, such an approach and ideology forces public broadcasters away from their mission to serve all parts of the audience with a public-value driven offer.

Ironically, VRT now offers Ketnet Jr. on one of its other linear channels, which otherwise broadcasts information and current affairs, culture, documentaries, and other more highbrow programs after 8 p.m. So, from 6 a.m., Ketnet Jr. is now a reality on that channel. This initiative met with no political discussions or protests whatsoever. No public value test was carried out. Commercial competitors remained utterly silent on the issue.

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## Chapter 5

# Historical dimensions of universalism at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

*Some implications for today*

David Skinner

### Abstract

This chapter explores the ways in which the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) has embraced the idea of universal service. While the CBC was not legislatively mandated to elements of universality until 1968, throughout its history, Canada's public broadcaster has striven to provide what are seen today as key elements of this ideal. But the large size of the country, coupled with its small population, the regional, linguistic, and heritage diversity, the vagaries of funding, and relations with the private sector, have made meeting those goals challenging. Today, however, the shifting technologies and fragmenting audiences that characterise the digital media environment present perhaps the biggest challenge yet to the role of the CBC within the system and its pursuit of the principles associated with universalism. Understanding the lessons that past struggles in this regard may have for the challenges currently facing public broadcasting in Canada is the purpose of this work.

**Keywords:** public broadcasting, public service media, universality, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, CBC

### Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which the public broadcasting in Canada – and, in particular, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) – has embraced the idea of universal service. While universal service is often seen as a key goal of public broadcasting, it wasn't until 1968 that the CBC was legislatively mandated to elements of this ideal. Throughout its history, however, Canada's public broadcaster has striven to provide what might be seen as seen as key dimensions of universality. But the large size of the country, coupled with its small population, the regional, linguistic, and heritage diversity, and the vagaries of funding, have made meeting those goals challenging at best. At the same time, since the inception of public broadcasting in Canada, the system has been comprised of both public and private elements (Canada, 1991) and, from the

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beginning, the public broadcaster has struggled with private broadcasters over access to the system's resources and audiences. Hence, a key element of this analysis is the influence the private sector has had on the pursuit of universal service within the system.

Today, the shifting technologies and fragmenting audiences that characterise the digital media environment present perhaps the biggest challenge yet to the role of the CBC within the system and its pursuit of the principles associated with universalism. Understanding the lessons that past struggles in this regard may have for the challenges currently facing public broadcasting in Canada is the purpose of this work.

### Defining universality

While there is no consensus on a definition of universality in the context of public broadcasting, a number of writers have attempted to develop a working definition. For instance, Tracey identifies eight principles underlying the project of public broadcasting, two of which directly address universalism. The first is universality of availability. Key features of this principle include ensuring that "signals are available to all" and that "no one should be disenfranchised by distance or accident of geography" (Tracey, 1998: 26–27). The second principle is universality of appeal. Here the concern is that public broadcasting should "provide programmes which cater to the many different tastes and interests which constitute a society's life" (Tracey, 1998: 26–27).

Focusing on the history of British public service broadcasting, Born and Proser (2001) identify three key elements of universality. The first is technical and geographical universality. Similar to Tracey's first principle, the key here is the provision of high-quality technical service "regardless of geographic or social location" (Born & Proser, 2001: 676). The second principle is social and cultural universality. Recalling Tracey's second principle, the focus here is on "the provision of programming that caters for and reflects the interests of the full social and cultural diversity of Britain and its minorities, as well as the aim of enhancing social unity through the creation of a 'common culture'" (Born & Proser, 2001: 676). The third principle is universality of genre and mode of address. Expanding on Tracey's second principle, here the aim is to have "programming that includes the entire range of broadcast genres" (Born & Proser, 2001: 676). Here, the idea is that public service broadcasting "should be truly popular, both as a value in itself [...] and, more instrumentally, to draw audiences across different and unforeseen kinds of programming" (Born & Proser, 2001: 676).

Providing a somewhat broader definition, the 2018 RIPE Conference Call for papers states that, "The principle of universalism has four dimensions:



1) access and reach, 2) genres and services, 3) relevance and impact, and 4) financing with attendant obligations” (Lowe, 2018: para. 2). On the face of it, the first three principles appear to echo the ideas discussed above. Financing with attendant obligations adds a new dimension that might refer to the ways in which the organisation either perceives or is mandated to allocate available resources to its responsibilities.

As we shall see, from its inception in Canada, public service broadcasting has been framed and animated by principles similar to these. However, within the context of the peculiarities of the Canadian state, these principles have both developed and been realised in particular ways.

### Setting the stage

Broadcasting began in Canada in 1919, but for most of its first decade, development investment in radio markets was focused at the local level and was both weak and parochial. Signals from high-power American transmitters flowed freely across the border, often overpowering those of the smaller Canadian stations, and hefty transmission fees on telegraph lines made networks all but impossible except under special circumstances (cf. Weir, 1965).

Set against the growing dominance of American stations and programming in Canada, the federal government struck the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting (Aird Commission) in 1928. The commission conducted an extensive survey of broadcasting in both the US and Europe and held a series of public hearings across the country (Canada, 1929b). In its report, the Commission found public opinion unanimous on one “fundamental question – Canadian radio listeners want Canadian broadcasting” – and that the “potentialities of broadcasting as an instrument of education [...] providing entertainment, and of informing the public on questions of national interest” had been impressed upon them (in Bird, 1988: 43). They posited that “broadcasting will undoubtedly become a great force in fostering a national spirit and interpreting national citizenship” but observed, “[at] present the majority of programs heard are from sources outside of Canada [and have] a tendency to mould the minds of the young people in the home to ideals and opinions that are not Canadian” (in Bird, 1988: 43).

The Commission went on to recommend that an independent, state-owned broadcasting company be established and “vested with the full powers and authority of any private enterprise, its status and duties corresponding to those of a public utility” (in Bird, 1988: 44). The technical backbone of the system was to be seven high-powered broadcasting stations, with perhaps a few low-powered undertakings supplementing their service in locales that were “ineffectively served”. All other stations would be closed down. Financing for

the system would come from license fees, indirect advertising, and government subsidies.

While not explicitly stated, these recommendations reflected a number of the core principles of universalism described above. Informed by a nationalist vision, the Commission was convinced that private investment was not adequate to the task of building (e.g., access and reach) and programming (e.g., genres and services) a national system. They were concerned that the system should eventually cover all parts of Canada but that private broadcasters requirement that programmes develop large audiences to garner advertising revenue resulted “in the crowding of stations into urban centres and the consequent duplication of services in such places, leaving other large populated areas ineffectively served” (e.g., universality of availability) (in Bird, 1988: 43–45). Based upon the observations that only a minority of Canadians owned radios and that a high licence fee would be “burdensome to those of limited means” (e.g., universality of availability), the commissioners were also concerned that the public would not support a system financed solely by licence fees or government subsidy (e.g., financing with attendant obligations). Consequently, broadcasting’s “educative value” and “importance as a medium for promoting national unity” (e.g., relevance and impact) made it appear “reasonable” to the Commission “that a proportion of the expenses should be met out of public funds” (e.g., financing with attendant obligations) (in Bird, 1988: 50). In other words, the Commission envisioned public broadcasting as providing a universally available service with a comprehensive range of programming, financed in a way that spread the cost between a range of stakeholders. However, how these principles would play out in the peculiar circumstances characterising the emerging system remained to be seen.

Moreover, while advertising is sometimes seen as antithetical to the purposes of public broadcasting, here it was an important part of the equation, as it was seen as a means for alleviating the cost of the system to the public and meeting with concerns of Canadian commercial interests who argued that a ban on advertising would leave them at a disadvantage to American companies in Canadian markets.

### Early radio broadcasting, 1930–1948

From the fall of 1930 to the spring of 1932, public debate on nationalising broadcasting was heated and government lobbying extensive. In the face of opposition, advocates for nationalisation allowed that stations serving local markets might be privately owned and locally programmed. And, in an effort to address both the popularity of American programmes and the concerns of station owners and advertisers that Canadian audiences would actually tune in to the proposed network instead of the American radio networks, selected

programmes would be obtained from foreign sources. These concessions illustrated the power of entrenched private interests and presaged the struggles between the private and public sectors that would characterise regulation for decades to come. At the same time, however, with the financial hardship of the Great Depression, the private profit-oriented interests were loath to undertake further responsibilities toward building a national system (Peers, 1969).

In May of 1932, Prime Minister R. B. Bennett gave a speech introducing the legislation in Parliament that clearly outlined its nationalist purposes and context. First, he argued that “this country must be assured of complete control of Canadian broadcasting from Canadian sources” (Bird, 1988: 112). Without it,

[broadcasting] can never become a great agency for communication of matters of national concern and for the diffusion of national thoughts and ideals [...]. It can never be the agency by which consciousness may be fostered and sustained and national unity still further strengthened. (Bird, 1988: 112)

Second, Bird (1988: 112) claimed,

no other scheme than that of public ownership can ensure to the people of this country, without regard to class or place, equal enjoyment of the pleasures of radio broadcasting. Private ownership must necessarily discriminate between densely and sparsely populated areas [...]. Happily [...] under this system there is no need for discrimination; all may be served alike.

Thus, from the outset, public broadcasting was envisioned as a national, universally available service for communicating Canadian ideas and perspectives and enhancing social unity; in other words, as having many of the hallmarks of universality.

The regulatory organisation which was created by the 1932 Radio Broadcasting Act – the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC) – was not well equipped to mould the broadcasting system into the “great agency” envisioned in Bennett’s speech. The CRBC’s relations with the private sector were focused more toward regulation than eventual ownership, and its relationships with Parliament were structured more like those of a government department than an independent organisation (Canada, 1932). The Commission was unable to borrow money or raise capital publicly, and it was dependent upon Parliament for releasing funds collected from licence fees – its main source of revenue. Moreover, nowhere in the Act were either Parliament’s aims for broadcasting or the national purposes of broadcasting specified, leaving the Commission without a clear mandate. It was, however, equipped with limited powers on two fronts: 1) to regulate and control broadcasting in Canada, and 2) to “carry on the business of broadcasting”. In terms of the latter, it was empowered to both “originate programmes and secure programmes from within or outside Canada”. Toward distributing programmes, the Commis-

sion was given full power over network broadcasting and “to make operating arrangements with private stations for the broadcast of national programs” (Canada, 1932: n.p.).

While Aird’s recommendations originally envisioned that the public broadcaster would buy up the existing local private stations, funds for this purpose were never forthcoming. Consequently, equipped with a handful of stations of its own in major centres, the CRBC, and later the CBC, set their sights on building and programming a national network and relied upon private stations to distribute much of their programming at the local level. Private stations were generally fickle partners, however. With their sights clearly set on the profit motive, they generally had to be paid to carry the public broadcaster’s programming and, where contracts and requests in this regard conflicted with more profitable alternatives – such as American programming – they refused carriage (CRBC, 1936). At the same time, where regulations were seen as interfering with their bottom line – such as in the case of content and commercial regulations – they complained, which often resulted in favourable changes. In the midst of the Depression, the Commission’s programmes were quite popular with private stations (CRBC, 1936). But, as economic conditions improved and commercial formats that attracted large audiences were developed, the public broadcaster’s programming quickly lost favour, forcing the public broadcaster to develop its own modes of distribution. However, through subsidising their operations with both free programming and payments, the CRBC played a key role in helping the majority of Canadian stations weather the tough economic climate of the Depression.

Consequently, animated by a discourse of nationalist purpose, and faced with the intransigence of private broadcasters, public broadcasting began to take up residence on the commercial margins of the system. Here, focused at the national level, what might be seen as universalism began to take on a particular form. Working in conjunction with the private sector, the public broadcaster created programming and supplied distribution services that the private sector was loath to undertake. Early on, the CRBC’s nationalist focus also ran up against another peculiarity of the Canadian state. To meet with what were seen at the time as Canada’s two major linguistic groups, the CRBC started out distributing programming in both English and French side-by-side in its programme formats. But in the face of protests from English Canada, the service was soon divided into English and French components, mirroring what were seen as the two cultural solitudes of the Canadian state (Weir, 1965). Meanwhile, profitable local programming, audiences, and services were largely left to private interests.

A new Broadcasting Act legislated in 1936 did away with the CRBC and gave rise to the CBC – an independent crown corporation. But while the CBC was granted more autonomy than the CRBC, there was still no clear direc-

tion or mandate for the corporation's activities, and its regulatory powers and own finances remained heavily circumscribed by parliamentary authority (cf. Canada, 1936).

Following the lead of its predecessor, network services and programme production were the CBC's main activities. After a judicious reorganisation of its financial relationships, the CBC doubled its investment in infrastructure, building a series of high-power transmitters similar to those envisioned by Aird (CBC, 1939). By May of 1939, the CBC claimed its signal reached 84 per cent of the population (cf. CBC, 1939; Canada, 1938; Weir, 1965).

Expanding programming increased demand for advertising. However, in partial response to criticisms by private radio stations and newspapers, the CBC adopted a "commercial acceptance policy" that limited advertising to 20 per cent of gross revenue and turned away hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue per annum through the 1930s and 1940s (Peers, 1969: 226–230; cf. Weir, 1965). Thus, one avenue for helping finance the unique services of the CBC was voluntarily circumscribed.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, in the face of the escalating struggles of the World War II and led by its concerns for providing a comprehensive programme service, the CBC felt compelled to increase its news coverage and, working with newspapers, pioneered a national news service. Soon after, it also launched an international short-wave service. Consequently, set against evolving financial constraints and in the spirit of universalism, the CBC continued to provide an expanding range of programme genres and services at the national and international levels.

Meanwhile, private stations pressed the CBC for the unencumbered right to create their own networks. But because the CBC was concerned that these would be largely used to air American programmes and leave out many stations that were too small to attract national advertisers, these requests were often denied. Instead, in order to maximise coverage, the CBC included these stations in its network. Hence, as a regulator, the CBC worked to impose universalist principles on the system as a whole. As a result, both advertisers and small stations benefited from CBC network affiliation. These arrangements were not designed to be lucrative for the CBC, nor were they as profitable for large stations as independent arrangements might have been (Weir, 1965; cf. Malone, 1962). Consequently, in urban areas where advertising was readily found, private stations balked at these arrangements and often failed to meet even half their network commitments (Canada, 1938).

However, under the shepherding of the public broadcaster, the private sector prospered, and by 1948, their revenue was almost twice that of the CBC (Canada, 1951). This prosperity spurred lobbying efforts of private stations; key among their demands were the unencumbered right to construct radio networks and, fuelled by growing resentment that they were being regulated by a competitor, the institution of an "independent" regulatory board. While

parliamentary committees reviewing broadcasting continued to endorse the public purposes of broadcasting and its use as a nationalist instrument, these hearings also became forums for enhancing the reach and legitimacy of the private sector, fuelling its growth. Consequently, as the system developed, the CBC had to increasingly depend on its own resources for distributing its programmes, as well as contend with a growing range of private sector competitors and fragmented markets and audiences. This expansion effectively sounded the death knell for the primacy of the public sector within the system.

### Television arrives

In the late 1940s, American television signals crept across the border, giving 60 per cent of Canadians access to them. Faced with this onslaught, the CBC began to make plans for the introduction of Canadian television in 1949. Just as American programmes had been employed in the CBC's radio schedules to offset the cost of production and improve broadcasting's popularity, the Corporation planned to deploy American programming in its television schedules to the same ends. The CBC was charged with building transmission and production facilities in six centres across the country and began broadcasting in September 1952. The federal government decided, however, that licences for stations in places other than these cities would be open to applications from the private sector.

Saddled with the cost of developing television, the CBC began operating at a deficit in 1949 (cf. Anderson, 1976). But as sales of television sets took off in 1952, manufacturers began to complain that many people were purchasing those sets in the US, where economies of scale brought them to market at a lower cost. To discourage such cross-border shopping, in April 1953 the government imposed a 15 per cent excise tax on television and radio sets and parts. The proceeds of this tax were made available to the CBC (Anderson, 1976).

With the CBC pouring money into the system, television broadcasting in Canada grew at an extraordinary rate, and by March 1958, there were 8 CBC stations and 36 private outlets (Ellis, 1979).<sup>2</sup> As Weir (1965: 331) notes, "During the first three months of the life of most private stations 85 percent of their programs were supplied by the CBC without cost to them". As stations became viable and acquired programmes of their own, the CBC still "made no charge to private stations in the case of sponsored or unsponsored programs" (Canada, 1957: 185). And when the affiliates carried the national network's sponsored programmes, the CBC shared the revenue with the private stations. Consequently, as with radio, public broadcasting's push for universality helped spur the growth of the private sector while leaving it dependent upon their cooperation for distributing programming.

## The system divided

In the context of the post–World War II development of consumer society, it quickly became clear that commercial television was going to be quite lucrative, and the private sector stepped up their campaign against CBC regulation. A newly installed conservative government provided a sympathetic ear, and in 1958, a new Canadian Broadcasting Act was legislated. While the government argued that the broadcasting system remained a single system, the 1958 Act recognised that system as being comprised of both public and private elements and set both reporting to an independent regulatory board – the Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG). With this shift, the CBC lost any hold it had over private broadcasters and was forced to appear before the regulator for both licence renewals and to compete with the private sector for new licences and other privileges within the system.

Fuelled by applicants’ heady promises of big contributions to the production of Canadian programming, the BBG licensed a large number of private stations and a private television network – the Canadian Television Network (CTV). However, recognising that private broadcasters would find it much more profitable to import American programming than to produce their own, the BBG also introduced Canadian content regulations to help ensure that a percentage of broadcast time would be devoted to Canadian content.

While the protected commercial environment afforded by regulation gave extra impetus to the growth of the private sector, it provided little solace for the CBC. As the market for television sets became saturated, proceeds from the excise tax fell off sharply and the federal government began to subsidise the CBC with an annual grant in the late 1950s. But, because the grant was provided on a yearly basis, long-term planning was difficult at best. And as private investors rushed to cash in on the expanding television market, the CBC was at a clear disadvantage in the competition for new licences. Consequently, just as had happened in radio, the growing dominance of private investment at the commercial heart of the system began to force the CBC to its commercial margins. As the CBC (1960: 9) itself noted, “The problem is one of economics [...] where economically feasible privately-owned stations are filling the gaps through the establishment of satellite stations. But in most areas, because of economics, Canadians are looking to the Corporation for service”.

With the growth of the private sector pushing the CBC toward the system’s commercial margins, the Corporation laid out what it believed to be the purpose of public broadcasting the following year: 1) “to be a complete service [...] bringing things of interest, value, and entertainment to people of all tastes, ages, and interests”; 2) “to link all parts of the country” through both a wide range of programming and extension of service to “as many Canadians as finances allow”; 3) “to be predominantly Canadian in content and character”; and 4)

“to serve equitably in the two main language groups and cultures” (CBC, 1960: n.p.). Thus, in the face of successive governments’ failure to provide the public broadcaster a mandate, it created one for itself. However, with this move, the principles of universalism “officially” became the responsibility of the CBC, rather than the system at large.

While this mandate was modified as it was entrenched in ensuing legislation, to a large part the principles have remained the same. These principles are very similar to those espoused by the Aird Commission, illustrating that despite the travails faced by public broadcasting through the development of radio and television, universality remained the guiding principle. However, the question of how to operationalise these principles in the face of limited organisational resources and ever escalating private investment would continue to dog the CBC. On one side, as the organisation strove to serve the broadcast needs of a growing set of diverse social and geographic interests across the country, it would divide its resources between a range of competing demands (just as Canada’s two main language groups and cultures had already forced a division within the Corporation). On another side, as private interests increasingly took hold of the commercial centre of the system, and began capitalising and investing profits in those aspects of the “national system” from which they might expect to turn a profit, the CBC’s mandate would continue to relegate it to those aspects of development that provided little or no commercial return. Thus, if private investment could not be controlled through regulation and turned to “uneconomical” national purposes, without a consistent and growing source of revenue, this mandate would leave the Corporation vulnerable to engaging with an increasing range of necessarily uneconomical responsibilities. The BBG was not always helpful in protecting the interests of the public broadcaster and, on several occasions, seeing the CBC as one element in the larger “single” broadcasting system, attempted to force the CBC to relinquish programming and broadcast time to the commercial network (Peers, 1969). But as the system developed and particular types of programming – such as sports – became more popular (and profitable), the private sector began outbidding the CBC for the rights to these programmes (Peers, 1969).

Following trends in the US, the television system grew sharply, and by 1965, 92 per cent of Canadian homes were considered television households (Canada, 1965). As with radio, advertising was the primary source of income within the system, and American programmes were key to providing it. Equipped with its mandate, the public broadcaster worked to turn such revenue to the production of Canadian programmes and the extension of broadcast service. For the private sector, however, producing domestic programmes entailed a double jeopardy. Not only was Canadian programming more expensive to produce than foreign programmes were to purchase, if a Canadian programme was scheduled to replace a foreign programme – even if it drew as large an audience – any return



on investment would be severely reduced if not lost altogether unless the cost of the Canadian programme was roughly equivalent to that of the imported program. Given that the cost of Canadian rights was generally a fraction of the cost of production, this was rarely the case. Consequently, the BBG constantly struggled to get private broadcasters to meet with their content obligations (Babe, 1979). This problem continues to haunt broadcast regulation.

At the same time, the CBC's push for universalism put it at a disadvantage in the emerging commercial environment. To maximise advertising income, the American programming offered by the private stations was designed to attract as large an audience as possible and carry that audience through the evening programme schedule. However, in striving to meet a diverse range of tastes and interests, the CBC deliberately focused on constructing different types of audiences from timeslot to timeslot through the evening (cf. Miller, 1987). These scheduling practices seemingly encouraged viewers – whose tastes were not met by the upcoming programme – to switch channels. Once they switched to another station, they became wrapped in a programme schedule that was deliberately devised to hold large, diverse audiences through programme changes or to capture a portion of a competitor's audience at programme breaks. Consequently, in the face of growing competition, by 1967, the CBC held just 50 per cent of the Canadian audience, and as the number of channels multiplied, the CBC's audience share continued its downward spiral (CRTC, 1979; cf. Rutherford, 1990).

Fuelled by concerns that the broadcasting system provide Canadians with the best service available, throughout the 1960s, the CBC continued to ride the leading edge of technology, experimenting with FM radio in 1960, proposing satellite distribution in Canada in 1961, and introducing colour television in 1966.

In radio, licencing on both AM and FM frequencies foregrounded the American popular music format throughout the system and, as national advertisers moved to television, declining revenue and pressure from private stations induced the CBC to abandon commercial radio broadcasting. Through this period, CBC radio continued to clearly differentiate itself from private stations and, based upon the principles of universalism espoused in its mandate, establish a relatively large and loyal share of the radio audience that continues to tune in to this day.

Meanwhile, entrepreneurs began building co-axial cable television (CATV) systems in Canadian cities. With their ability to import large numbers of distant, mainly American, signals, these systems threatened to flood the broadcasting system with foreign content. Because cable did not utilise the radio spectrum, these systems were outside the jurisdiction of the BBG, and the board stood helplessly by.

Partially in response to the cable problem, the federal government legislated a new Canadian Broadcasting Act in 1968. For the first time, both the nationalist

goals of the system and the mandate of the CBC were enunciated in legislation. But while the Act stated that the broadcast undertakings within the system constituted a “single system”, two elements were defined: a national broadcasting service and a private element. Following the lines set out in the CBC’s self-proclaimed mandate, the public broadcaster was charged with the presentation of “a whole range of programming”, extension of service to “all parts of Canada”, “contributing to the flow and exchange of cultural and regional information and entertainment”, and contributing “to the development of national unity and provid[ing] for a continuing expression of Canadian identity” (Canada, 1968: section 2.g). The private sector, on the other hand, was given the more modest responsibilities of issuing a programme service providing “reasonable and balanced opportunity for the expression of differing views [...] of high standard, [...] and] using predominantly Canadian creative and other resources” (Canada, 1968: section 2.d). In the case of conflict between the two elements, “paramount consideration” was to be given to the “objectives of the national broadcasting service” (Canada, 1968: section 2.h). Moreover, while there had originally been provision for a five-year funding formula for the CBC, by the time the legislation reached the House, annual appropriations were still the rule.

With this legislation, the dual economic systems that had underwritten broadcasting development since its inception were enshrined in regulation. Similarly, reflecting its historical position within the system, the CBC was defined as a “national” broadcaster – not a “public” broadcaster. The CBC’s new “mandate” also reflected the difficulties in forging private investment to the larger interest of public communication, and left the Corporation with the larger purpose of constructing programming that reflected the diversity of interests of Canada’s different communities while, at the same time, attempting to forge these interests to the larger national purposes of unity and the expression of a “Canadian identity”.

Despite shifting technologies and markets, over the next 30 years the public and private elements would follow much the same paths as they had always followed. Private broadcasting would continue its attempts to capitalise only those elements of the system that presented a potential for profit, while the public sector would continue to pursue the more ephemeral goals of extending service and programme production into areas where private investment was loathe to tread.

## The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission

In the hope of increasing Canadian programme production, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) expanded the

private sector and admonished the CBC to be less commercial and schedule more Canadian programming. But, as the private sector expanded and audiences were fragmented, the CBC lost audience share, and advertising revenue fell from 21.9 per cent of total income in 1969–1970, to 16.7 per cent in 1975–1976 (Babe, 1979). At the same time, private broadcasters began to consolidate their holdings to take advantage of economies of scale. But harnessing the private sectors' profits to Canadian programme production proved difficult for the CRTC and, between 1968 and 1979, the amount of Canadian programming the CTV network scheduled from 8:00 p.m.–10:30 p.m. fell from 22.8 per cent to 5.7 per cent (CRTC, 1979; McFadyen et al., 1980). Still, led by its mandate, the CBC continued to press ahead with new distribution technologies, renting three channels from the newly launched government-owned Anik satellite in 1972 for radio and television distribution, introducing a stereo radio network, and developing an accelerated coverage plan to bring its service to northern and underserved communities.

In the 1970s, footprints of American broadcast satellites began edging into Canada and attracting viewers. In the face of these incursions, the government began to press the CRTC to introduce pay television as a way to keep audiences tuned to Canadian services. The CRTC was loath to do so for fear that it might fragment audiences. But the Commission's efforts to hold back the tide of technological change soon proved for naught. With economic tremors from the end of the post-war boom rocking the economy, the federal government developed a new policy vision to spur the growth of the communications sector in the early 1980s.

Set against the impending threat of foreign satellite broadcasters, privately owned CATV distribution networks were positioned as the "cornerstone" of a new system that would carry a wide array of new information services (Canada, 1983b). As the government stated, in this new "multi-channel broadcasting environment [...] the Canadian broadcasting system as a whole, rather than the CBC, [would] provide a balanced and comprehensive programming service" (Canada, 1983a: 12). But the CBC would still play "key" role that "complements" the private sector and helps spur programme production (Canada, 1983a: 12). Toward this end, the CBC's Canadian content targets were raised, and it was charged with contracting 50 per cent of its programming from private producers. But, as a new conservative government came to power in the mid-1980s, one of its first actions was to pare about 10 per cent from the CBC's budget (Raboy, 1996; Winseck, 1995).

In the face of this shifting environment, a task force was appointed to re-view broadcasting policy (Canada, 1986). The ensuing investigation became the backdrop for the legislation of a new Canadian Broadcasting Act in 1991. Running counter to government concerns for restraint, many of the task force's recommendations looked to strengthen and expand the place of the public sec-

tor within the system and were reflected in the ensuing regulation. Toward this end, both community and aboriginal broadcasting were given particular mention, and a new set of cultural concerns were enunciated. However, these were never followed up with strong policy action and, for instance, while aboriginal broadcasting managed to obtain a degree of independence, the CBC continued to carry large responsibilities in this area, particularly in the north. For the CBC's part, their mandate reiterated the necessity of continuing to provide a range of programming that "informs, enlightens and entertains", that the majority of its programmes be "distinctively Canadian", and that extension of service "throughout Canada" remain a key priority (Canada, 1991: section 3.1 & m. i, vii). Extending these service and programming responsibilities, the CBC was also charged with: actively contributing to the "flow and exchange of cultural expression", contributing to "shared national consciousness and identity", and "being made available throughout Canada by the most appropriate and efficient means [...] as resources become available" (Canada, 1991: section 3. m. iii, vi, vii).

With the changes introduced by the new Canadian Broadcasting Act and the increasing number of pay and specialty television channels – or "discretionary services" as they would come to be known, covering topics from history to science and sports to nature – being launched, the scope of the Corporation's once singular responsibilities was, to a degree, reapportioned amongst new players in the system. In the face of these changes, the CBC floated a "repositioning" strategy in the early 1990s that would have strengthened the Corporation's representation of regional issues and concerns (at the time, a noticeable gap in the system), as well as creating some economies through centralisation. But the plan was cut off at the knees by the CRTC's refusal to allow the Corporation to solicit "local" advertising for "regional" service (CRTC, 1991: 423; Raboy, 1996). A litany of budget cuts followed, and by 1998, the CBC's full-time staff was reduced to half of its 1984 level. In the wake of these cuts, local news and public affairs programming were heavily cut back. At the same time, the conservative opposition party began to call for privatisation of the CBC (Canada, 2003). Despite these setbacks, however, the CBC continued its efforts to expand the dimensions of broadcasting service. In 1990, it began to quietly experiment with digital audio broadcasting, and in 1993, the first CBC radio programmes were made available on the emerging Internet (Patrick & Whelan, 1996).

With the increasing number of television channels, audience fragmentation accelerated through the 1990s. Although the CBC and conventional "over-the-air" stations were all carried on the growing cable and satellite distribution services, this fragmentation saw the English CBC's share fall from 12.9 per cent in 1993 to 7.1 per cent in 2003. The share of conventional stations fell from 44.1 per cent to 35.1 per cent, and the new discretionary channels rose from 6.2 per cent to 16.4 per cent during the same period (CRTC, 2004). Private

operators moved to cope with these events by reassembling audiences through mergers and acquisitions. The new discretionary channels offered opportunities for private broadcasters to both cross-promote and rebroadcast programming. However, the CRTC regularly refused the CBC's request to develop discretionary channels where it might accomplish similar ends.

Still, throughout this period the CBC remained the largest single source of Canadian television programming. In 1995, the CBC announced it was going to "Canadianise" prime time by 2000–2001. On the English side, 90 per cent of programming during peak viewing hours (7:00 a.m.–11:00 p.m.) was Canadian content, while the private conventional stations averaged less than 25 per cent. On the French side, Canadian programming averaged 88 per cent, while the private French networks averaged about 50 per cent between them. Moreover, during peak viewing hours, 93 per cent of viewing time on CBC's English television was devoted to Canadian content, while on the private conventional networks, it accounted for less than 15 per cent (Canada, 2003). The CBC also continued to innovate on the emerging Internet, and in 2000, it launched Radio 3 – an online music archive directed toward youth. Hence while the CBC was further marginalised within the system through the 1980s and mid-1990s in terms of both regulation and audience share, following principles of universalism remained a key driver of cultural production within it.

Through the late 1990s, media policy continued to accent market liberalisation. Key was a convergence policy that allowed media industries once kept separate through regulation – such as broadcasting, telecommunications, and newspapers – to consolidate, thereby creating new economies of scale and scope. But, as the private sector consolidated to take advantage of efficiencies in programme production and delivery, both local and broadly popular distinctively Canadian programming were increasingly left out of this mix. Driven by universalist principles, the CBC felt increasing pressure to fill these gaps. Meanwhile, in May 1999, the CRTC announced that the Internet did not fall under the purview of the Canadian Broadcasting Act and thereby it would not be regulating Internet content under the terms of the Act (CRTC, 1999). In time, this would unleash a whole new set of pressures on both the CBC and the system at large, as digital streaming services began to undermine the objectives of regulation.

### Into the new century

Over the last two decades, the CBC's place within the system has been a matter of continuing controversy. Following a two-year study of the broadcasting system, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage's 2003 report succinctly outlined the questions that still haunt the CBC:

The conundrum [is] clear – how does one situate a publicly funded broadcaster in an era of increasing choice and fragmented audiences? What is its role? What should its mandate be? What should it be doing? Can it still be justified? And how should it be funded? (Canada, 2003: 208)

While the Committee found no clear answers to these questions, it went on to reiterate the central importance of the CBC to the system at large and recommended stable funding, more focus on regional and local programming, and amending the Canadian Broadcasting Act to reflect the importance of new media services to the future of the CBC. Other studies that reached similar conclusions followed (Canada, 2006).

Building on the recommendations of these studies, The CBC announced a five-year strategic plan in 2011 (CBC, 2012). Among the promises were to boost Canadian content in prime time, develop more online services, and add local radio stations. These were places where broadcasting services were flagging at the time. The two growing gaps signalled in the 1990s were particularly apparent at 1) the local level, as the private broadcasters had begun to abandon small- and medium-sized markets where, in the multichannel universe, local programming is no longer profitable, and 2) the “national” level where, due to the economies of scale, distinctively Canadian programming was simply unable to compete financially with American programmes. The CBC stepped up in both these areas, initiating both new radio and online services, as well as developing a growing number of popular weekly television programmes. To meet with emerging mobile markets, the CBC also introduced a number of new online services including a music platform for showcasing Canadian artists (CBC, 2012).

In late 2013, however, the public broadcaster was dealt a serious blow when broadcasting rights to its flagship hockey sports programming were purchased by a private media company. Professional hockey had been a mainstay of CBC programming since the early days of radio. But under the public broadcaster’s management, it had grown to command highly valuable audiences, and coupled with the promise of greater profits from new media markets – like other sports programming the CBC pioneered – the broadcast rights to those games grew beyond the financial reach of the Corporation (Shoalts, 2014). Thus, another field of programming that the CBC had nurtured and developed was effectively spun off to the private sector for further exploitation.

In 2014, the CBC released a five-year strategic plan titled “Strategy 2020: A Space For Us All”, outlining directions for development. In the face of shrinking resources, a central feature of the plan was further investment in online resources:

This strategy will reduce our fixed costs and shift investments from support services, real estate and traditional broadcast infrastructure, to providing high

impact Canadian content, including news and current affairs, progressively adapting to audience preferences through an even greater focus on digital and mobile across all genres. (CBC, 2014: 1)

Here, the principles of universalism might be seen as attenuated through the financial pressures of the day.

Meanwhile, in October 2015, a new liberal government took office. After years of budget cuts under the conservatives, the liberals promised to increase the CBC's appropriation by more than 10 per cent annually. Soon after, the government also announced that the Department of Heritage would undertake a public consultation on "Canadian Content in a Digital World" – an effort to develop a policy to forward the interests of Canada's cultural, or "creative", industries (Canada, 2017).

The CBC's submission to the consultation continued to draw upon the nationalist vision of public broadcasting developed in the early twentieth century as well as accenting the Corporation's commitment to digital expansion. In this regard, the document described four priority areas that would guide their future work and investments: "1. Digital innovation; 2. Contributing to a shared national consciousness; 3. Creating quality Canadian content; 4. Promoting Canada to the world" (CBC, 2017: 3). At the same time, responding to concerns over continued growing gaps in local broadcasting services, it also promised that the CBC would be "More local than ever before" (CBC, 2017: 12). Here, the CBC demonstrated that, to a large extent, the founding principles of public broadcasting in Canada – programme production and distribution – still drove its operations. However, as the Corporation noted, in the face of declining advertising revenue, it was at a disadvantage with the private sector in that, unlike "vertically integrated broadcasting distribution companies", it did not have "other sources of revenue" to "mitigate the impact of these changes" (CBC, 2017: 17). Consequently, in the face of declining revenue and increasing pressure from the private sector, in exchange for a guaranteed annual income, the CBC also floated the idea of going advertisement-free (CBC, 2017).

Meanwhile, the private sector was already coveting the CBC's digital assets. With more than 14.8 million views of CBC's website in 2015–2016, and more than 3 million views of Radio-Canada's digital offerings in Quebec during the same period, the CBC/Radio Canada was the online leader in Canada (CBC, 2017). Hungrily eyeing this online news audience, a 2017 report written by a panel of news industry experts recommended that the Corporation give up news advertising revenue and refocus its news production to more local and less profitable forms of news – in other words, surrender much of the news field they had developed over the last 60 years to the private sector (Public Policy Forum, 2017).

The 2017 report of the Department of Heritage's creative industries consultation reaffirmed the CBC's universal mission:

The expectations for CBC/Radio-Canada are high, but reflect what Canadians expect: a CBC/Radio-Canada that showcases the best of Canada to the world; that reflects the country's diversity, including Indigenous cultures, on multiple platforms, from coast to coast to coast; and that continues to provide an essential local service to Canadians in all regions of the country, and in both official languages. (Canada, 2017: 32)

However, there were no commitments of support other than to state that the government would work with the CBC to “renew” its mandate in the context of an upcoming review of the Broadcasting Act and Telecommunications Acts. In the interim, the CBC remains by far the largest single producer of Canadian programming as well as the largest distributor of Canadian content across a growing array of digital platforms (CRTC, 2017).

## Summary and conclusions

Invested with nationalist purpose and led by both implicit and explicit mandates reflecting universalist principles (as well as pushed by both regulators and private operators), public broadcasting in Canada has been located on the ever-shifting commercial margins of the system. In this position, the CBC – as a “national” public broadcaster – has operated as a kind of development vehicle – at times subsidising the growth of the private sector, but primarily taking up elements of production and distribution that the private sector was unwilling or unable to undertake. The character of this role has shifted through time – across different technologies; between the national, regional, and local levels; and between different language and cultural groups – but it is a position the CBC has occupied since its inception.

Here, the principles of universalism have helped guide public broadcasting to areas, audiences, and services that have been underserved by private, profit-oriented broadcasters. At the same time, however, hampered by both lack of funding and the support of regulators in developing new services, public broadcasting has continued to hover on the margins of the system in terms of audience reach and the services it provides. Meanwhile, in the shifting economic currents of the system, the CBC is being pressured to both backfill local services abandoned by the private sector and relinquish some of the online audiences it has developed to them.

While historically the private sector has often worked to flood the system with foreign programming, led by universalist principles, public broadcasting in Canada has well served the public interest in the system, striving to provide both universally available broadcasting services and a wide range of content to fill them. Given this history, providing the CBC more latitude in meeting its universal objectives would help fulfil the larger objectives for the system set



out in the Canadian Broadcasting Act at a time when new digital technologies threaten to overwhelm the system with foreign programming.

One of the first steps in this direction might be to establish predictable 5–7-year funding for the Corporation. This has long been a recommendation of enquiries and studies. Stable funding would allow the Corporation to undertake meaningful long-term planning. A second step would give the CBC priority to license new services that complement existing operations. Too often such licensing requests have been turned down in favour of private sector applicants. The effect has been that the private sector has been able to develop efficiencies in their operations that have eluded the CBC. Finally, on a more controversial note, while the CBC and many of its supporters are currently calling to make it “advertising free”, giving the Corporation free reign to solicit advertising where it sees fit would provide some flexibility toward developing new income streams and, consequently, new services. As pointed out by Leonard Brockington, one of the first chairs of the CBC, unlike the private sector, every cent that the Corporation takes in is set to the purpose of developing programming and services for Canadians. Moreover, as we have seen, led by a universalist mandate, traditional concerns about the impact of commercial imperatives upon the character of media programming don’t impact the CBC in the same way as they do the private sector. On the contrary, they might spur the development of popular, recognisably Canadian programming, something private investment has shunned historically.

In conclusion, while the universal principles upon which public broadcasting was founded in Canada have at times been subverted to support the growth and profits of private interests within the system, they have also worked to focus the public broadcaster on elements of content production and distribution that might have otherwise gone untended.

## Notes

1. It is interesting to note that at this juncture, CBC management saw little conflict between the carriage of advertising and the purposes of public broadcasting. For instance, when asked by a parliamentarian, “what real good argument is there against a certain amount of advertising on the [CBC’s] programs?” the CBC’s chairman, Leonard Brockington, replied, “At the present time I should say there was none” (Canada, 1938: 32). And, when pressed on the point that the CBC’s advertising practices presented unfair competition for private stations, Brockington reminded the committee of how the Corporation converted this revenue to public purposes: “It is sometimes forgotten that every cent taken in by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is used for the building up of something for the benefit of the Canadian listener. It does not go into the profits of shareholders. It does not go to build up private operators’ profits. It is held in trust for the people of Canada” (Canada, 1938: 33).
2. The CBC contributed substantially to this growth, and between 1952 and 1957, the Corporation pumped USD 170 million into the system (CBC, 1960).

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## Chapter 6

# Multichannel strategy, universalism, and the challenge of audience fragmentation

Julie Münter Lassen

### Abstract

Technology and the political climate made it possible for the Danish public service media institution, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), to expand its television channel portfolio from two to six channels between 2006 and 2009. For a decade, DR has been operating one primary television channel and five others with relatively narrow profiles. This chapter considers whether DR might be undermining its own legitimacy as a provider of a universal service by pursuing this multichannel strategy. Although the entire population can access all of DR's content, the multichannel strategy positions DR as part of a development that is fragmenting the public into discrete taste groups. Through a qualitative study of DR's scheduling strategies, the chapter investigates the extent to which DR seeks to unite its channel portfolio, thus avoiding running six separate channels. In the conclusion, political development of media in Denmark elucidates the changing conditions of DR's activities.

**Keywords:** legacy mass media, personalisation, curation, linear and non-linear television, content diversity, Nordic media

## Introduction

If a Danish television viewer wanted to change channels in the beginning of the 1990s, there were few domestic options. Danish viewers could choose between three national television channels: the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), TV 2, and TV3. Today, the Danish television market features about 45 television channels that are enabled by technological, political, economic, and user-behaviour developments. For viewers, the large number of television channels means more choice. For television companies, those developments mean increased competition and – following this – a need to develop marketing and scheduling strategies to both capture and retain the attention of viewers. DR has felt the increased competition, but for public service media organisations,

this development raises a question of balance. On the one hand, they must take care of the special tasks that are their *raison d'être* by providing the public with a diverse programme offer, catering for minorities, and strengthening the national culture and language of Denmark. On the other hand, they must ensure that viewers, listeners, and users actually make use of their offers. Otherwise, public organisations lose relevance and legitimacy.

This chapter focuses on DR, the Danish public service media institution (previously named Denmark's Radio), to consider how it has developed its television operations between 2005 and 2015. During this period, DR transitioned from operating two television channels with mixed profiles for general audiences to six channels, one primary and five with distinctive and rather narrow profiles. The extended channel portfolio gives viewers more programmes and channel options to choose between. Distinctive profiles have enabled DR to retain a high reach and share, including young audience groups who are typically leaving linear television. The development also means strategic and scheduling tasks have changed radically in a relatively short period.

Everybody in Denmark can access DR's television channels and online streaming service. These channels are free-to-air and the streaming service does not require an account. From this perspective, DR's television service is a universal service. However, with six profiled television channels, DR contributes to the general trend in media development to cater to individual preferences. The previous "mass audience" is fragmented into a series of non-integrated niche audiences. The pros and cons can be argued, but the aim here is to discuss whether by doing so DR might undermine its own legitimacy as a universal service provider as it metamorphoses into a multichannel provider. It is reasonable to question whether this development is a better way of serving viewers, and whether DR has any alternatives. To this end, the chapter sheds light on the degree to which DR is operating its television channel portfolio as a unified offer or as a series of discrete channels. This is done through analyses of the development of the intersections between channels during prime time and the *continuities* at 8:00 p.m. Continuities are here understood as the visual and auditive elements played between or in the programmes to inform viewers of (up)coming programmes or otherwise brand the television channel or company in general. The empirical material for these two analyses consists of recordings of the range of programmes on all DR's television channels, and the analyses draws methodologically on Bruun (2016), Ihlebæk and colleagues (2014), and Johnson (2013b). One week from the autumns of 2005, 2010, and 2015 were chosen for the study because these years represent key stages in DR's development as a provider of a multichannel portfolio.<sup>1</sup>

After a short introduction to DR and the Danish television landscape, the chapter continues with a discussion of the notion of a channel and how a universal and diverse television service is to be understood. In the conclusion,

the media political development in Denmark is incorporated to demonstrate a reinterpretation of DR's public service mission and tasks. The chapter deals solely with DR and the circumstances in Denmark, but aims to contribute to the broader discussion about the future role of legacy public service broadcasters in a media landscape characterised by multiple channels and platforms, which Ellis (2002) described as the era of plenty, and which Ihlebæk and colleagues (2014) refer to as the era of proliferation.

### DR's public service activities

DR is the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. It was founded in 1925 as the first broadcaster in Denmark. From the start, DR was given the status of a public service institution. In the first 25 years of its history, DR was the sole provider of radio services. From 1951, the institution broadcast television services as well, and in 1996 DR launched its first web page that was solely for news content. The year 2001 was the first time that DR provided live-broadcast television online in conjunction with the Eurovision Song Contest the company hosted that year. Today, programmes can be watched as catch-up services online, there is a streaming service and several apps that provide content and services for children and news, and so forth.

DR is an independent public institution managed by an executive board and a management board in accordance with the Danish Radio and Television Act and DR's successive public service contracts. These contracts are agreements between DR and the Minister for Culture. Until 2019, DR's public service activities were financed by an annual licence fee. Between 2019 and 2022, the licence fee will be gradually replaced by a tax, thereby making the budget of DR part of the general public financing system (The Danish Ministry of Finance, 2018).

This chapter focuses on the television activities of DR, which is not the only provider of public service television in Denmark. TV 2/Denmark also has public service obligations, and the same applies to eight regional TV 2 television stations. Of these public institutions, DR is by far the largest in size and in the number of channels and platforms. The television channels of both DR and TV 2/Denmark are popular among viewers; in total, 63 per cent of television viewing in Denmark is devoted to public service channels (The Agency for Palaces and Culture, 2019).

### The television channel in theory

“Broadcasting”, in the original sense of the word, referred to the scattering of seed corn that a sower cast in all directions. In relation to electronic media, the

term is allegorical for the universal transmission of programme content from a central sender to everyone as a mass audience. This contrasts with the concept of “channel”, which the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines as “a path along which information (such as data or music) in the form of an electrical signal passes” (Merriam-Webster, 2002: n.p.). Whereas “broadcasting” describes the broad provision of unspecified content, “channel” characterises targeted communication where the sender directs the content to receivers. This distinction is interesting to keep in mind when describing how the television channel went from being merely a technical distribution platform to becoming a carefully profiled means for addressing a specific target group within the broad mass of potential audiences.

Drawing on Ellis (2002), Johnson describes the circumstances under which television channels began in the medium’s formative period:

In the early decades of television broadcasting the number of television channels was determined by the restriction of the electromagnetic spectrum. As a consequence, the broadcast era (roughly from the 1930s/40s to the 1980s) is often one characterized by a scarcity of television channels. (Johnson, 2013a: 276)

Due to spectrum scarcity, it was both costly and difficult to operate a broadcasting network that was mandated to reach even the most remote residents of a population. Scannell (1990) describes how it became a task for national governments to distribute the sparse number of frequencies amongst broadcasters, the armed forces, emergency services, telecommunications, and so forth. Because of restricted supply but great demand, public broadcasters in Europe had one or two channels (Mortensen, 2008; Scannell, 1990). The channel was primarily understood as a technological means for distributing content to an entire population. As cable and satellite technology made it cheaper to launch and operate television channels, more were launched, and the single channel went from being a platform of distribution to a way of addressing specific target groups – in other words, niche audiences.

One reason for this development was new financing techniques that paralleled developments in distribution technologies. While a public broadcaster financed by a universal licence fee is required to serve the entire population, and a channel financed by commercial advertisements must have a high reach in its target group to be attractive to advertisers, cable and satellite technologies gave the possibility of establishing pay-per-view and subscription services. Johnson (2012) describes how channels were profiled to help persuade viewers to pay for their content. Despite the large supply of television channels, most viewers watch between five and eight according to Johnson (2012). Therefore, it was “increasingly important not only for broadcasters to stand out in an ever more crowded marketplace, but also to try to position themselves as one of the few



regular channels for television viewing” (Johnson, 2013a: 283). One way to stand out was, according to Johnson (2013a), to launch niche channels directed at narrowly defined target groups or with uniform content – thematically or in genres. Thus, profiled channels are targeted to niche interests. However broad or narrow, niche is the opposite of universal.

Although public service broadcasters are not subject to market mechanisms in an economic sense (at least for those that are non-commercial), the intensified competition that followed the arrival of so many new television channels meant that public media institutions have needed to address viewers more directly to stand out in the competition. A general tendency emerged in European television markets during the 1990s that encouraged profiling each channel (Johnson, 2013a; Light, 2004). Among others, Light (2004) characterised the development of today’s multichannel system as a transition from broadcasting to narrowcasting (see also Goodwin, 2018; Negroponte, 1995), which is to say, from transmitting programmes intended for an entire population to transmitting programmes directed to narrow viewer segments – that is, target audiences. A broad mass audience is eroded when viewers are spread across an array of niche channels.

### Universality: From a question of access to a question of content and presence

Constituent in the development of today’s multichannel television landscape, the notion of a universal service has widened. Syvertsen (1999: 6) argued that public service broadcasting was initially understood as a public utility, and that within this understanding, “the prime criteria of success are signal quality, efficiency of operations and a distribution network that provides universal access”. Later, Syvertsen (2003) applied this understanding to the mission of European public broadcasters as an obligation to guarantee universal coverage as a service for an entire population. Thus, universality was a matter of developing a network the entire national population could access. Jakubowicz (2006) and Van den Bulck and Moe (2018) broadened the definition of universality to focus as well on content.

Given developments in television markets and the emergence of new distribution platforms in recent years, Jakubowicz (2006: 12) worried that a new understanding of universality concerned with “the use of thematic services, and even more so of personalized ones, can be seen as undercutting what has always been regarded as a distinguishing element of PSB, i.e. universality of content and access”. Van den Bulck and Moe focus solely on the content aspect in their description of universality as a dual ideal. It refers to universal appeal because “PSM must provide a range of programmes that inform, inspire, entertain and

appeal to the diverse interests of the young and the old, the higher and less educated, across the community” (Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018: 877). At the same time, universality can be interpreted as “the idea that PSM must cater to every specific taste, even outside the mainstream” (Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018: 878). This combination of programmes with mass-appeal and services tailored for specific audiences is also evident in Jakubowicz’s (2006) understanding of universality of content.

Universality is not mentioned explicitly in DR’s legal framework or public service contracts; however, a number of DR’s obligations reflect the universality ideal in both access and content. In the current public service contract, DR is obliged to ensure that the entire population has access to important and independent information, as well as cultural programming and space for debate (DR, 2018b: 2). By law, DR is also required to endeavour to provide versatility and diversity in its overall programme supply. The Danish Radio and Television Act (2014) specifies a number of genres DR must provide, including news, information, educational programmes, art, and entertainment. DR’s public service contract for 2019–2023 enlarges on *how* DR must handle its obligations within news, educational programmes, content for children and young people, Danish drama, music, art, and types of sport.

There are several reasons for DR’s obligation to provide a diverse supply of genres. First, a broad range of genres ensures the population is well-informed about topics deemed important to the society. Second, the obligation sets the public service institution apart from commercial competitors that are more specialised in their content provision. Third, a diverse supply of genres can better ensure that the content of DR is able to cater to “every” specific taste.

Everybody in Denmark can access DR’s services and content. Thus, regarding universality as a matter of access, DR is without debate providing a universal service to the public. However, the development described by Jakubowicz (2006) is characteristic of the way DR has evolved over the past decade. As DR’s multichannel portfolio offers viewers more content to choose between, the extension of channel choice entails a challenge for the public service media organisation from a universality perspective. The comprehensive channel and programme choice means there are fewer programmes viewers have in common, which means fewer shared experiences and less common knowledge. In addition, the multichannel portfolio has made a diverse reception more difficult because viewers can choose between several rather narrowly profiled channels, and therefore more easily avoid less-popular genres.

## The diverse programme output and its reception

There is a sticking point: “On its own, diversity of supply cannot secure diversity of reception, but it is a necessary condition for this”, McQuail observed (1993: 157). The viewers’ exposure to a diverse programme supply is part of the debate about the obligation of the public service institution to provide a versatile and diverse programme output. It is important to note that DR has never been required to ensure a diverse reception, nor has the Danish broadcaster been asked to have equal programme output across genres. Such demands would curtail the flexibility needed to respond to changing current events, relevant platforms, and the preferences of audiences. However, there is an implicit expectation that a diverse supply can stimulate diversity of reception, including genres typically seen as important to society in a broader perspective (e.g., news and current affairs especially).

This view was expressed by Scannell (1989: 138) when he argued for “the supply of mixed programme services [...] i.e. a wide range of different kinds of programmes delivered on a single channel”. Scannell feared a segmented British television market and the implications for the broader public:

Generic programming fragments the general public that is still constituted in today’s four national UK television channels into particular taste publics whom advertisers are increasingly keen to target. In so doing it destroys the principle of equality of access for all to entertainment, informational and cultural resources in a common public domain. (Scannell, 1989: 139)

Scannell considered universal access and appeal to have key importance for the democratisation of society. According to Scannell, the consequence of segmenting viewers across numerous niche channels could be problematic for a society as a whole since individual interest would replace a shared common interest. This prediction was made 30 years ago, but in Denmark, the viewing habits have to some extent developed as foreseen. In Denmark, a country of approximately 5.8 million inhabitants, the number of programmes with more than 1 million viewers has declined from about 1,000 in the 1990s to about 100 in 2017 (Knudsen & Svenningsen, 2018). And today, we not only have a wide range of segmented television channels to choose between – several online services foster personalised media consumption.

Because all viewers are not well-resourced, some will opt out of the more challenging programme genres they would have otherwise met on a channel with a mixed range of programmes, writes Scannell (1989). This can also be said about well-resourced viewers who do not seek out a mixed range of programmes. According to Scannell, the absence of equal access to a broad and mixed programme service erodes the democratic principles on which public service broadcasting rests.

On the one hand, Scannell is right in identifying the challenges the multiplied and individualised television market entails for the public service mandate, especially to what degree we can still talk about a universal service of benefit for society. We shall get back to this discussion seen from a Danish perspective at the end of this chapter.

On the other hand, Scannell romanticises the general public in the UK and exaggerates the abilities of public media to be community creators. A mixed programme supply on a single channel directed to an entire population does not take into account different preferences in genres and styles that cause viewers to switch off the television or – in a multichannel system – to choose other channels. Neither does he acknowledge, for instance, that when children’s programmes are being broadcast, other age groups may switch off or to another channel (see also Ytreberg, 2002). Light (2004: 249) is among those upbraiding the view Scannell expressed:

One has to ask at this stage whether such a vision of genre diversity still has any validity or whether it is just a vestige of public service broadcasting history. It rests on the assumption that proximity still works as a means to lure audiences to flow from a more popular programme to a less popular one.

According to Light (2004), flow scheduling of diverse channels might have an effect in a system with limited options, but when viewers can switch between many channels in a few clicks on the remote control, it is more likely that a viewer will change channels than stay and watch a programme that does not create immediate interest.

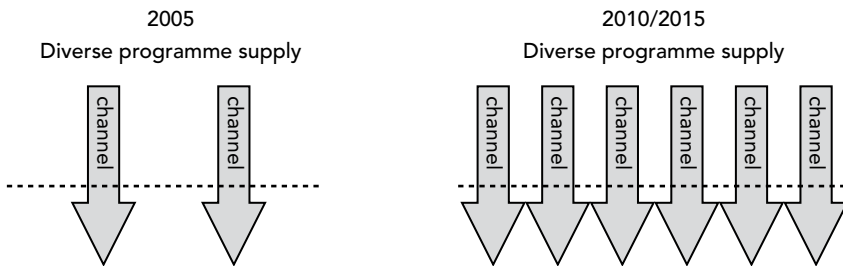
The contributions of Scannell and Light must be read against the background of the times in which each was written. The late 1980s was characterised by deregulation when public television monopolies were ended in many European countries and commercial competition became notable. Scannell (1989) accentuates media development in the US as concerns arose about the consequences of fragmented channels with low-cost repeats and narrow ranges of content within channels. He described how economic and political forces were pressing for a similar development in Europe. When Light wrote her dissertation in 2004, the segmented channel landscape was a reality. Although viewers now have numerous channels to choose among, that does not mean Light was right in her assumptions of viewer behaviour. According to interviews with key staff in DR’s programming department I carried out, flow scheduling still has a measurable effect (Lassen, 2018). This indicates that viewers can still be motivated to stay with a channel despite numerous alternatives.

Unlike Scannell, both McQuail (1993) and Hellman (2001) argued that diversity is (also) a question of choice in the viewing options. McQuail described two forms of versatility: internal and external diversity; Hellman formulated this as vertical and horizontal diversity. The idea is much the same: a single channel

can offer a versatile and manifold range of programmes, described by Scannell as a mixed programme supply. This would be internal or vertical diversity. But diversity can also be found across channels in a portfolio or even an entire channel system. This would be external or horizontal diversity.

On this type of diversity, Hellman (2001: 185) writes, “although individual channels may have become less mixed, the audience may be better served today than they were yesterday”. DR’s channel portfolio offers an example of this kind of diversity. Figure 1 demonstrates the number of channels (and thus the number of programmes) viewers could choose from at any given time in 2005, 2010, and 2015, respectively. The DR viewer could choose between two programmes in 2005, while this number in 2010 and 2015 was six.

**Figure 1.** Horizontal viewer choice



Comments: The dotted line illustrates the viewer’s option at any given time.

To a public service media institution such as DR, the multichannel portfolio is an advantage in allowing DR to broadcast a greater number of programmes at the same time, thus making it possible to cover more genres and target groups. In this way, horizontal or external diversity is bigger within the channel portfolio of DR.

However, in reality, it is not necessarily the case that an increase in the number of channels will cause a more diverse programme output in the entire channel system. It can result in the opposite, so that there will be more of the same kinds of content. Hellman (2001: 186) writes, “it is possible that each channel aims at diversity with similar content (identical channel diversity), with none of the channels making any ‘extra’ contribution to the overall system diversity”. The reason for this is that in a segmented channel, the programme output will be narrower than on a channel with a mixed profile. At the same time, a greater number of television channels results in more intense competition for the attention of viewers. When in addition there is a smaller part of the population of interest to advertisers, and consequently for private commercial television companies, those channels tend to focus on the same target groups. In a study of the Norwegian television landscape, Ihlebæk and colleagues (2011) concluded that the public service television channels broadcast a broader variety

of programme genres and addressed a greater part of the population compared with private channels.

## DR's television channel portfolio

Since DR launched its second television channel in 1996, the strategy has been a mixed portfolio rather than mixed channels. Analyses of DR's strategies and interviews with key staff show that the design (and changes) of the profile for the entire portfolio has reflected contemporary challenges in the media landscape in general, and to DR specifically. For example, the profile of DR's television channel portfolio from 2014 to 2020 points to difficulties this company (and other legacy broadcasters) face in reaching children and young people who are leaving traditional linear channels in favour of on-demand services. DR is grappling with this development by offering three channels targeted to children and young people: DR Ramasjang for children aged 3–6, DR Ultra for children aged 7–12, and DR3 for teens and young adults aged 15–39.

An aspect of central importance in designing the overall portfolio profile is competition. Soon after DR's monopoly was broken in 1988, DR began losing viewers to the new, competing public service channel TV 2. As more channels and services have come into being, the competition has grown ever fiercer. A response to the competition is the strengthening of DR's main channel DR1. Since DR2 was launched in 1996, DR1 has been the main channel in the portfolio. But this position was strengthened in 2012 regarding which programmes the individual channels broadcast and the scheduling strategies for the portfolio.

Besides making it possible for DR to address the difficult-to-reach-target groups, the multichannel strategy lets DR offer viewers more content to choose between and cater to niche groups with narrower profiles. The strategy has worked well in light of audience ratings. The main channel, as well as the portfolio channels, have obtained high shares and reaches in viewing. In 2015, DR's television channels obtained a joint share of viewing of 34 per cent (in 2018 the number was 37%), and DR Ramasjang obtained the highest share amongst the children's channels in the Danish television market with 2 per cent (DR Media Research, 2019; Lassen, 2018).

However, legitimising the strategy of a large channel portfolio with segmented channel profiles is challenged in two areas. First, the number of channels makes it difficult for DR to fill out the schedule with original programmes. When DR launched new channels (in 1996 as well as in 2009), DR's income was not increased correspondingly. Therefore, many reruns and imported programmes were necessary. From 2005 to 2015, the share of reruns went from 51 per cent to 79 per cent on DR's television channels, while the broadcast hours of fiction from abroad rose from 2,419 hours to 13,872 hours – or from 23 per cent to

32 per cent of DR's total television programme output (Lassen, 2018).<sup>2</sup> This development gives rise to criticism, not least from Danish politicians, which will be elucidated at the end of this chapter.

The second reason the legitimisation of the channel portfolio is challenged hinges on the question of whether an assortment of niche channels actually comprises a universal service. The entire population can access all DR's channels, and the combination of one broad and several narrow channel profiles gives DR rich opportunity to cater to every taste group. But if the public is fragmented into niche audiences that do not share a common experience, then a core value of public service broadcasting is undermined. To address this challenge, the next section will shed light on the degree to which DR is uniting its television channel portfolio through its scheduling strategy.

### A united television channel portfolio?

Two aspects are highlighted in the study of whether DR is offering a united portfolio or running separate channels, and how this has developed from 2005 to 2015. Both aspects are related to the structural and strategic level of DR's television activities.

The first aspect is whether the range of programmes are coordinated so that it is easy for viewers to shift between channels without missing content. If this is *not* the case, the viewers will have to choose one channel and stay on it (or switch to a competing channel) and will not benefit from DR's different offers and channel profiles. Secondly, DR's practice of making programme promotions will be investigated. Of special interest will be whether DR does cross-promoting so viewers know what can be found on the other channels during specific viewing periods.

The data consists of printed television listings and recordings of the range of programmes for a week during the autumns of 2005, 2010, and 2015. The focus is on prime time (6:00 p.m.–midnight) – a longer period than usual because the channels in the portfolio have different prime times.

#### *Coordination of scheduling structure*

There are two main reasons why it is important to coordinate the channels' range of programmes. For the broadcasters, it increases the possibility of retaining viewers within the channel portfolio. For the viewers, it is a better service due to more options to choose between. In this chapter, "intersection" describes the coordination of programme starting times. The three tables below show the intersections between the channels comprising DR's television channel portfolio during a week in 2005, 2010, and 2015.

**Table 1.** Intersections in DR’s television channel portfolio during week 40 in 2005

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednes- day	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:00 p.m.	X						
7:30 p.m.							X
8:00 p.m.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8:30 p.m.		X					
9:00 p.m.	X						
9:50 p.m.				X			
10:30 p.m.			X				

Table 1 shows a limited number of intersections between DR1 and DR2 during prime time in 2005. This is remarkable because it should have been an easy task for the schedulers to coordinate the programme start times with only two television channels. However, as also apparent from Table 1, there was a well-established break in the range of programmes on both television channels every day at 8:00 p.m. This break happens nearly every day on most of DR’s television channels for the adult target groups throughout the time period of the study. This break does not lead up to any specific programme. On the contrary, different programmes within different genres are broadcast at 8:00 p.m. during the week. However, it is a tendency in the Danish television channel landscape to have a break at 8:00 p.m.

In 2010, DR’s portfolio featured more television channels – one for children, one 24-hour news update channel, and four “regular” television channels: DR1 and DR2 with mixed genre profiles, DR K (“K” for “culture”), and DR HD broadcasting in high definition. The news update channel ran as a separate offer with no firm schedule and will not be examined in this chapter. Nor will the children’s channels be included: DR’s one children’s channel in 2010 and two children’s channels in 2015 differed substantially from the rest of the channels in the portfolio regarding structure, transmission time, and prime time(s), owing to the target groups of the channels.

Table 2 shows the intersections between the four DR television channels in 2010. As also appears from Table 2, the increased number of channels caused more possibilities to establish points where viewers could switch channels. What the table does *not* show, however, is that the intersections in 2010 primarily involve two of the four channels (except for the break at 8:00 p.m.). During the weekends, some intersections involve three or even all four of the channels for the adult target group, but during the weekdays, the overall impression is that DR runs six separate channels with few possibilities to smoothly switch from one channel to another within the portfolio during prime time.



**Table 2.** Intersections in DR's television channel portfolio during week 46 in 2010

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:00 p.m.	X	X		X	X	X	X
6:30 p.m.	X				X	X	X
7:00 p.m.	X	X			X	X	X
7:30 p.m.	X	X	X	X		X	
8:00 p.m.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8:25 p.m.			X*				
8:30 p.m.		X		X			
8:45 p.m.	X						
8:50 p.m.					X		
9:00 p.m.	X		X		X		X
9:30 p.m.					X		X
9:35 p.m.				X			
9:50 p.m.	X						
10:20 p.m.					X*		
11:00 p.m.		X					
11:30 p.m.					X		
11:40 p.m.				X			

Comments: \*Two channels broadcast the same programme at the same time, one of them in HD quality

**Table 3.** Intersections in DR's television channel portfolio during week 46 in 2015

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
6:00 p.m.		X	X				
6:05 p.m.					X		
6:30 p.m.	X	X	X	X	X		X
7:00 p.m.							X
7:15 pm		X					
7:30 p.m.						X	
7:55 p.m.	X						
8:00 p.m.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8:30 p.m.			X	X			
8:45 p.m.	X	X					
9:00 p.m.			X		X	X	X
9:30 p.m.	X	X	X	X			
9:40 p.m.							X
10:30 p.m.	X	X	X	X			

The intersections in 2015 are characterised by a big difference when comparing weekdays and weekends. Unlike the structure in 2010, there are more intersections during the weekdays' prime time than in the weekend. And whereas most intersections in 2010 were before 8:00 p.m., Table 3 shows several intersections

later in the evening in 2015. Most importantly, many of the intersections in 2015 involve three or all four channels for adult viewers (two of the six television channels in DR's portfolio were children's channels at this point in time). Thus, viewers could choose between a greater number of channels in 2015 than in 2010.

This development is not least due to the strengthening of DR1 as the main channel in the portfolio. From 2012–2014 DR restructured its television channel portfolio in an attempt to stem declining viewing figures. The first step in this restructuring was to strengthen DR1 as the entry point for all DR offers. The main channel position comes to light in at least three aspects. First, if a programme is deemed important, it will be placed on DR1. Second, the channel has – by far – the largest budget.<sup>3</sup>

Third, and most relevant in this context, the programme schedule of DR1 is reflected in the structure of the range of programmes on the portfolio channels. Throughout the week, DR1 has a fixed structure: From 6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m. and from 9:30 p.m.–midnight, the schedule is fixed with the same programme series or types of programmes every day Monday–Thursday. Between 8:00 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., genres vary over the course of the week, but each day has a fixed time structure that is repeated weekly. The fact that the structure is this fixed during the week offers two advantages: it makes it easy for the rest of the channels to adjust to this structure, and the recognisable structure cultivates routine use. This also facilitates DR1 strengthening its position in the competition with the other large Danish main channel – TV 2.

This development suggests that DR, from 2005 to 2015, has become more adept at running a cohesive and unified multichannel portfolio. The structure in the range of programmes of all DR's channels has been sharpened, and the scheduling has become a task that involves and considers the entire channel portfolio. Obviously, it is not enough to create intersections in the range of programmes, however. To make sure the channel portfolio in practice functions as a unified offer, DR must make sure the viewers know about the different programme options at a given time. We next examine the degree to which DR informs viewers about the content on other channels in the portfolio through programme promotions.

### *Cross-promotions*

As the analysis above showed, there is a break at almost all of DR's television channels at 8:00 p.m. This break gives viewers an opportunity to switch to another channel in DR's portfolio or to a competing television channel. Thus, DR must promote its programmes in order to retain, move, and guide the viewers. While some programme promotions are trailers, line-ups, or other visual presentations, some are articulated as a voice-over by the "channel voice".

In rare cases, this articulation is done by the programme host (Bruun, 2016; Ihlebæk et al., 2011, 2014; Johnson, 2013b; Stigel, 2004; Søndergaard, 1994; Van den Bulck & Enli, 2012). Several scholars (Bruun, 2016; Johnson, 2013b; Stigel, 2004) suggest two dimensions are especially important with regard to programme promotions: when a programme is being broadcast (time) and on which channel or platform (place) it is broadcast. In this chapter, I focus on place to shed light on the degree to which DR’s channels are linked via continuities. Bruun (2019: 88) defines continuities as a “television text that informs the viewers of upcoming content, holds their attention during these intermissions and even attracts new viewers for the upcoming content”. The sample for analysis is the programme promotions at 8:00 p.m. on DR’s television channels for the adult target groups during a week in 2005, 2010, and 2015.

Table 4 shows how many promotions were on DR1 at 8:00 p.m. during the analysed weeks and the duration of the continuity. It is clear that the overall number of promotions is fairly stable over the time period of investigation. However, the promotions have been made differently throughout the period, which is reflected in the duration of the promotions. In 2010, DR used line-ups – that is, visual overviews of the programmes to be broadcast – in combination with longer trailers. Therefore, the overall duration of the continuity is shorter in 2010 than in 2005 and 2015.

**Table 4.** Number and duration of programme promotions on DR1 at 8:00 p.m.

Year/week	Programme promotions per day	Duration
2005/40	4–10	1 minute, 55 seconds–2 minutes, 20 seconds
2010/46	5–9	1 minute, 35 seconds–1 minute, 55 seconds
2015/46	5–9	2 minutes, 10 seconds–2 minutes, 45 seconds

In 2005, the emphasis was on the programmes to be broadcast on DR1, and only a few programmes on DR2 and other platforms. In 2010, trailers for DR1’s own programmes still dominated the continuities, but DR used voice-overs during the roll of credits for ending programmes – an approach Johnson (2013b) and Ihlebæk and colleagues (2014) found in British and Norwegian contexts, respectively. One trailer promoted a DR radio channel, and four trailers were for general branding of the company.

In 2015, DR hardly used any line-ups, but while approximately four trailers per continuity were for programmes to be broadcast on the portfolio channels, only a few concerned programmes on DR1. Few trailers promoted other platforms during the week: the children’s web-universe, the DR concert hall, and a DR radio channel. Thus, the main channel functions as a display for the rest of the portfolio and DR’s different services.

For portfolio channels, the situation is the opposite. With few exceptions, the portfolio channels promote their own programmes with no exposure of the other channels' offers. Similarly, there were only a few promotions for other platforms on portfolio channels during the three investigated weeks. This practice is surprising from a competition perspective, especially because the viewers of portfolio channels, according to managing editor of DR's scheduling department, Henrik Birck, choose specific programmes to watch instead of just "watching TV" (personal interview with Henrik Birck, 18 March 2016). It would seem an obvious advantage to present viewers with the different offers across DR's portfolio and platforms.

From a pragmatic perspective, one can ask if it is relevant, for example, that the viewer of the culture channel DR K is informed about an upcoming programme on the youth channel DR3. The answer could very well be that it is not, because the channels' target groups have too little in common. However, in light of DR's public service task, the lack of cross-promotions (even among diverse topic areas) is problematic: When viewers of the narrowly profiled portfolio channels are kept on each channel instead of being exposed to the programme offer of the entire channel portfolio, the channels come across as separate entities. As pointed out earlier, DR's diverse and versatile programme output is to be found horizontally *across* the channel portfolio and not in a single channel. When viewers of the portfolio channels are not informed about the offers in other channels, the public service media organisation does not stimulate a diversified selection of programmes. Additionally, it is more difficult to legitimise DR's role as a public service institution if viewers are retained on narrowly profiled channels and are not (necessarily) exposed to genres that are deemed important for the wellbeing of the society.

Beyond these two points, a potential consequence of the lack of cross-promotions and the viewers' isolation on narrowly profiled portfolio channels may be that a shared, national debate is undermined by niche groups and small communities of interest. The following section will elaborate on this challenge.

## One mixed channel or a segmented portfolio – which is “best” for public service?

As Light (2004: 21) wrote, “with a greater choice of channels, the likelihood is that audiences will fragment across them, reducing any sense of a shared space and a shared moment” (see also Keane, 1995; Rasmussen, 2016). By running a multichannel portfolio – in the interests of competition and individualised media usage – DR potentially contributes to a fragmentation of the public.

Two points should be emphasised. First, this is a theoretical consideration. Only comprehensive empirical studies can document the actual media usage

in the multichannel system (and such studies have not yet been carried out in a Danish context). Second, it is important to emphasise that the fragmentation and individualisation is not only the work of DR. The entire media system is developing this way, not least the growing number of video on-demand subscription services. But one could argue that as a public service media organisation, DR should counteract this tendency and programme one or a few television channels with mixed genre output, as Scannell (1989) suggested. However, there are important reasons for DR to follow the general tendency of the media market.

When DR2 was established in 1996, a key argument for the channel was that DR needed a better position in the competition against the other players in the television market. Although DR (for economic reasons and as a consequence of its specific tasks) does not need to compete, it is important that the public service media organisation has a high reach. DR can only facilitate a collective dialogue in society if it is in contact with a great part of the population (Nissen, 2006). With targeted profiles, the multichannel portfolio ensures that DR has a high reach and share. Should DR decide to run but one single channel with a mixed programme output, it is reasonable to expect that the viewers would seek the more targeted offers somewhere else, in line with how the media usage and the media landscape in general have developed.

The strategy of the multi-channel portfolio DR has chosen corresponds to what Jakubowicz argues as the best way to understand universality of content in the age of channel proliferation:

Universality of content can no longer be understood as one-size-fits-all programming on one or more broadcast channels, but as both universality of basic supply on generalist channels (including mass-appeal, entertainment programming), which will be central to what public service broadcasters offer to the public, and universality across the full portfolio of services, some of them specialized or tailored for specific audiences, adding up to a more extended and comprehensive range of services. (Jakubowicz, 2006: 13)

Although DR segments the population across a number of portfolio channels, the public service media institution operates the main channel, DR1, as a broad and intentionally unifying channel. The main channel functions as a counterweight to the potential risk of fragmentation that a multichannel portfolio contributes to. By operating a main channel that is prioritised economically and in scheduling, the channel can achieve a high reach and share, which positions DR as an important unifying institution in Danish society. Had the public service media organisation only offered a number of specialised channels, it would be more difficult to legitimate the continued need for DR as a public service alternative to commercial offers.

Similarly, a single channel with a mixed-genre profile would be challenged since the viewers most likely would turn to other, more specialised offers. With

a channel portfolio that contains both a widely profiled main channel and a series of channels that target specific segments with content – that otherwise is sparsely represented in the Danish media landscape – DR maintains its role as an important alternative to private commercial media. The combination of broad and narrow channel profiles ensures that DR can provide universality in content and across audiences. DR can simultaneously address the public as a whole and remain in contact with different target groups.

### A smaller DR in the future

This chapter has shed light on the development of DR's television activities from 2005 to 2015, where DR extended its television channel portfolio from a few to many channels. During this decade, DR has become more adept at operating a channel portfolio as scheduling – to a large extent – increasingly unites the channels to comprise a joint offer. With its multichannel strategy, DR has achieved high reach within the population while providing a universal service in both access and content dimensions. However, while this chapter was being written, the conditions of DR's television activities changed.

In the spring of 2018, the liberalist-leaning Danish government decided to cut DR's income by 20 per cent between 2019 and 2023, and to reduce the number of DR linear television channels (The Ministry of Culture, 2018). The reason for this decision is that the parties behind the agreement believe DR is distorting the competition on the Danish media market. In September 2018, DR and the Danish Minister for Culture signed a public service contract in which it was agreed that DR will close three of its six linear television channels in 2020.<sup>4</sup> The remaining channel portfolio will consist of one main channel with content that aims at uniting the population and two channels with narrower profiles: one with a combination of society and culture programmes and the other a continuation of the current DR Ramasjang for children aged three–six (DR, 2018a).

The changes suggest an end to the multichannel strategy and a significant downsizing of the main public service media organisation in Denmark. It will also be a radical change for viewers and for the larger Danish media market. Of interest in this context is how the decision to reduce the number of linear television channels by 50 per cent will likely affect DR's prospects of providing a universal service.

DR's linear television service will still be a universal service in the understanding of universality as a matter of access and – with the broad main channel – mass appeal. But as three channels will be closed, DR will not have the same possibilities to address minorities and niche audiences with linear content. When the plans were made public in September 2018, Director General of DR Maria

Rørbye Rønn said that she expects DR will lose viewers as a consequence of the downsizing. If this happens, the future DR will be less inclusive and thereby harder to legitimate as a public institution for the entire Danish population.

It should be noted that part of the agreement between DR and the Minister for Culture intends that DR's online streaming service (DRTV) will become a more extensive service with more unique content (DR, 2018a). This decision is in line with the general development of media use in Denmark where an increasing proportion of people, especially among the younger age groups, is moving from linear television channels to on-demand services (The Agency for Palaces and Culture, 2019). Likewise, it is interesting to note how other Scandinavian public service media organisations have fewer television channels than DR and yet obtain a better daily reach. In 2017, Finland's YLE had four television channels and obtained a daily reach of 68 per cent. Norway's NRK had four channel profiles distributed on three channels with a reach of 66 per cent. Sweden's SVT had five channels and a reach of 62 per cent. Despite having six channels, DR obtained the lowest daily reach of 61 per cent (Nordicom, n.d.). Thus, a high number of linear channels is not necessarily tantamount to ensuring high reach.

With a combination of a broad main channel, two specialised channels, and an online streaming service, DR's television service may well live up to Jakubowicz's (2006: 13) description of universality as having a "presence on all relevant media and platforms with significant penetration, but also the ability to deliver a 'personalized public service' in the 'pull', online and on-demand environment". However, DR's online streaming service DRTV will, with the use of algorithms, cater to personalised tastes. This, combined with the future smaller linear channel portfolio, means that DR must reinterpret and restructure how it carries out the public service mission going forward. In today's increasingly more individualised media landscape it is of utmost importance that DR continue to curate its content to stimulate a diverse programme consumption and ensure the population has knowledge and experiences in common.

## Notes

1. For 2005, week 40 is investigated, while 2010 and 2015 are represented by week 46. This is due to limitations in the data. Week 46 is regarded as "the news week" in Denmark; that is, a week where no extraordinary events usually happen, and the collection of data is intensified by the Royal Danish Library. However, in week 46 in 2005 there was a municipal election in Denmark, which influenced the range of programmes of DR's two television channels. Because of flaws in the official archiving systems, DR's streaming service was not archived for most of the autumn in 2015, so the archiving was done manually by the author. This was possible in week 46. To represent 2010, week 46 was chosen. This way, DR's streaming service could be compared most equally. The streaming service did not exist in 2005.
2. The total amount of broadcast hours on DR's television channels rose from about 10,500 hours in 2005 to about 43,300 hours in 2015.
3. DR spent about DKK 1,400 million – or 60 per cent of the television expenses – on the main channel DR1 in 2018. DR2 was the second most expensive channel with 16 per cent of the

expenses, followed by DR3 with 8 per cent. DR spent about 8 per cent of the television expenses on DR K, and about 6 per cent on DR Ultra and DR Ramasjang (DR, 2019: 52).

4. In June 2019, a new government was elected in Denmark. In the fall of 2020, the media political agreement is expected to be renegotiated since several parties in the Danish Parliament wish to reduce the cutbacks of DR. The current government has stated that the decision to reduce the number of linear television channels will not be changed.

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## Chapter 7

# A question of value or further restriction?

## *Public value as a core concept*

Christiana Gransow

### Abstract

Inaugurated by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), a systematic assessment of a new service with regards to its public value is part of the governance system in public service media. The concept was applied throughout Europe over the past decade, in combination with the *ex ante* test. The procedure exists in 14 European media systems and just under 90 services have been reviewed. This chapter critically analyses the conceptual understanding of public value and addresses how public broadcasters define the key term in practice. Four case studies illustrate the variability of the concept. In particular, the issues of a decreasing value and the effect of a proposed service to previously approved services are difficult to address. Based on a systematic inventory of the institutional responsibilities, public broadcasters and decision-makers are at the centre due to their negotiations of pros and cons of launching a new service, particularly in cases where the public value has been considered insufficient compared to its market impact.

**Keywords:** public value, *ex ante* evaluation, public interest test, public service media, PSM, market impact assessment

## Introduction

Budget cuts, structural reforms, and threats to the freedom of media challenge the future viability of public service media (PSM). The origins of such controversies stem from attempts to reduce costs, increase accountability, and simultaneously deliver distinctive programmes of high quality, establish new services, and consolidate existing broadcasting channels (Herzog et al., 2018; Humphreys & Simpson, 2018; Schweizer & Puppis, 2018). To satisfy all these requirements in times of high competition and an audience with changing viewing habits, public service broadcasters (PSBs) emphasise public value as a core concept. It sets standards for publicly-funded corporations, guides key stakeholders on a normative and practical level, and helps them to implement new services (for

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an overview, see Moore, 2017; Gonser & Gundlach, 2016; Martin & Lowe, 2014). However, European competition law, or, more precisely, guidelines for state aid, require PSBs to respect the standards of fair and effective competition. Furthermore, most PSBs are legally bound to pass an *ex ante* test as a form of horizontal accountability (Campos-Freire et al., 2019). The procedure serves as a mechanism for weighing public value against market effects of either a modified existing or a newly created one. It determines, following a long and complex procedure, whether a negative impact is offset by the public value it is expected to deliver (Donders & Moe, 2014).

Although half of the European member states have implemented an *ex ante* test and over eighty proposals have been assessed, there is still insufficient transnational analysis of the interpretation of public value as a concept. There is a research gap on smaller media systems and the sampling of cases remains biased. This chapter examines all European countries where the procedure was implemented by the end of 2018.<sup>1</sup> Given its rapid changes, comparing the European media landscape is a methodological challenge. Each media system has its own structures, internal organisation, and policies with different rules, settings, and stakeholders – it is the universal validity of PSBs which unites them (Humphreys, 2012; Puppis & d’Haenens, 2012; Schweizer & Puppis, 2018; Van den Bulck et al., 2018).

In addition to the British case as the background sample, three countries – Austria, the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, and the Netherlands – are discussed in detail because the public value concept is applied stringently within these governance systems. All four case studies spell out a series of criteria to define the key term and develop methods for applying them. Therefore, the number of countries which actually applies both the *ex ante* test and public value as a concept has diminished over the last five years (Moe & Van den Bulck, 2014).

Its implementation can be manifold. Public value may be part of the remit, provide a basis for evaluating the programme, or act as a pillar in the accountability system. Public value has attracted criticism for its market-oriented perspective that cannot be considered separately from the need of PSBs to prove their added value to society (Goodwin, 2014; Moe & Van den Bulck, 2014). Comparative academic studies and commissioned studies (for an overview, see Gransow, 2018) examine the implementation of the procedures but focus on the actual results of the assessments. Raats and colleagues (2015) conducted a benchmark-related analysis with a focus on range and target audiences. Moe and Van den Bulck (2014), Neumüller and Gonser (2013), and Wippersberg (2010) lay the groundwork for researching public value conceptually. These authors demonstrate the PSBs’ effort to set up their public value concept in practice by continuous monitoring and reporting to the management and key stakeholders. This chapter expands their previous research by asking the following questions: If a PSB emphasises the public value concept, which are the central universal values serving the democratic, social, and cultural needs of the society? How are they

measured and by whom? Under which circumstances is the audience involved? What exactly is a material change of an existing service? What are the arguments to reject a proposed service? Does a proposal approved for its public value have an impact on other services or activities which are permitted by an *ex ante* test?

The comparison is organised along three central themes: 1) legal framework and remit; 2) set-up of the *ex ante* test and its public value assessment; and 3) the results of the decisions, which have been made in the last five years (2015–2019). The first section comprises a systematic inventory of the institutional responsibilities and classifies the case studies according to their use of the public value concept. In the second part of the chapter, the case studies are presented and analysed.

### Public value as a concept in public service media

Academic debate about public value is contentious and the perspectives are manifold. Hence, the concept itself has proven to be near elusive (for an overview, see Martin & Lowe, 2014; Moe & Van den Bulck, 2014; Benington & Moore, 2011). In media studies, public value operates as an insurance and the ambition of PSM is to create public goods or services of high quality and to satisfy the needs of a society (Mitschka, 2013). The application of public value as a “lens for assessing PSM” (Martin & Lowe, 2014: 23) and as an “analysis tool” (Sorsa & Sihvonen, 2018: 11) are far from consistent. Proving the contributions to fulfil the remit and being part of a professionalised and independent monitoring is a complex matter (Donders, 2012; Trappel, 2014). From another perspective “public value has become a vehicle for more top-down management approaches, extensive and increasingly bureaucratic assessment procedures” (Moe & Van den Bulck, 2014: 61), in terms of the *ex ante* evaluation.

According to Gonser (2013), the term has several dimensions and is measurable with a range of qualitative and quantitative methods. Nevertheless, the main challenges are to define the scope of its components precisely and to set appropriate methods of measurement. Public value cannot be detached from its normative and ideological dimensions, which can provoke a conceptual overstretching PSB with its universal claim, standards, and remit to shape the respective understanding of the concept (Collins, 2011; Hasebrink, 2014). The different models of European media systems and the long-standing conflict between the European Commission and national decision-makers provide the framework for implementing the term and the procedure (Moe & Van den Bulck, 2014). O’Neill (2016: 173) draws attention to two essential problems by asking “which values are public values” and highlighting that “it is often left unclear whether public value is what the public actually value, or what they ought to value (but may not)”.

The discourse on the distinctive ex ante tests is closely related to the divergent perspectives defining and measuring public value (Gonser & Gundlach, 2016; Lis et al., 2017). The question remains to what extent this argument has been adequately taken into account by the decision-makers and in the assessment itself. According to Campos-Freire and colleagues (2019: 12), the assessment of new media services act as a “double-edged weapon” in terms of increasing “transparency and participation in decision-making processes, legitimating the activity of public media, or as a hostile tool designed for its control and restriction, strongly in favour of commercial interests.”

### Research design and methodology

Taking the characteristics of comparative analysis into account, research on PSM is complex. It requires a reasonable selection of criteria and indicators to overcome difficulties in interpreting the concept of PSB, contextualising the special features of each media system and categorising different models of organization and contextual factors (Karppinen & Moe, 2012; Raats & Pauwels, 2011). Drawing on literature review and document analysis, and the study taking Moe’s and Van den Bulck’s (2014) critique into account, the analysis of the public value concept calls for an extensive collection of texts.<sup>2</sup> In each case, the use of public value as a key term and how it is operationalised was examined. If the term does not occur, a different value-based approach guides the governance and accountability system (see Table 1). The research covers a pan-European overview and the last twelve years, but we focus on the last five years because some of the governments have reviewed their legal basis.

**Table 1.** Classification of case studies

		Application of Public Value	
		Yes	No
Application of an ex ante test	Yes	AT BE/VG NL UK	DK FI DE IE NO PT
	No		BE/CF HR HU LV SE

Source: Gransow (2018) supplemented by own research

## Status quo of ex ante evaluations and decisions

Since 2015, over 20 proposals have been assessed by an ex ante test – five have been declined, three are currently pending. To understand the arguments of the different decision-makers, the procedure can be categorised: With the exception of the German media system, either the regulatory authority or a political agent takes the final decision to approve a new service (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Institutional responsibility for ex ante tests and applications to date

Application of the procedure	Board of the PSB	Regulation authority	Political agent
Yes	Germany	Austria	Belgium (Flanders)
	Broadcasting Councils	KommAustria	Government
	(50 / 2 / 1)	(4 / 4 / 2)	(0 / 1 / 0)
		Denmark	Finland
		Radio and Television Board	Administrative Council
		(3 / 0 / 0)	(4 / 0 / 0)
	Portugal	Ireland	
	Regulatory Authority for the Media	Ministry for Communication, Climate Action and Environment	
	(1 / 0 / 0)	(3 / 0 / 0)	
	United Kingdom	Netherlands	
	Ofcom	Ministry for Education, Culture and Science	
	(6 / 1 / 0)	(3 / 3 / 0)	
		Norway	
		Ministry of Culture	
		(2 / 0 / 0)	
No		Hungary	Belgium (Wallonia)
		National Media and Infocommunications Authority	Council of Media
			Croatia
			Agency for Electronic Media
			Latvia
		Council of Media	
		Sweden	
		Government	

*Comment:* Results from the ex ante tests (based on data from October 2019) are shown within parentheses (approved / rejected / pending).

*Source:* Adapted from MPRT (2017, 2015) and RTR-GmbH (2014) supplemented by own research.

In the Austrian media system, the regulator KommAustria guarantees the independence of the procedure. In the Netherlands, the education minister has final decision-making powers. In both cases, only half of the proposals were approved (see Tables 4 & 6). Discussing the reasons for a refusal is important for the analysis. In the British case, the BBC Trust completed five public value tests before 2016 (see Table 3). Along with the renewal of the Royal Charter and Framework Agreement, major organisational and procedural changes have been implemented. The Office of Communication (Ofcom) is in charge of all decisions and has to carry out a public interest test (PIT). It already performed the PIT twice. The same provisions are found in the Danish, Hungarian, and Portuguese media systems, where the regulation authority has decision power.

The last three cases are part of the group which also includes Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, and Norway, where the political agent has approved the proposals. In Flanders and Sweden, the government takes the decision and the regulator conducts the procedure (see Table 5). The 14 case studies demonstrate heterogeneity in both institutional responsibility and application of the *ex ante* test. If a government acts as a decision-maker, its political influence on PSM must be criticised (Bardoel & Vochteloo, 2012; Donders & Pauwels, 2012).

Indeed, five media systems legally formulated an *ex ante* test, but none of them have any experience assessing services. With the exception of the French-speaking part of Belgium, none of these countries completed a state aid procedure. One point of criticism is the procedure itself. In the Latvian case, the Council of Media never formulated a concrete procedure. In Sweden, the government intends to open up the *ex ante* test to interested stakeholders who request a service to be evaluated (MPRT, 2018). Taking these arguments one step further, it enables third parties to question each proposal developed by a PSB and to call for an *ex ante* test. Even more problematic is the limitation of PSBs' innovation capacity, and therefore its universality, especially in media systems where the level of regulation is much higher and political independence is lacking. This requires a detailed analysis and classification of the latest developments in assessing new services and products of PSBs.

## Characterisation of case study findings

Each case illustrates the variability of the concept. In particular, the issues of a decreasing value and the effect of a proposed service to previously approved services are difficult to address. With that in mind, the findings reveal that research still need to provide insight on evaluating public value in the context of different media systems.



*The United Kingdom***Table 3.** Concluded proceedings in the UK

Date	Proposals	Results
01/08/19	BBC iPlayer	Approved
26/06/18	BBC Scotland	Approved
25/11/15	BBC Three, BBC One, iPlayer and CBBC	Approved
31/07/09	BBC Local Video	Rejected
24/01/08	BBC Gaelic Digital Service	Approved
27/04/07	BBC HDTV	Approved
31/01/07	BBC on-demand proposals	Approved

Source: Gransow (2018) supplemented by own research

In November 2017, the BBC published its concept for another Scottish television channel, BBC Scotland. The expansion was justified with its contribution to the mission particularly providing impartial news and information according to BBC's public purposes (BBC, 2017a). After carrying out a PIT, including a review of the public value, Ofcom permitted the launch of the new service (Ofcom, 2018a, 2018b). The purpose of Ofcom's assessment was to ensure that it "made a compelling, well evidenced and methodologically sound assessment of the public value" (Ofcom, 2018b: 1). Therefore, the regulator identified a number of impacts that are strongly connected to public purposes. One of them is personal value. Its level depends on the ability of the BBC to "deliver creative and distinctive output" for all viewers (Ofcom, 2018b: 10).

Some aspects are problematic: The broadcaster again applies a broad definition for the key terms and revises the existing definition of public value. The assessment suggests a strong public value and a strong contribution to the public purposes and mission of the BBC. It also concludes that BBC Scotland would generate a personal value on a medium to high level. To measure a possible public value that justifies the impact on the market, the PSB runs qualitative deliberative workshops and a quantitative research project. The BBC board consults the public for six weeks and accepts responses from other stakeholders or citizens. Commissioned consulting firms analyse and model the results (BBC, 2017a). BBC used this mixed methodological approach because "it is not possible to put a monetary value on the different elements which contribute to public value" (BBC, 2017a: 34).

Despite the positive arguments, the regulator points out that the "BBC Board will [...] consider closely the wider effects of other BBC services [BBC Alba] and third parties of any further expansion to the proposal" (Ofcom, 2018b: 27). Ofcom doubted that the new channel compensates for the lost public value of

the already existing television channel (Ofcom, 2018b). The ties between existing and new services create a general problem and makes it difficult to quantify the changes. Therefore, BBC has to be aware that any proposal linked to other services approved by an ex ante test will change their public value.

With the relaunch of BBC Three as an online-only service, the formalities are changing as well. This new format has financial and strategic effects (BBC Trust, 2015b). As Ramsey (2016) argues, the reasons for change have to be convincing and confront challenges. This is particularly important in the case of a leading PSM organisation such as the BBC. Most recently, the BBC intends to reinvent the iPlayer by extending the time period of box sets and other programme content available by using personalisation options in steps with changing audience habits and needs (BBC, 2019). Ofcom calls on the need to support PSBs in the digital age and supplies the BBC as a cornerstone of the global media markets which have to be well-funded and reach its audience, especially the younger age group (Ofcom, 2018c). Regarding the proposed changes, the regulator approved a services extension of up to one year. However, the adverse impact on rival services is a concern. To justify the positive ruling, the BBC has to specify the extent of the iPlayer's impact. There is a need to clarify the maximum number of available content and to filter data by different categories and genres (Ofcom, 2019). The BBC is not the only broadcaster that is taking steps to improve their services, but this broadcaster explicitly makes an effort to take on a trailblazer role.

### *The Netherlands*

**Table 4.** Concluded proceedings in the Netherlands

<b>Date</b>	<b>Proposals</b>	<b>Results</b>
31/08/2018	NPO Soul & Jazz TV channel	Approved
19/08/2016	NPO Plus	Approved
05/04/2016	NPO FunX Turkpops	Rejected
05/04/2016	Npo3.nl	Approved
-	NPO News and Events	Withdrawn
8/2010	Revising of NPO Services	Rejected
		Temporary approval until January 2012
4/2009	New NPO Service proposal	Rejected
		Trial until September 2010

Source: Gransow (2018) supplemented by own research

The Dutch stakeholders still highly prioritise the concept of public value as its self-promotion. The term is specified in Dutch media law and is part of the remit. Legally integrated as a concept in 2008, its status has increased over the years. In 2016, the government reformed the legal requirements for the *Nederlands Publieke Omroep* [Dutch Public Broadcasting] (NPO). Safeguarding the future of PSM and the commitments as set out in the agreement have to comply with public values (NPO, 2016). The recommendations of the Council of Culture<sup>3</sup> as an advisory body have had an impact on ensuring a modern PSM. The policy agreement 2016–2020 states that the broadcaster seeks to generate public value and quality across programmes and genres. Its services fulfil the democratic, social, and cultural needs of the Dutch society and are measured along a number of quality criteria each year (RvC, 2014). To score the potential public value, the NPO has developed strict guidelines and a monitoring concept based on eight criteria. If a certain broadcasting service does not fulfil the expected norms, it is judged by an expert panel and can even be cancelled (NPO, 2015, 2016).

The *ex ante* test has been carried out six times – three proposals were approved and three were rejected. With the new concession plan, the PSB proposed four new services (NPO, 2015). NPO Plus, a commercial video-on-demand service, was permitted because it generates enough public value to justify the market impact (OCW, 2016a). Education Minister Bussemaker states that the effects may be negative because commercial providers hinder setting up comparable new, profitable services. However, many new providers enter the audiovisual market, and therefore, the NPO needs to develop pioneering services (OCW, 2016a).

In a separate request, the NPO sought permission to launch a new radio channel for pop music and traditional Turkish music to better address younger target audiences. The NPO saw the public value in a potential appeal to young Dutch people with a foreign background (NPO, 2015). The minister agreed with the council's rejection who feared the proposal would only appeal to a rather limited audience and would only have public value if it achieved some degree of cross-promotion with the other channels. In addition, the application does not explain how a service for a specific target group matches the ambition to be a connecting force for society (OCW, 2016b).

Finally, the NPO requested approval of a new online platform for a young audience. PSBs have to respond to two major changes in young persons' media use: their preference for on-demand services and their increasing need for interaction with the media (NPO, 2016). The project combines all the broadcasting and online content of the NPO which appeal to that age group. Moreover, it offers a space where young Dutch people can get involved. The council approved this proposal: By offering new (web-only) content, the PSB meets the needs of its young audience in terms of form, duration, and storytelling. As such, it contributes to the fulfilment of the remit. The council also suggests that the content

should be disseminated via other online and social media platforms. The minister agrees and states that it is logical and sensible that the NPO develops a range of services that match the target group and promote the remit (OCW, 2016a).

### *Flanders*

**Table 5.** Concluded proceedings in Flanders

Date	Proposals	Results
22/05/2017	Ketnet Jr.	Rejected

Source: Gransow (2018) supplemented by own research

According to the current management contract, public value has four dimensions: democratic, cultural, social, and economic. Each of them describes the connection of the programme and products to fulfil the needs of the Flemish society (VRT, 2017). The Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie [Flemish Public Broadcasting] (VRT) commits to quality understood as being socially relevant and responding to the needs of the audience. The public value concept is currently based on six criteria. Additionally, there are two characteristics for assessing functional quality. This constitutes the assessment of a proposed service and is the key factor in everything the PSB does (VRT, 2016, 2018).

The only *ex ante* test yielded a rejection. The idea was to expand the existing online service for children in the linear programming (VRT, 2017). According to the Media Decree of 2009, the broadcaster needs government approval. The Flemish Council of Media<sup>4</sup> (VRM), acting as regulatory authority, assesses the proposal and advises the government. Rather than determining what a new service is or defining a material change as in the other case studies, the media agreement was supplemented by a wide list of existing broadcasting and online services. However, this list was so extensive that according to Karen Donders (personal interview, 3 December 2013), it was barely possible to classify a planned service as a new one. Moreover, all the services of an online platform were automatically covered by the remit. Extending the number of television channels is not part of the list. As a result, the government finally had to carry out an *ex ante* test. The process of assessing a proposal is not as sufficiently detailed as in the other cases. The regulator consults the public, experts, and other media companies and makes a decision.

Six months after VRT submitted its proposal in 2016, the PSB was not able to convince the government to support a new children's channel. In their decision, the government pointed out that the assessment showed inconclusive results. These were confirmed by the partial evaluations, which did not allow a positive or negative recommendation of the new service. The impact on the

media market along with insufficient protection and promotion of the Flemish identity were the main reasons for declining the proposal. Although VRM gave a positive recommendation, the government considered the additional channel as an unnecessary addition to the existing programme incompatible with the management agreement (VRM, 2017). Therefore, the delivery of public value was not adequate to convince the government to launch a new television channel (Donders & Van den Bulck, 2014).

*Austria*

**Table 6.** Concluded proceedings in Austria

Date	Proposals	Results
09/05/2018	ORF video library “Flimmit”	Rejected
09/05/2018	ORF Youtube channel	Rejected
22/07/2015	radiothek.ORF.at	Approved
18/02/2015	Ö3-Live/Visual	Rejected
12/07/2013	Tvthek.ORF.at	Rejected
14/11/2012	Archive of Focus (Radio show)	Approved
21/11/2011	Ö1 is catching on	Approved
18/05/2011	Special-interest TV channel for information and culture	Approved

Source: Gransow (2018) supplemented by own research

The public value concept is a key element of the accountability and governance system of the Austrian PSB. Whereas the term is not legally implemented, it sets the standards for the quality management system. Österreichischer Rundfunk [Austrian Public Broadcasting] (ORF) releases a report each year which proves the variety of the services and its performance as a PSB. Its concept consists of five dimensions with 18 criteria. Each criterion is connected to one or more requirements of the remit, programme policy, guidelines, or code of conduct, and even the demands of the Protocol of Amsterdam are mentioned.

By processing a political independent evaluation procedure, the Austrian version of the ex ante test serves as a role model in Europe. The ORF is the only PSB that holds a public hearing for six weeks before the actual test is performed. The added value of the proposal can be revised before the regulator expresses any criticism. In addition to the competition authority, an advisory body as part of the KommAustria assesses the public value of a proposed service. It is comprised of media experts which represent the public interests (RTR-GmbH, 2014). The evaluation procedure is clearly described in the media law. A total of ten services has required an ex ante approval so far. The remaining propos-

als were rejected either because of their incompatibility with the remit or the potential negative market impact was higher than the presumed public value. In contrast to the other case studies, ORF's presence on the Internet is more limited than other PSBs.

In their last decision, KommAustria denied ORF's proposed presence on YouTube for several reasons. Other providers of video-sharing websites were disadvantaged. The online channel should extend the accessibility of the broadcaster's programme. The regulator confirms the need for ORF being present on media platforms and sees potential to fulfil the remit. However, it is not reasonable to pass over the legal requirements, which include a weakening of the PSB's own platform (KommAustria, 2018a). In another recent decline, the PSB wanted to launch its own video-on-demand service in order to be more accessible for those age groups who watch online television content (KommAustria, 2018b). The rejection was based on the uncertain financial sustainability such as in the media law requested (KommAustria, 2018b). The council supports the proposal because since it has only been in operation for a short while, it does not provide public value in the sense of a publicly funded service. The same applies in the case of its own YouTube channel. Being innovative and relevant to young audiences is important for PSBs in order to deliver public value for all. It is the broadcaster's responsibility to ensure coherently worded proposals that meet a variety of legal requirements (KommAustria, 2018a; 2018b). More recently, ORF requests an approval on two new services that focus on news and fiction.

### Discussion: Rise and fall of public value

A range of services and products require an *ex ante* approval. Common proposals include content-specific and high-definition channels, on-demand-services, and various mobile apps. The evaluations are predominantly tailored towards specific age groups or language minorities.<sup>5</sup> The few proposals which have been declined either lacked public value or could not be implemented for legal, financial, or technical reasons. During the first wave of procedures, the PSBs were establishing themselves in the world of online services. Currently, it is more relevant to develop on-demand catch-up services which allow (especially young) audiences to watch a programme anywhere at any time. The challenge is to make the new services compatible with the requirements of media law. Martin and Lowe (2014) remark that it is important to invest public money in services and products that promote public value. Therefore, PSBs must be enabled and trusted to expand their boundaries beyond the existing requirements, as they are facing a number of urgent issues. It has become clear that the *ex ante* test is not an overarching response because of its costs and time-

consuming organisation, but in terms of transparency, it is an important step towards their engagement in progressive services.

Three aspects are crucial in public value assessment. It is still difficult to apply all different values. The question remains if they can accurately be separated from one another. Values such as independence, diversity, innovation, and universality avoid the danger of overlaps, subjective determination, and overvaluation. No matter what the concept concentrates on – a new service, improving an existing one, or activities as a whole – the values are still normative. Even if the PSBs execute an order by the government, the application of public value does not exempt them from being aware of, refining, and evolving their services continuously.

This comparison emphasises the indispensability of a public value framework. The concept raises PSBs' awareness of their specific key values, how they relate to their remit, and helps to assess a new service. Essentially, the democratic, social, and cultural structure of a country is crucial to determining public value. The key stakeholders are responsible to discuss the characteristics of PSM in depth, in particular which studies are important for its evolution. For some, it is essential that their PSBs are present in social media, break down the digital shift by having their own commercial on-demand-service, or intensify cooperation with other institutions. For others, it is more difficult to provide these services.

However, what are the strategic plans of a PSB board to convert an existing television channel to an Internet service? It is necessary that a PSB reacts to the challenges – including covering all demographic groups – with services to suit their needs and ensure the existing broadcasting services in its own interests. Relaunching BBC Three is one step in the right direction, but Ramsey (2016) argues that the quota is only one important pillar for being distinguishable from commercial television, and with the exclusive online service, these percentages are omitted. It remains unanswered which production quotas are obligatory for a service like BBC Three. Ramsey also suspects that other television channels will go online, but the discussion relates to financing and the concept of production quotas. However, what happens if the impact of an online-only service offers too little in terms of added public value?

In recent years, public value has become an important argument for the PSBs fulfilling their remit and for assessing new projects. The issue of decreased value of a service needs be addressed, particularly whether the services, which are launched without prior approval, have sufficient public value. In spite of the public value approach, it is doubtful that a range of key values is enough to convince democratically elected parliaments that their services have value for society. Certain warning signs, such as the increasing political control of public institutions or replacing the financial model, linked to the weakening of PSM and restricting the mission, cannot be ignored. Citizen support is essential and contribution to PSM is a sign of democratic health. To underline their value

to societies, PSBs need to consult with the people who pay for the services and show them concrete evidence of their value. However, statutory provisions and saving public expenditure are setting the development of PSM.

Another crucial issue remains unsolved: To what extent, if at all, are PSBs allowed to stream their content online? With popular streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, and Disney+ coming up, it is outdated to maintain old regulations. Instead, the flexibility of using publicly financed content needs to be increased. Politicians are called to finally conform the remit to the developments of the media market to highlight the importance and indispensability of PSM. In times of fake news and drastic changes in the media sector, the existence of PSB is more urgent than ever to audiences and societies, even if they may not always be aware of this. A further concern relates to the purpose of the second wave of *ex ante* tests. It is not assessed if an approved service has any negative impact on existing services. BBC Scotland is predicted to have a negative impact on BBC Alba and BBC Two in terms of the number of viewers. Their Scottish content will also decline, which reduces *their* public value. Based on Ofcom's assessment, the changes to the iPlayer will have an adverse impact on the media sector in the UK. These omissions will have to be addressed.

### Conclusion: The reform of the remit is a matter of urgency

Based on the three different types of decision-making, 14 cases have been categorised according to their application of the *ex ante* test. There is no standardised procedure to assess a new service or change an existing service. Each country defines their way of expanding the range of PSM individually. All case studies have a concept of the value of PSBs' services; however, public value is not the preferred evaluation criterion in their accountability system. Only four PSBs assign the concept. The other cases, such as Germany and the Scandinavian countries, determine the democratic, social, and cultural needs of their society based on a genres-related approach. The findings reveal that the specific meaning of public value depends on its legal status in the media system.

Audience demands are in constant flux, and so are the contents of PSM. In the age of Internet and media giants, politicians need to support PSM even more as a unique feature of democracy that strengthens pluralism and enriches the increasingly fragmented nature of media markets. PSBs must be given the opportunity and the money to invest in new online streaming formats or receive a political mandate in order to be innovative and appeal to all different demographic groups. Using the full potential of its universality is key to ensuring that all generations value public broadcasters. It is an ongoing process between PSBs and key stakeholders of media policy to predict future purposes of PSM and to deliver online and linear services with values determined by the remit. For both parties, it is



not expedient to serve the status quo in combination with a time-consuming procedure. Conflicts with private media companies due to the ineffectiveness of the procedure, such as in the Irish and Finnish cases, do not solve the problem. Neither does rejecting new services. The revision process is far from complete and many challenges need to be addressed, but not at the expense of the audience.

## Notes

1. The countries included were: Austria, the Flemish and French part of Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the UK.
2. This includes media laws, decrees, management contracts, government agreements, reports published online by PSBs and regulation authorities, guidelines, and outcomes of previous evaluations.
3. Raad voor Cultuur (RvC).
4. Vlaamse Regulator voor de Media (VRM).
5. Two exceptions from this pattern are the assessment for leasing a PSB's studio or the provision of an information service for public facilities and transport.

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## Chapter 8

# Challenges for public service radio in small nations

### *Lessons from Scotland*

Aleksandar Kocic & Jelena Milicev

#### Abstract

Scotland does not have any public service radio on a local level, except for a few bulletins or programmes offered by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Radio Scotland on an opt-out basis. Scottish commercial radio stations do cover local issues, but only in the form of brief hourly news bulletins without any in-depth coverage. By neglecting local news, BBC Scotland fails to meet one of its key obligations as a public service broadcaster – universality of content. Through a review of the existing literature on the role of media in democracy – and in particular the role of local radio – interviews with academics whose expertise lies in the fields of media policy and regulation, and focus groups with members of the public, this study formulates proposals on how to achieve universality in this key area of news provision in Scotland.

**Keywords:** local, radio, public, service, news, regulation

## Introduction

Scotland is a stateless nation, or as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) refers to it in the context of its own structure – a national region. In the radio arena, Scotland has a very strong national player in the form of BBC Radio Scotland, which is both a national radio for Scotland and, as part of the bigger BBC family, a regional one. What Scotland lacks, though, is local public service radio along the lines of similar services in many countries, including south of the border in England. In terms of local news provision, radio audiences in Scotland are served by a network of commercial radio stations, while the BBC in Scotland offers local news only on its website. That level of provision, as we argue in this chapter, is insufficient. Of particular interest to us is provision of local hard news, or what Kernell and colleagues (2018: 240) refer to as “civic affairs news” – news that help inform citizens’ political activity. This is particularly important now that the local press is in

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decline, with titles closing down or reducing staff numbers and output (Fraser, 2017; Mayhew, 2018).

According to a YouGov survey on news consumption, for citizens of the UK, radio is the second most popular source of news, after television and still ahead of print, online news sources, and social media feeds. British people say that local or regional news is the second most important type of news, after national, with a combined figure of 76 per cent saying that it is either “very” or “fairly” important. The four most important types of local news for British people are: crime and policing (80%), local events and entertainment (69%), traffic and travel (63%), and local politics (62%). Although 61 per cent say there is enough local news where they live, it is not clear if the levels of satisfaction vary between the four nations of the UK, given that the BBC runs local radio stations only in England (all figures by YouGov, 2019).

In that context, and with focus on universality of content as one of the stated obligations of public service media, we aim to answer two research questions:

1. What is the state of local news provision by radio in Scotland?
2. How to achieve universality of content for BBC radio in Scotland?

To answer these two questions, we reviewed the existing literature on the role of media in democracy. We also interviewed news editors, station managers, and academics with expertise in the fields of media policy, regulation, and history. Furthermore, we spoke to members of the public in focus groups. The same data set has been used to answer other research questions, with partly overlapping conclusions published elsewhere (see Kocic & Milicev, 2019). Our aim is to evaluate the current local news provision by radio in Scotland and formulate possible ways forward for BBC in Scotland so it can achieve more complete universality of content.

## Theoretical perspectives on the role of media

In Scotland, as elsewhere in the UK, the BBC is the main public service broadcaster, while commercial rivals have only limited public service obligations. Public broadcasting systems are allocated certain responsibilities and are required to serve the “public interest” in ways that go beyond what market forces can determine (McQuail, 2003: 15), which makes the BBC’s position over local news coverage in Scotland rather peculiar. What seems to be of particular concern here is to what extent the BBC meets its responsibilities in terms of universality and diversity. These are – together with independence and distinctiveness – some of the main responsibilities of public service broadcasters, as defined by Banerjee and Seneviratne (2005). The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) distinguishes



between universality of content and universality of access. It is universality of content that is of particular interest to this study.

The EBU (2002) defines universality of content in two ways: universality of basic supply on generalist channels and universality across the full portfolio of services, some of them specialised or tailored for specific audiences. Writing before the proliferation of digital services, Born and Prosser (2001) argued that in the context of universality of content, the traditional concept of mixed programming is superior to the concept of niche channels, where more demanding programmes on current affairs or the arts are concentrated in specialist channels. While BBC Radio Scotland has maintained the single-channel approach, this chapter demonstrates that it has deliberately neglected a key aspect of news provision – local news coverage.

For Bardoel and d’Haenens, the universality of content requirement presents public service broadcasters (PSBs) with a particular challenge as they seek support of a society that is changing rapidly because of major social trends such as individualisation, lower interest in politics and established institutions, as well as a shift from a mono- to a multicultural society. A key problem is the gradually diminishing reach of PSBs among “problematic groups” such as younger generations, migrants, and the less educated (Bardoel & d’Haenens, 2008: 341). Young people often support the ideal of public service in media, but many do not find public service media (PSM) channels or content of personal interest and value (Van den Bulck et al., 2018).

In Scotland, the gap in local news coverage by BBC Radio Scotland is partly filled by commercial radio, in the form of brief hourly news bulletins. Nevertheless, as commercial media have a structural bias against news and current affairs (Aalberg et al., 2010), it remains unclear to what extent this addresses the informational needs of Scottish audiences. This is important because of the potential of local media to contribute to democratic processes. Democracy functions best when its citizens and decision-makers are informed about different viewpoints on policy problems (Baumgartner & Jones, 2015). Local journalism provides information about local public affairs, it holds local elites at least somewhat accountable, it provides a forum for discussion, and it ties communities together (Nielsen, 2015). Local media have the ability to bring politically disinterested citizens together and help them engage in public life (Campbell, 1999). The media do that by raising citizens’ concerns about issues (Smith, 1987) and by providing information on how individuals can participate in politics (Lemert, 1981). Furthermore, local media help foster social integration by helping people navigate their local community and contribute to social cohesion and a sense of belonging to the locale (Costera Meijer, 2010). From this perspective, local and regional media are seen as fundamental resources of both democracy and identity (Robins & Cornford, 1993).

The functioning of democracy relies on an informed citizenship (Esser et al., 2012). News media use is expected to affect political participation by affecting knowledge about current political affairs, which then affects beliefs in one's capability to act on this knowledge (Andersen et al., 2016). Active political participation is key to a healthy democracy, especially within the frameworks of participatory and deliberative democracy (Strömbäck, 2005). Citizens who pay close attention to news about public affairs and politics should not only be able to cast more informed ballots and hold elected officials accountable; they should also be more supportive of democratic processes and procedures (Goidel et al., 2017).

The second equally important function of the media is in facilitating participation in deliberative processes. Carpentier and colleagues (2013) say that the media sphere serves as a location, where citizens can voice their opinions and experiences and interact with other voices. This concept is of particular importance to the present study as we believe that local media – and local radio in particular – play a key role in facilitating public participation in democratic processes. This is achieved through its role of bringing to the fore issues relevant to local communities it serves and, through its staple – the phone-in – and other speech-based programmes, facilitate mediated public discussion around those issues.

The arrival of the Internet brought with it a new public sphere with great hopes for the effect of online and mobile news' effect on democracy. Jakubowicz (2008: 5) is among those who believe that the Internet has “transformed large parts of the traditionally passive audience into active communicators, willing to engage in debate and expecting a similar willingness on the part of professional media”. Social media in particular was thought to have democratic potential to engage people in dialogue about issues of common concern and public interest (Hjarvard, 2018; Shirky, 2008). Others, however, have argued that the potential for digital democracy is greatly overstated (Ceron & Memoli, 2016; Hindman, 2008). Digital media may subsequently have little effect on democratic attitudes, or the effects may be more nuanced (Goidel et al., 2017). As far as local news coverage is concerned, the emergence of new digital forms of local media has caused a great deal of optimism, but as Nielsen (2015) points out, the evidence that digital-only operations can sustain local journalism on a significant scale is inconclusive.

## Radio market and listening habits in Scotland

Currently, there are 34 local commercial stations available to listeners in Scotland (Ofcom, 2019).<sup>1</sup> According to their schedules and service formats, they all provide news coverage in the form of brief hourly news bulletins in peak

hours. At the same time, substantial local news coverage by the BBC exists only on “opt-outs” in some parts of Scotland. BBC Radio Orkney and BBC Radio Shetland each broadcast a half-hour daily news programme, extended to a full hour in winter months, while short local news and weather bulletins are also broadcast on weekdays from studios in Selkirk, Dumfries, Aberdeen, and Inverness. This leaves other parts of Scotland, including large cities such as Glasgow, Edinburgh, or Dundee, without any local news coverage.

In order to help fill the gap in the coverage of local councils and other public bodies in the UK, the BBC in 2017 launched Local News Partnerships – a news agency tasked with providing content for print, broadcast, and online news outlets. The agency currently employs 20 journalists in Scotland who produce content available to over 130 partners, mostly local newspaper and commercial radio stations (BBC, 2019). While certainly a step in the right direction, that project does little to address the lack of local news coverage by BBC Radio in Scotland itself. This is quite important as research by the Office of Communications (Ofcom) consistently shows that listeners in Scotland attach a great deal of importance to local news coverage – it is the second most valued type of content after music (2019). Radio in general remains very popular in Scotland, with 85 per cent of adults tuning in every week in quarter 1 of 2019. Local commercial radio is the most popular type, at 51 per cent weekly reach, while BBC Radio Scotland – at 17.2 per cent – is doing better than local radio in England combined (all figures from Ofcom, 2019).

## Methods

The present study – which received ethical approval from Edinburgh Napier University prior to data collection – used a mixed-methods design as a way to collect rich, comprehensive data and compare quantitative and qualitative findings.

### *Design*

We employed an exploratory sequential design (see Wisdom & Creswell, 2013) whereby a qualitative approach was used to explore the previously established quantitative findings. Content analysis was used to reach quantitative findings. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were employed to obtain views of experts, professionals, and government officials, allowing us to gather detailed answers about each respondent’s field of expertise (Guest et al., 2017). Focus groups were used to obtain the views of members of the public. This method was appropriate as group dynamics – based on the interactions between group members – were likely to produce a wider range of views and perspectives than

one-to-one interviews (cf. Kidd & Parshall, 2000; Krueger & Casey, 2015). Combining quantitative data about the extent of local news coverage and qualitative data about user needs and ways to address them, we obtained a comprehensive tool to assess the current state of local news provision by radio in Scotland, as well as the ability to draw up suggestions about optimal ways of achieving universality of content for BBC radio in Scotland.

### *Procedure*

The study was undertaken in four consecutive phases: 1) interviews with news editors; 2) content analysis of news bulletin scripts; 3) interviews with experts; and 4) focus groups with the general public. The findings from each phase informed the design of the subsequent phases in the following way. First, news editors at BBC Radio Scotland and Bauer Media<sup>2</sup> were interviewed face-to-face using a semi-structured approach to gain insight into stations' editorial policies and output.

Next, content analysis was applied to the news bulletin scripts provided by Bauer Media and the BBC Radio Scotland, looking into programmes by four Bauer Media stations and the BBC Radio Scotland between 25–27 September 2017 (see Table 3). News stories were sorted according to the predetermined categories listed in Tables 2 and 4. Once the state of news provision by commercial and PSB radio in Scotland was quantified, we used semi-structured interviews with six experts and one Scottish government representative to put those findings into perspective and solicit ideas for ways forward. The academics (see Table 1) were chosen on the basis of their extensive knowledge of media history, policy, and regulation in Scotland, or more general expertise on radio and its public service role.

**Table 1.** Interviewees

Station or news editors	Gary Smith, Head of News, BBC Radio Scotland Lorraine Herbison, Head of News and Sport, Scotland, Bauer Media
Regulators and policy makers	Scottish Government
Academics	Neil Blain, Professor Emeritus of Communications, University of Stirling David Hutchison, Visiting Professor in Media Policy, Glasgow Caledonian University Peter Schlesinger, Professor of Cultural Policy, University of Glasgow and former member for Scotland on the Content Board of Ofcom Peter Lewis, Professor of Media and Culture, London Metropolitan University Chris Frost, Professor of Journalism, John Moores University

Finally, the findings from content analysis and interviews with editors and experts were used to inform the design of the focus groups' interview schedule.

### *Participants*

The academic experts (see Table 1) were chosen on the basis of their extensive knowledge of media history, policy, and regulation in Scotland, or more general expertise on radio and its public service role. Scottish residents aged 18 and above were eligible to participate in our focus groups, provided they had resided in Scotland for more than a year. Invitations for participation were emailed to the members of Edinburgh Active Citizenship Group – whose members are ordinary citizens with a keen interest in public affairs – and students at Edinburgh Napier University. Scottish citizens (N=22; age range 19–72) took part in four focus groups. The purpose was to gain insight into ordinary citizens' views on the importance of local news and local radio.

### *Data analysis*

Both the interviews and focus groups were analysed using thematic analysis. This is a flexible approach that allows for identification of key patterns (themes) in the data and their interpretation in relation to the research questions and relevant theoretical ideas (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2014). It was a particularly suitable way to address our research questions, which aimed to tap into individuals' conceptions of social phenomena, as it enabled us to capture a wide range of views as well as identify the most dominant ones (cf. Willig, 2013). First, we assigned preliminary codes to the data. Next, we searched for patterns across the interviews. Finally, themes were refined and defined so that each one was coherent and distinct. Consequently, our themes represented the dominant attitudes and perceptions related to local news provision in Scotland, while the minority opinions were recorded as “disproving cases”, helping to form a balanced representation of the entire data set.

## Quantitative results

On BBC Radio Scotland we counted 124 stories in total, with the breakdown listed in Table 2.

We note here – as per BBC Radio Scotland's news policy explained by its Head of News Gary Smith – that local stories are included in news bulletins or programmes only if they are considered by editors to be of interest to the wider Scottish audience. Such stories often fall into these categories: crime, traffic, and human interest. Some of the headlines in this category we found included:

“Easterhouse Stabbing Inquiry Continues”; “A Man Has Died Following a Disturbance in Dundee”; and “Motorists Reporting Long Delays on the A9 in the Cairngorm”.

**Table 2.** Types and number of stories covered by BBC Radio Scotland

<b>BBC Radio Scotland News Coverage</b>	
Local	10
Regional	26
National	35
International	27
Human interest	5
Business	7
Science	10
Arts and entertainment	4
Other	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>

In the commercial sector, we looked at the output of four Bauer media stations, listed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Commercial radio stations included in the content analysis

<b>Station</b>	<b>Output</b>
Clyde 1 (greater Glasgow area)	FM and DAB Weekday news bulletins, hourly 6:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.
Clyde 2 (greater Glasgow area)	AM and DAB Weekday news bulletins, hourly 6:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.
Radio Borders (Scottish Borders and North Northumberland)	FM Weekday news bulletins, hourly 6:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.
Radio Forth (greater Edinburgh area)	FM and DAB Weekday news bulletins, hourly 6:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.

All of the above listed stations have one thing in common – they offer a far smaller number of stories than BBC Radio Scotland, but with more emphasis on local news. Lorraine Herbison, Bauer Media’s head of news for Scotland, points out that this is because local news is Bauer’s USP in terms of its news offering. This point is clearly illustrated in our breakdown of the four radio stations’ news output over the same three days in September 2017, listed in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Types and number of stories covered by four commercial radio stations

	Station		
	Clyde 1 and 2	Radio Borders	Radio Forth
Local	11	17	12
Regional	13	6	5
National	9	12	17
International	2	4	3
Sport	7	3	9
Human interest	2	0	0
Business	1	2	1
Science	2	1	2
Art and Entertainment	1	2	1
Other	1	0	0
Total	49	47	50

Our analyses demonstrate that in relative terms, commercial radio in Scotland covers a substantial number of local stories. However, those stories are covered in brief only, as the majority of stations, including those listed here, do not go beyond the two-minute news bulletins on the hour, extended to five minutes at 1:00 p.m. on AM stations only (which serve an older audience).

## Qualitative results

In our interviews with media experts, three themes emerged: 1) the BBC is not doing a good enough job; 2) commercial radio is not a viable alternative; and 3) the BBC and broadcasting policy in Scotland should be reformed.

### *Theme one: The BBC is not doing a good enough job*

All expert interviewees agree that the BBC could do better in the area of local news provision. Frost said he thought that local news provision “was the main purpose of BBC Scotland”, while Lewis pointed out that attention on local radio suffered due to the BBC’s “prioritising” of television and online services. Schlesinger challenged the traditional concept of mixed programming: “An all-purpose pan-Scottish station’s model is ripe for review, not least as patterns of consumption change apace”.

### *Theme two: Commercial radio is not a viable alternative*

Given the lack of local news provision on BBC Scotland, we asked our interviewees to comment on local news provision by commercial rivals in Scotland. For Schlesinger, “the long-term trend of commercial local radio has been to

de-localise content and to consolidate ownership”, while for Blain, commercial radio is less suitable as an alternative to PSB because it is “more prone to buffeting by various market considerations”. Frost sees deregulation as the main reason why commercial radio fails to provide substantial news coverage and does not expect that to change any time soon.

### *Theme three:*

#### *The BBC and broadcasting policy in Scotland should be reformed*

Our interviewees suggested a variety of ways for future local news provision in Scotland – from the preservation of local press (Blain) to the “rethinking” of public provision by the BBC (Schlesinger) or a possible new network of non-BBC PSB stations (Hutchison). Blain thinks the BBC should trial local stations in areas “where research indicated a kind of identity community which would support them”. He adds that the existing provision for Shetland and Orkney could be a useful model. Hutchison argues that the money allocated to the BBC’s new digital channel for Scotland could be better spent by setting up local radio stations. For him, one of the reasons for that is the decline of local press: “When local newspapers were stronger that didn’t matter, but I think it started to matter more and I’m not sure the solution is expanding the BBC website”. The Scottish government, which on broadcasting matters does not have policy-making powers, says it too would like the BBC to go beyond just the local opt-outs: “We believe that [...] audiences would also welcome dedicated services from the BBC offering high quality news and current affairs from the distinctive perspective of Scotland’s regions”.

For Lewis and the Scottish government, the solution lies in devolution of broadcasting in the UK, which in the government’s view would “ensure that proportionate decisions can be taken which recognise the requirements of viewers and listeners in Scotland”. Schlesinger believes the dilemma facing the BBC is “how to design and market content that will appeal to younger demographics without an entrenched habit of radio listening [and balance it] with attention to existing radio audiences”. This is of course the dilemma facing all PSBs around the world, as highlighted by Van den Bulck and colleagues (2018).

## Focus groups

Thematic analysis of the focus groups revealed four dominant, interrelated themes: 1) we are second best for the BBC; 2) there is a need for a variety of local news; 3) commercial radio does not do news well; and 4) the BBC may not be the only solution.



*Theme one: We are second best for the BBC*

Most of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with various aspects of the BBC in Scotland, most notably its trustworthiness and impartiality. These were perceived as compromised by a “really obvious political bias it has, which is [...] not even subtle now, it’s just awful”. According to our participants, the station also lacked in spirit and creativity (“There is no energy in that radio”), which was attributed to the inferior status of the regional provider in relation to the national corporation:

I feel like there’s a very strong sense in Scotland with a lot of people that we are second best for the BBC.

BBC Scotland’s news [...] I think they’re badly prepared, truly badly prepared compared to BBC core. Main news broadcast and lot of the news is very vague, they don’t grow traction or stimulate.

Our focus groups were also critical of the extent to which BBC Scotland catered for different groups, tastes, and needs. Main perceived deficiencies were to do with repetitiveness (“It’s always the same lady that’s on, she kind of backslaps and jokes with the people. It seems a fairly trivial chat”), and the lack of local content (“But there usually seems to be chat shows, it’s not local news”). Nevertheless, many participants praised particular elements of BBC Scotland’s output, such as the morning programme, sports, or night-time music.

*Theme two: There is a need for a variety of local news*

In line with the aforementioned 2019 YouGov survey of news consumption, most participants expressed great interest in local news. In addition, they voiced frustration that local news is “not out there” or that “if it’s covered at all, it’s not in-depth”. There was a shared feeling that important local information was obtained accidentally (“I only happen to hear about these if somebody happens to come on the door”) or that “you’ve got to want to make an effort to look for it”. Interests included council spending and planning, transport, infrastructure, services, schools, education, and “feel-good” stories. Finally, several participants stressed the relevance of local information to the possibility of civic action and political activity:

Like, if you want things to change, or if you want to hear about local corruption, or bad planning, or that sort of things, local news should be a platform.

I think it’s good to know what they’re spending money on, because that shows what your local Council thinks is important. And if I think something is important and you can see they’re not spending any money on it, then I would ask myself why. Or ask them.

*Theme three: Commercial radio does not do news well*

Although commercial radio in Scotland provides news in the form of short hourly bulletins, our participants did not feel that this was an adequate way to provide local news coverage, labelling it “ridiculous”. Similar to experts, focus groups expressed the view that commercial media cannot be an adequate substitute for PSBs: “Every time I listen to any local channel on the radio, I never hear the news in it, I just hear the same pop tune that is on the next channel”.

At the same time, our focus groups perceived some aspects of commercial radio rather positively: “I think they can be fun to listen to and I think there are a lot of really good people, like, hosting different types of shows”.

*Theme four: The BBC may not be the only solution*

The focus groups also indicated there is demand for local public service radio, though not necessarily one provided by the BBC. While some participants thought that each of the seven cities of Scotland should have its local BBC station, the majority felt that the BBC’s reputation as a news provider was too “tainted” due to its shortcomings discussed in theme one, and that there was a need for a public broadcaster that would “have autonomy and not be yet another aspect of the BBC”, which would be close to the Scottish government’s view that broadcasting should be devolved. While overall there was ostensible enthusiasm for some form of local radio, there were also those who thought that radio’s days were numbered: “Online news is the future really. It will all be shifted over to online at some point”.

## Discussion

In this study, we set out to evaluate the state of local news provision by radio in Scotland and to explore the possible ways in which to achieve universality of content for BBC radio in Scotland. Our content analyses demonstrated that BBC Radio Scotland covers local news only as an exception, while commercial radio in general includes a relatively large number of local news, but mostly without any in-depth coverage. Our thematic analyses resulted in three overarching themes for the interviews and four for the focus groups. Notably, the two sets of themes overlapped to an extent, providing a more rounded view of the issues at stake. Both experts and the members of public agreed that local radio is important as a provider of local news and facilitator of local democracy.

While the experts highlighted the public service media as the best for the role, members of the public did not have a strong preference for it to be the BBC, voicing unambiguous dissatisfaction with the performance of the national

broadcaster in Scotland. The perceived bias and lack of creativity, diversity, and local content imply that, in the view of Scottish residents, BBC Scotland might be failing to meet its PSB responsibilities of independence, distinctiveness, universality, and diversity, as defined by Banerjee and Seneviratne (2005). The fact that our focus groups felt that local information was vital for their political activity and civic action supports Kernell and colleagues' (2018) notion of civic affairs news as news that empower citizens by informing their political activity. Both focus groups and experts suggest that the BBC model in Scotland should be reformed. Focus groups supported the view that commercial media cannot be an adequate substitute for PSBs because, as Aalberg and colleagues (2010) pointed out, they have a structural bias against news and current affairs. In addition, they felt that the BBC should be replaced by a more autonomous news provider, echoing the view of the Scottish Government that broadcasting should be devolved. Despite some differences between the views of experts and focus groups, a sufficient number of common perspectives has emerged to help us answer our research questions.

Theoretical perspectives on the role of radio outlined above demonstrate a clear need for robust local news provision in democracy. In assessing the state of that provision by radio in Scotland, we looked at the number of stories covered before gathering perspectives on the quality of the coverage. Our content analyses show that public service radio covers more stories and offers more airtime to news and current affairs than its commercial rivals but by and large neglects local news. Our interviews with experts highlight this as an important gap, while our focus group interviews demonstrate both scepticism of the BBC and dissatisfaction with commercial radio.

We conclude that the current provision by the BBC and commercial radio in Scotland is insufficient and that Scotland needs local radio with a strong public service role. Such radio would help keep the citizens informed about local issues and thus potentially engaged in local democracy. Democracy functions best when its citizens are politically informed (Aalberg et al., 2010). Studies show that news media with high levels of political content affect knowledge and voter turnout positively (Althaus & Trautman, 2008; Baekgaard et al., 2014; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006).

In order to achieve universality of content for BBC radio in Scotland so that it includes local news coverage, we propose that the BBC set up a network of local radio stations with opt-ins into BBC Radio Scotland. This would be based on the English model – where currently there are 40 local BBC stations – possibly starting with the expansion of the existing BBC community stations in Scotland (see below), followed by the establishment of new ones. The amount of output per station would vary, and they would all at certain times opt into BBC Scotland, or at night, a national BBC station such as BBC Five Live. Some of our experts suggested precisely this.

Our focus group interviews revealed distrust of the BBC based mostly on its perceived bias. While this is a matter for a separate study, we here note that in the current constitutional setup, the BBC is best placed to provide universal news service to audiences in Scotland. Without the unlikely regulatory overhaul, commercial radio can only play a supplementary role in news provision, while a PSB rival to the BBC, as championed by some of our experts and focus group participants, does not seem to be viable in the current political climate in the UK.

A reformed BBC therefore would best meet the two complementary obligations for PSBs, namely universality and diversity. The BBC with a single national radio station for Scotland, together with a network of local stations, would enable the corporation to achieve more meaningful diversification in terms of the audiences targeted and the subjects discussed, thus reflecting the whole range of current issues in society, especially at local level.

The BBC is a well-established PSB, with sufficient resources to run such a service, provided BBC Scotland is reorganised. According to its annual report for 2017–2018 (BBC, 2018) the BBC raises over GBP 320 million in Scotland from the licence fee but spends about a GBP 100 million less. The rest goes to the central BBC budget. The total spent on radio is just over GBP 22 million (BBC, 2018).<sup>3</sup> By establishing a network of local radio stations, the BBC would go a long way towards reaching universality of content in its news coverage in Scotland. However, we consider this option unlikely in the near future. It is clear that in the short-to-medium term, the BBC does not have any plans to invest in a network of local radio stations, as confirmed to us by Gary Smith.

Alternatively, BBC Radio Scotland could continue running a single national radio station, but with more local opt-outs – giving existing BBC community stations more airtime and adding new ones in places where they don't already exist. At the moment, BBC Radio Orkney and BBC Radio Shetland both air a half-hour daily news programme each, while local news and weather bulletins are also broadcast from studios in Selkirk, Dumfries, Aberdeen, and Inverness on weekdays. From the perspective of universality, this option would be in line with Born and Prosser's (2001) argument that the traditional concept of mixed programming is superior to the concept of niche channels. In this scenario, news for different localities would essentially be an integral part of a single BBC Radio Scotland channel. We acknowledge, however, that this option had limited support among our expert interviewees and focus group participants.

At present, the BBC in Scotland provides local news coverage mainly on its website, where Scotland is divided into six geographical areas. This is certainly welcome and can be seen as an essential part of strengthening the reach of public broadcasting. The merits of this strategy – which at the moment appears to be insufficient both in scope and aims – should be examined in a separate investigation. In terms of its capacity to nurture and represent inclusive public dialogue – as suggested by Bardoel and Lowe (2007) in their argument for

transition from PSB to PSM – the website fails, as it does not offer a possibility for discussion of issues.

## Conclusion

Through a combination of policy and regulatory decisions, Scotland has been left without significant local news provision by radio. This may not have mattered much in the days of a strong local newspaper market,<sup>4</sup> but today it creates a worrying gap. This is not to say that radio in Scotland is a failure – on the contrary, BBC Radio Scotland is going strong with a steady audience of around 20 per cent; but we believe its current remit creates a significant gap in relation to its universality obligation.

In the present study, we approached the issue of validity by using triangulation, that is, looking at the issue at stake from two different standpoints: experts' and citizens' (see Wilson & MacLean, 2011). We acknowledge that this study is limited by relying on a small number of interviews and focus groups and the fact that all focus group participants were from Southeast Scotland and hence the views expressed might be primarily representative of this region. Future research could verify the generalisability of the current findings by surveying a larger number of participants from a wider geographical area. The proposals outlined here present a starting point for discussion and further in-depth research that would look at their political viability and feasibility. Future research should also address the state of the current local news provision in Scotland in general – by encompassing print and online media. Given the position of Scotland in the UK and the extent of its autonomy, future research should also look at the possibility of local news provision by public service radio set-up outside the BBC.

## Notes

1. Radio listeners in Scotland are also served by a range of community radio stations. Scottish Community Broadcasting Network currently lists 27 of those. Community stations, however, usually lack resources to be able to produce standard news bulletins and news programming, and they do not employ trained journalists. As such, they were excluded from our considerations.
2. Bauer Media runs thirteen stations at eight locations in Scotland, and in quarter 1 of 2018, it had the largest proportion of the market among commercial radio groups (Ofcom, 2018).
3. These figures do not include the GBP 32 million allocated annually for the BBC's new digital television channel for Scotland, launched in early 2019.
4. 57.9 per cent of the British population live in areas not served by a local daily. Rural areas are particularly poorly served, with almost all local daily papers covering major urban areas (NUJ, 2017).

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## Chapter 9

# Whose voices and what values? *State grants for significant public content in the Russian media model*

Olga Dovbysh & Tatiana Belyuga

### Abstract

This study explores how the public service function of media can be implemented in a media model where the institution of public service broadcasting has not been established thus far. Analysing the Russian media model, we investigate how paternalistic state support is related to the commercial logic of mass media. Taking the example of state grants for significant public content, we reveal what topics and whose voices are gaining visibility in mass media. The analysis of state grants revealed the limitations of public accountability in grant competition, the overlap of public interest with state interest in grant projects, and a lack of problematisation in supported projects. Two main groups of topics were identified – public-oriented “by default” topics (culture, history, etc.) are related to an official governmental agenda, while problem-based and controversial topics are less visible. Journalists applying for grants try to anticipate what topics will be considered public-oriented topics by the grant competition’s expert council. Therefore, the only voices that matter are those that do not contradict the official political agenda.

**Keywords:** state grants, Russian media model, public service content, state control, market failure

## Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, public service broadcasting (PSB) was introduced in the majority of post-communist states. Only some post-Soviet countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) failed to transform state broadcasting into PSB (Jakubowicz, 2012).

Some scholars note that the introduction of PSB in post-Soviet countries was an artificial process performed at the “insistence” of and under “additional pressure” from the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media (Richter & Golovanov, 2006). Public broadcasting in such countries is criticised

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for being strongly dependent on political elites and a direct extension of the political power structure (Jakubowicz, 2012).

Another case is Russia and other countries where the institution of PSB was not introduced at all. How can enhanced civic engagement and informed citizenship be achieved in such media models? What is the nature and degree of state intervention in the way mass media provides a public service? In this chapter, we explore the mechanisms of state support for public-oriented content production and distribution in the current Russian media model. We address not only the practical embodiment of public service, but also a more general idea of public interest. Public interest implies a responsibility to support the norms, ethics, and values of a society through informational diversity and represent the opinions and perspectives of various social groups and communities, including those that are small and underprivileged (McQuail, 2010; Rozanova, 2007). In this sense, we understand public service as the ability to create a “communicational condition of democracy characterized by [the] informed and responsible engagement of citizens in public debates under conditions of separation and [the] balance of power” (Rozanova, 2007: 142).

In the following study, we focus on one particular institutional form of this mechanism – state grants for providing “significant public information”. We find these grants to be an important aspect of the Russian media model and especially for regional mass media to provide informational diversity and the opportunity for different voices within society to be heard. Following Couldry (2010), we understand a voice as the instrument by which one expresses an opinion, which can in turn have two interrelated meanings: voice as the process of speaking or voting in elections, and voice as an expression of value, or the act of valuing and choosing to value. Therefore, voice can be seen as an instrument for organising human life and resources through the process of valuing particular social groups or topics. Therefore, when considering state grants for mass media, we investigate two research questions:

1. How does the mechanism of state grants shape the process of addressing public interest?
2. Whose voices gain visibility in the mass media as a result of such grants, and what values do they construct?

This text is organised as follows. In the next section, we discuss the contemporary Russian media model and the role of public interest in it. Next, we analyse previous attempts to establish PSB in post-Soviet Russia. These two issues lead us to an analysis of the political economy of media in Russia and ways media fulfil the public service function given the lack of an institutionalised public service model. In the empirical part, we describe the research methodology and present the results. The chapter concludes by discussing state grants as a mechanism to support public-oriented content production and distribution.

## Russian media model: The role of the state and public interest

De Smaele (1999) was one of the first scholars to notice the limits of applying a Western media model to Russia. She witnessed the emergence of an “indigenous” Russian media model.<sup>1</sup> Later, Oates (2007) concluded that Russian media operated according to a “neo-Soviet model”. Becker (2014: 192) criticised this approach and argued that the Russian media landscape, particularly with respect to government control, “has more in common with other authoritarian countries than it does with the immediate Soviet past”. He suggests that this model can be better described as “neo-authoritarian”.

The current Russian media model operates based on a duality of new and old institutions (Kiriya, 2018). New neoliberal norms were mainly implemented after the collapse of the Soviet Union and involve, for instance, commercial advertising in media, news journalism, and private ownership in media. Old norms suggest peculiar relations with political power, the prohibition against privately owning certain types of media (first of all – television), the use of media to forcefully advance government policy, and fragmentation of the public sphere. Referencing the same dualistic image, Vartanova (2012) calls the Russian media model “statist commercialized”, with two simultaneous processes shaping the model: marketisation and state influence.

The media industry in Russia is growing quite rapidly compared to other countries. In 2018, Russia ranked fifth (together with Indonesia and Pakistan) in the rating of the fastest-growing entertainment and media industries (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2018). The Russian advertising market is also growing fast, approximately 16 per cent annually (RMAA Agency, 2018). At least four main features of the current Russian media market can be mentioned (Vartanova et al., 2016). First, it is important to note the economic, audience, and information domination of national television.<sup>2</sup> Russian television, regardless of the ownership structure, is financed primarily by advertising and sponsorship. Second, the prevalence of an advertising-based business model is noteworthy. Third, the media market is largely concentrated in leading segments of the media industry, combined with the fact that the state controls much of the media capital. The largest media companies belong to government-controlled structures (All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company [VGTRK], Gazprom-Media) or to private companies with their main interests outside media sectors. Finally, the media market is dominated by central (federal) media companies economically and in terms of control of audience numbers and information. Regional media holdings are much smaller in terms of revenues and audiences.

State interference in the media market includes the role of the state and state agencies in shaping media structures and policy. The role of the state in Russian media has been widely discussed by previous scholars from different

perspectives, such as direct interference in media ownership (Gehlbach & Sonin, 2014), market regulation (Kiriya, 2017) and media manipulation in electoral campaigns (Akharkhodjaeva, 2017; Enikolopov et.al, 2011), to name a few.

In general, state intervention is one of four central dimensions or pillars of normative media models, together with media markets, political parallelism, and journalistic professionalism. The particular constellation of these four dimensions then constitutes the three models and is the basis by which individual countries are classified (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). State interference can be high in democratic corporatist countries because of the central role of PSB, which is usually subjected to a higher degree of regulation than commercial media systems falling under the liberal model (Voltmer, 2011). However, as Voltmer stresses, there is a substantial difference between state interference as the extensive regulation of PSB and interference in the running of media organisations and their editorial decision-making processes. When focusing on the Russian media model, Vartanova (2012) points out a strong interrelationship between the media, journalists, and the state, legitimised by shared beliefs – whether consciously or unconsciously – in the regulatory and decisive role of the state (or state agencies). With respect to the connection between public broadcasting and the political system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), Russia is closer to the government model, where implementation of the public service is moderated by the government or by the political majority.

Vartanova (2012: 130) points out that the “philosophy and values of PSB had never been legally or even publicly declared in Russia”. In the post-Soviet period, political and business elites have been the main driving forces in media policy, whereas the public has mostly been shunted aside (Koltsova, 2006). The limited degree of participation by people in the public sphere can be seen as one of the elements that are largely indigenous to the Russian media model (Kiriya, 2018). In the next section, we elaborate on these peculiarities by applying them to the establishment of PSB in post-Soviet Russia and the reasons it has failed.

### Failed attempts:

#### Why PSB did not emerge in post-Soviet Russia

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were two national television networks in Russia that potentially could have been reorganised as PSB channels – Channel 1 and Channel 2.

##### *Attempt One: ORT – Russian Public Television*

Channel 1, formerly known as Gosteleradio (State television and radio of USSR), had a broadcasting signal that reached almost every household in the country.

After the collapse, transmission and production facilities were still financially supported, but not as lavishly as in the Soviet years (Hoffman, 2002). Channel 1 tried to earn revenue from advertising, but it was unsuccessful due to a lack of commercial experience and a high level of theft. In 1994, Channel 1 was taken over by Boris Berezovsky, a well-known political entrepreneur who was close to then-President Boris Yeltsin and his family.

In order to explain this process, two important things must be clarified about this transitional period. First, mass media outlets of that period (in fact, in the next periods as well) should be understood as political resources rather than as business or public service actors (Soldner, 2008), as a “weapon to gain political capital” (Koltsova, 2001: 322). In fact, politicised media-holding companies played the role of “surrogate parties” during the Yeltsin presidency (Zasoursky, 2016). In this context, addressing public opinion was of minor importance, while media campaigns mainly addressed “political decision makers and/or to rivals in the economic or political sphere” (Soldner, 2008: 162). Second, during the Yeltsin presidency, political decisions were often made behind closed doors through informal bargaining between those who were close to the president and his family (Soldner, 2008).

As such, Berezovsky lobbied for the creation of a “president’s channel”, which would be Yeltsin’s instrument in the political struggle. In November 1994, Yeltsin signed a decree making it possible to privatise the huge television channel without an auction, as required by law (Hoffman, 2002). The name of the new organisation was Russian Public Television (ORT). Hoffman (2002: 281) continues that “the idea of ‘public’ television, which would not be state television, was a novelty, and no one knew precisely what it would become”. In fact, the word “public” meant nothing, since the company was owned by state enterprises (51% of shares) and by various private companies (49% of shares). From the very beginning, Berezovsky started to manage the channel as a commercial one.

### *Attempt Two:*

#### *RTR – Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting Company*

Another national television network, Channel 2, continued to be owned by the state during the period of Perestroika. A new Federal State Unitary Enterprise, The Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (RTR), was founded in 1990 and served as the main media outlet supporting Yeltsin in his struggle with then-Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. In early 1993, RTR acquired the status of a national broadcasting company, according to the VGTRK official webpage.<sup>3</sup> In 1998, all regional branches of the former Gosteleradio were merged into a holding company, thereby making RTR the largest state-owned media corporation in Russia. Since the company also inherited broadcasting facilities

that allowed it to reach almost 98 per cent of all Russians, media moguls always saw it as an extremely attractive actor in the advertising market, making it the focus of lobbying from the advertising industry. Thus, RTR began to operate in hybrid form – a state-owned company with subsidies from the federal budget and, at the same time, a commercial player in the advertising market.

Though public broadcasters in European countries often receive funding from advertising, significant limitations are placed on the amount of advertising in broadcasting in order to diminish dependence on ratings, but stimulate the production of the content, which is valuable for society (Kiriya, 2018). In the case of RTR, though, no regulations were put into place regarding advertising. Therefore, state and quasi-state media companies declared their devotion to state and public interests, but in fact acted primarily according to the logic of the market, making money on advertising while still enjoying budgetary financing, various tax and other reductions, and long-term state loans (Aksatarova et al., 2003). Kiriya and Degtereva (2010) point out the paradox of Russian state television channels receiving the largest part of their income from advertising. This is still true: in 2017, *Perviy Kanal* (the current brand name of ORT) and *VGTRK* (the current brand name of RTR) posted the highest revenues among national television broadcasters (Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media, 2018).

### *Attempt Three: OTR – Public Television of Russia*

Almost 20 years later, in 2013, another attempt was made to introduce PSB in Russia through the launching of the television channel Public Television of Russia (OTR). It was an initiative of then-President Dmitry Medvedev, who founded it as non-commercial organisation. OTR's official web page claims that its mission is the “formation and development of contemporary civil society [translated]”.<sup>4</sup> According to OTR's charter, the television channel's activities aim to “distribute and promote ideas of civil society that includes by informing Russian audience about events in Russian and abroad through television broadcasting [translated]” (OTR, 2015: 3). The company is fully subsidised by the state. Advertising activities are restricted (except for social advertising and social sponsorship).

The Council of Public Television assigns people to the television channel's supervisory board. The general director and members of the council are assigned directly by the president of Russia.

Initially, OTR was available on all cable networks, by satellite, or Internet protocol (IP) television, while the terrestrial broadcasting of OTR was available in digital standard format only. Therefore, in 2017, OTR's audience share was only 0.6 per cent (for the audience “all 4+”) (Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media, 2018). Later, OTR was included in the first multiplex set of

television channels, available to households after the country's shift to digital broadcasting. After the shift in the majority of Russian regions in January 2019, the share of OTR will grow (RIA Novosti, 2019).

On the one hand, OTR is an artificial case of a television channel being established *de jure* as a public one, while *de facto* it does not meet at least two important requirements of public media (Brants & Siune, 1992). First, it lacks public accountability since the members of the council and the general director are assigned by the president. Second, it lacks service universality in a territorial sense because of the low coverage of OTR. On the other hand, OTR is probably the only television channel with nationwide coverage, representing and giving voice to people from different regions (the programme *Bolshaya strana* [Big country]) and from small settlements, the programme *Malye goroda Rossii* [Small towns of Russia]) in particular.

When comparing these three cases, the failure to establish PSB in Russia can be explained with several different reasons. The examples of Channel 1 and Channel 2 demonstrate the lack of political will to establish PSB together with non-mature economic and social institutions during the transitional period. The Case of OTR is rooted in a lack of PSB elements and is closer to cases of PSB in eastern European countries (Jakubowicz, 2012). As such, in the next part we discuss what mechanisms are used to ensure the production and distribution of public service content within the Russian media model.

## The political economy of media in Russia: “Market failure” and state paternalism

Following previous research, we distinguish two interrelated aspects of the Russian media model that influence how public service functions can be implemented: the “failure” of the media market and the paternalistic role of the state.

How does the concept of market failure relate to public service information? McChesney (2012) claims that controlling media markets with private capital makes them concentrated and noncompetitive and leads to a marginalisation of the voices and interests of the poor and working class. It means that if a media outlet exists within a commercial paradigm (i.e., it relies on market financing sources), then it seeks to maximise its audience rather than appeal to the public (Berg et al., 2014). Consequently, the media outlet preferably focuses on such content that allows it to attract a larger audience. Often, it is referred to as “sensationalism” of the media or the “sex, sport, scandal” formula. As a result, socially significant – but less attractive – content aimed at a mass audience becomes irrelevant for such a media outlet and will not be published or broadcast.

This “market failure” effect has the most visible impact at the regional level of a country's media system. Beginning in the 2000s, regional media outlets

have been forced to act as commercial actors, which also has an influence on their editorial policy and news process (Dovbysh, 2019; Richter, 2006). At the same time, regional media professionals still claim to be performing a service for the public. Within limited professional freedom and clientelistic relations with local authorities, this job also becomes, for many journalists, a way for professional legitimisation (Erzikova & Lowrey, 2014).

The “failure” of the Russian media market co-exists with another important element of contemporary media culture – the paternalistic role of the state in relations between citizens and power elites and between people and their leader. Russians have “viewed it [the state] as a sacral force, a guarantor of the unity and the very existence of the Russian nature and society” (Vartanova, 2012: 131).

Beginning in 2000, when Vladimir Putin became president, another element was added to the description of state-media relations – the formation of so-called common values and construction of a “national idea” (Becker, 2004; Kolstø, 2004). Soon after his appointment as president, Putin emphasised the need for a new state ideology, one based on “pan-human values” and “traditional Russian values”. State paternalism was deemed one such value. Kolstø (2004: 3) notices that the claim for a new ideology came after “nearly a decade of conscious deideologization of the Russian state”.

In other words, this is a kind of authoritarian model, where ruling elites not only exercise control but also feel responsibility towards society. Following this logic, state authorities implement paternalistic policies aimed at “curing” the “market failure” of media outlets not providing much socially significant content. There are three main mechanisms to bridge this gap in the contemporary Russian media model:

1. Direct subsidies from the state are usually aimed at national or regional state-owned media outlets. In 2018, the state spent RUB 83 billion (0.5% of all budget expenses, or 0.1% of Russian GRP) on mass media (Gazeta.ru, 2018). The main recipients of these subsidies are the largest media companies: VGTRK (RUB 24.6 billion); TV-Novosti, the autonomous non-commercial organisation that produces content for Russia Today’s television channel (RUB 19.2 billion); Russia Today (RUB 6.8 billion); OTR (RUB 1.5 billion); Zvezda, the television channel owned by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (RUB 2 billion); and print media (RUB 3.5 billion) (Gazeta.ru, 2018). The mechanism of direct subsidies does not include any transparent procedure of public control regarding how these media outlets spend the budgetary funds (Kiriya, 2018). Also, there is no clear and publicly discussed editorial policy for these media outlets. As such, Russian state-owned media companies are usually considered instruments for articulating the official discourse (Tolz & Teper, 2018).



2. State information contracts is another institutional form of state support, popular in Russian regions. Using such contracts, regional authorities “order” the coverage of specific topics in regional mass media (Ademukova et. al., 2017). Previous analysis of such contracts demonstrated that many of them were designed to produce “socially significant content” (Dovbysh & Gudova, 2016). However, topics are assigned on a top-down basis, and in many contracts, the nature of such content is only stated vaguely. For instance, one of the most popular topics in such contracts is media coverage of the governor’s activities. Media content under this topic may vary from investigating the governor’s activities to enhancing authorities’ accountability to pure political public relations. However, when taking into account the client-executor relations underpinning these contracts, they become a convenient tool for manipulation and lead to clientelistic relations between regional authorities and the mass media (Erzikova & Lowrey, 2010).
3. State grants for “significant public projects” from the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications (FAPMC) were established by decree by the Ministry of the Russian Federation for Press, Television and Radio Broadcasting and Mass Communications<sup>5</sup> in March 2000. According to Decree No. 44 (2000), financing can be granted for the production or distribution and replication of concrete television and radio programmes, contributing to the solution of public significant tasks.

Later, a description of significant public content was added to the decree. According to the latest version (Decree No. 6, 2018: 8), significant public projects are understood to be different types of television and radio programmes, “representing public and state interests and corresponding with main directions of state informational policy and long-term priorities of state and public development [translated]”. Some of these directions are specified:

- patriotic education
- promoting a healthy lifestyle, physical culture and sports, spiritual, moral and cultural values of the peoples of the Russian Federation, traditions of family education, motherhood and large families, education and new educational possibilities
- the formation of a tolerant mind and prevention of extremism
- the formation of a tolerant attitude toward labor migrants and the social adaptation of migrants
- development of inter-ethnic communication
- promoting the best achievements in science, education and culture
- informational support of socially unprotected groups of citizens
- an increase in legal and financial literacy

- promoting charity and patronage
- ecological education
- projects for kids

[translated] (Decree No. 6, 2018: 8)

Surprisingly, Internet projects are briefly described as projects having “social or educational value”.

According to the Decree (2018), a project should meet certain requirements in order to receive a grant, such as 1) addressing the “public significance” of the project; 2) providing a descriptive scenario of how the project will be conducted; 3) accurately accounting for the project budget; and 4) explaining how it corresponds to the needs of the target audience, that is, the media outlet’s audience and others.

All the projects are assessed by an expert council. The members of the council are assigned by the head of FAPMC. In 2018, the council included nine members: the head of FAPMC (council chair) and three other representatives from FAPMC; a representative from the Ministry for Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media; a representative from the Federal Service for Supervision in the Field of Communications, Information Technologies and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor); a representative from the Federal State Unitary Enterprise, Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting Network (RTRS); a representative from the Russian Child Foundation; and a representative from St. Petersburg State University. The assessment procedure is organised in the form of voting. The project receives support if the majority of the members of the expert council vote for it.

In comparison to state information contracts, state grants suggest a clear pattern of how money is spent. If state informational contracts work in a top-down manner – as authorities specify what topics should be covered – the grant system works in a bottom-up fashion, meaning that media outlets, not authorities, propose socially and publicly significant topics they want to cover. Moreover, the mechanism of a grant contest is centralised: all media outlets from all regions compete for grants with each other. Therefore, we consider state grants as the most transparent institutional form of state support of public service content production and distribution within the Russian media model today. In the next sections, we thus analyse the projects and topics supported via state grants in the years 2001–2015.

## Methodology

The initial database included 2,875 media projects for television, radio, and Internet supported by FAPMC from 2001 to 2015. The data are freely available

on FAPMC's website. The projects included television programmes, movies and series, radio programmes and performances, websites, and other forms of media. The data were collected in a single table, which contained the names of the projects, the companies applying for them, and brief descriptions of the projects.

The coder for this research was developed via the open-coding method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in order to conceptualise and label the data (Moghaddam, 2006). Categories for coding were defined by the researcher based on their observations. Thereby, data analysis involves the researcher as an actor in the process (Walker & Myrick, 2006). For this research, the procedure included two parts: pre-coding and a basic coding stage. First, we selected 100 project descriptions (50 from the top of the data list and 50 from the end). The descriptions were then assigned thematic categories by two encoders working independently. Then, they defined the thematic categories, discussed them, and collected them together in a coding protocol. Second, the rest of the project descriptions were encoded using the categories identified in the first stage. Some of the categories were removed, and additional categories were proposed. Ultimately, 20 categories were identified based on the empirical data: economy; Russian regions; security; healthcare; education; science; underprivileged groups of people; culture; religion; foreign policy and diplomacy; domestic policy; patriotism; history; migration; travel and tourism; mass media; ecology; Internet; sport; other.

The majority of them included three to five subcategories providing additional information derived from the project descriptions. For instance, the category of culture included four subcategories: art (music, fine art, ballet, etc.); literature; multiculturalism, traditions, folk art; and Russian language. In order to provide more detailed coding, each grant project could have several categories and subcategories. For instance, a radio programme called People of Russia also covered the topic of ethnical variety of Russian population and discussed the history of folklore, cultural exchange, and the preservation of traditions and music pieces of various ethnic groups; hence, it was coded using the categories Russian regions (subcategory: national autonomies and ethnicities) and culture (subcategory: multiculturalism, traditions, folk art).

## Results

This section presents and interprets analysis results of the aforementioned dataset. First, descriptive statistics of the whole dataset are presented. They are followed by analysis of topical subcategories.

*Number of projects*

The number of project applications grew steadily between the years 2001 and 2015, with a slight decrease in 2006–2009 (see Table 1). In the beginning of the 2000s, the FAPMC supported approximately 100–150 grants projects. The number increased to nearly twice that amount by the mid-2010s. The majority of projects receiving support are for television, while the numbers of projects for studying the Internet and radio are almost the same. Even though the number of grants focusing on the Internet increased, it is still lower than for radio.

**Table 1.** Number of grant projects for different types of media

Year	Internet	Radio	TV	Total
2001	14	21	68	103
2002	3	13	38	54
2003	23	28	111	162
2004	21	21	52	94
2005	49	26	114	189
2006	19	16	42	77
2007	24	31	63	118
2008	44	38	93	175
2009	49	28	72	149
2010	48	63	157	268
2011	54	65	141	260
2012	42	65	161	268
2013	43	56	133	232
2014	44	56	91	191
2015	49	57	140	246

*Grant topics*

Table 2 demonstrates what grant topics have been most popular during the 15-year observation period.

The most popular categories were culture, history, and education, while the least popular were economy and ecology (see Table 2). The average share of projects for each category was quite stable and did not change significantly during the 15-year observation period, with the exception of five categories (see Figure 1). One topical category – religion – demonstrated the highest growth, improving from 0.7 per cent in 2001 to 5.6 per cent of all funded projects in 2015. In total numbers, it means a growth from one project in 2001 and two

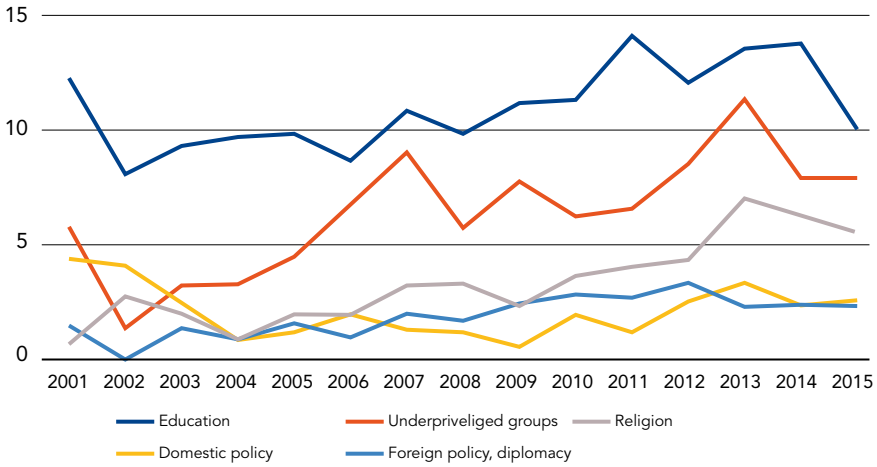
projects in 2002, to 16 projects in 2014 and 19 projects in 2015. The greatest number of projects on religion received support in 2013 – 21 projects.

**Table 2.** Distribution of grant projects (per cent)

<b>Category</b>	<b>Share, 2001–2015</b>
Culture	23.8
History	15.0
Education	11.0
Patriotism	6.6
Regions	6.5
Underprivileged groups	6.4
Science	3.8
Healthcare	3.5
Religion	3.3
Mass media	3.1
Others	3.1
Domestic policy	2.1
Foreign policy, diplomacy	1.9
Internet	1.9
Migration	1.6
Sport	1.5
Travel and tourism	1.5
Security	1.4
Economy	1.0
Ecology	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

One category – healthcare – demonstrated significant decline. After funding six projects in 2001 and five projects in 2002, the FAPMC then funded fifteen projects in 2011, followed by a decline to only seven projects in 2015.

**Figure 1.** Topical categories demonstrating the highest growth during 2001–2015 (per cent)



### *Topical subcategories*

Analysis of the categories gives only a cursory and generalised representation of what topics were supported by the state. Therefore, an examination of the subcategories provides more nuance.

For instance, we divided the regions category into four subcategories: national autonomies and ethnicities; life in Russian regions; Chechen Republic; and Republic of Crimea. Interestingly, the FAPMC supported projects on the Chechen Republic in 2001–2007, a time of military conflict in the republic. Likewise, the FAPMC funded more projects on the Republic of Crimea in 2014–2015, simultaneously with the emerging political crisis in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 (see Table 3). Projects receiving support covered the history and culture of Crimea and represented the peninsula as a part of Russia, emphasising its important military role in Russia’s past and present. For instance, the description given for one of the projects, a television documentary movie called *Pozor Shestogo flota* [*Shame of the Sixth Fleet*] by Miriam Media production studio, states:

This TV documentary talks about one heroic episode of domestic military history when in 1988, Soviet sailors from a small patrol ship entered into confrontation with a heavy American cruiser off the coast of Sevastopol and forced it to leave the Black Sea area [translated]. (Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media, 2014: n.p.)

**Table 3.** Number of projects in the subcategories of Regions

Year	Chechen Republic	Republic of Crimea	National autonomies and ethnicities	Life in Russian regions
2001	1		2	5
2002	2		1	4
2003	2		9	5
2004	1	1	4	3
2005	4	1	9	7
2006			4	3
2007	1		5	4
2008			14	7
2009			9	5
2010			17	9
2011			15	8
2012		1	9	7
2013			12	5
2014		3	10	3
2015		7	6	5
Total	11	13	126	80

We divided the security category into four subcategories: terrorism, fighting against it, international terrorism (11 projects); legal violations (15 projects); traffic regulations (15 projects); and emergencies (7 projects).

We also divided the healthcare category into four subcategories: drug addiction (56 projects); alcohol consumption and smoking (8 projects); healthy lifestyle (49 projects); and medical help for the population (16 projects). The first project applications about the danger of alcohol consumption and smoking appeared in 2009.

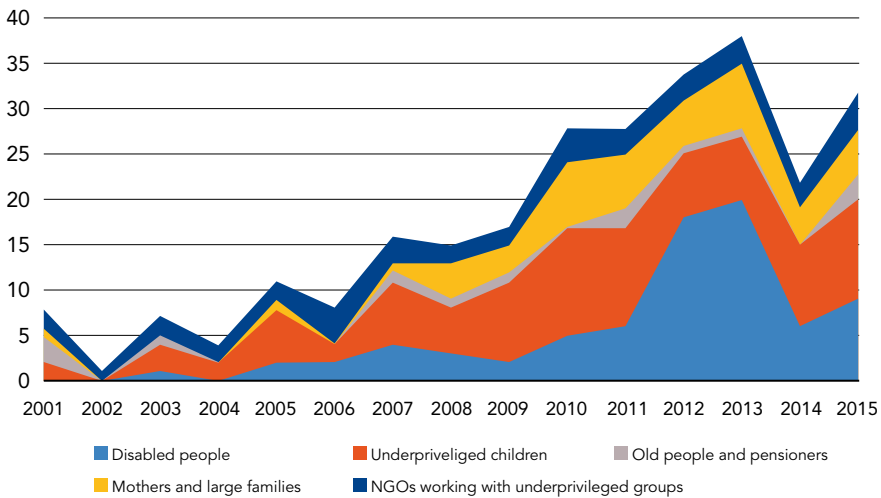
We divided the education category into six subcategories. Three of the subcategories dealt directly with types of education: pre-school and school education (31 projects); higher education (20 projects); and education aimed at gifted children (33 projects). The other three subcategories dealt with educational content: for children (pre-school and elementary school students) (179 projects); for teenagers (middle- and high-school students) (197 projects); and legal and financial literacy of citizens (34 projects). Projects on how best to provide educational content for adults appear only after 2010. It is clear that the most popular topics have been those focusing on providing different kinds of educational programmes for children and teenagers. Such topics as reforming the educational system, educating kids with special needs, and other challenging

topics are barely represented. For instance, we found only one project related to special needs: a television programme *Uchimsya vmeste* [*Study together*], “devoted to inclusive education for people with disabilities [translated]” in 2013. This project was proposed by non-commercial organisation for disabled people Inva TV (Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media, 2013).

We divided the science category into three subcategories: problems in the reforming and financing of science; history of science, international scientific achievements; and achievements of Russian and Soviet science. However, the majority of projects belonged to the second (63 projects) and third (98 in total) subcategories. Only nine projects dealt with reforms and other problems of science – this is less than one project per year.

We divided the underprivileged groups of people category into five subcategories: disabled people; underprivileged children (disabled, orphans, etc.); old people; mothers and large families; and NGOs working with underprivileged groups. Figure 2 demonstrates how often each subcategory was represented during the sample years. The most popular subcategories were disabled people and underprivileged children. Topics on motherhood and large families only appear among grant project applications beginning in 2007.

**Figure 2.** Number of projects in topical subcategory, Underprivileged groups of people



We divided the culture category into four subcategories: art (including projects related to different types of art, like music, ballet, cinema, fine arts, etc.); literature; multiculturalism in Russia (projects on multiculturalism, traditions, folk art of ethnicities living in Russia); and Russian language. The first two subcategories have proved three times more popular than the others.

The religion category includes four subcategories: interfaith relations and religious studies (15 projects); Orthodoxy, Russian Orthodox Church (116



projects); Islam (1 project); and other faiths (5 projects). The number of project applications dealing with Orthodoxy or the Russian Orthodox Church dominate, and the number of such projects has increased dramatically since 2010.

The foreign policy category includes three subcategories: international organizations, memberships and cooperation (46 projects); cooperation between states, diplomacy (28 projects); and contemporary world events related to foreign policy (20 projects).

We divided the internal policy category into five subcategories – one for each branch of power: executive branch; judicial branch; and legislative branch – and two for the most salient topics in this category: corruption; and army and armed forces.

Surprisingly, the most popular subcategory in this group proved to be the last one, with most projects covering topics related to the Russian armed forces (44 projects). Also, we noticed changes in the nature of the projects over time. At the beginning of the 2000s, the projects mainly focused on daily life and the problems with recruits, discussing army life, its weekdays and holidays, and everyday military work. In the 2010s, the projects became more oriented toward the army as an institution and covered activities of the Russian army and fleet, often with a “patriotic” stance. Only one radio programme *Voennoe revu* [*Military revue*] from this period, by media outlet Komsomolskaya Pravda and supported in 2013 and 2014, was problem based and covered army reform via a “frank conversation with military personnel and retirees about the army and its problems [translated]” (Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media, 2013).

The patriotism category includes three subcategories: contemporary Russian heroes and well-known persons (103 projects); attractions (modern or historical) (88 projects); and heroes – ordinary Russian people (37 projects). We chose to call this category “patriotism” because the projects aim at nurturing a sense of patriotism and praising Russia’s places and people.

We divided the history category into five subcategories: Russian history and events (212 projects in total); world history, events (44 projects); historical Russian heroes, famous personalities, masterminds (236 projects); foreign heroes, famous personalities (6 projects); and wars (147 projects). The two subcategories dealing with Russian history and heroes received the most project applications, while grant projects on various wars took third place. The majority of projects in this subcategory dealt with the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) and World War II (1939–1945). Projects on other wars only appear in the data during anniversary years, for instance the 100-year anniversary of World War I in 2013 (9 projects) or the 200-year anniversary of the 1812 Patriotic War with Napoleon of France (4 projects). Only a couple of projects focused on recent military conflicts, like the Afghan conflict (1979–1989), or other wars. Several projects focused on wars and military conflicts in Crimean history, supported in 2015, a year after the peninsula’s annexation.

We divided the migration category into three subcategories: immigration (24 projects); migration within CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and the Baltic countries (40 projects); and history of immigration (10 projects). We defined only two subcategories within the travel and tourism category: internal tourism (in Russia); and external tourism (abroad). This category has been one of the least popular, and the projects in the subcategories are distributed almost equally. For the five remaining categories (mass media, ecology, Internet, sport, others), we did not include any specific subcategories.

In the next section, we critically analyse state grants as a tool for the production and distribution of public service content within the Russian media model.

## Discussion

The contemporary Russian media model is characterised by a tendency towards commercialisation. With the exception of the national state-owned media, which get direct funding from state budgets regardless of ownership structure, media outlets in the country tend to receive financing from advertising or sponsorship. It concerns also regional and local state-owned media, usually experiencing lack of budgetary funds. Such circumstances direct the behaviour of media outlets towards producing less complex, but more attractive, content for a mass audience. This behaviour creates a “market failure”, one related to an underrepresentation of public service content in mass media. Another important feature of the Russian media model is the paternalistic role of the state. This duality has the most significant influence on regional media. The intersection of these two elements creates a situation wherein the state implements a paternalistic policy to support the production and distribution of public service content (i.e., to improve “market failure”).

We argue that state grants are the most transparent form of state support within the Russian media model. First, media companies, regardless of their ownership structure, can obtain such grants.<sup>6</sup> Second, there is clear and publicly available information about what content is produced via the grants. The procedure of grant competition is also more transparent than in the case of direct subsidies or state informational contracts. Third, the grants provide support for local and regional media, which are in a more difficult financial situation than national media outlets. Finally, the database for grant funding lists a number of bright and interesting media projects focusing on different aspects of life and different places within the country. However, a detailed investigation of the state grant system revealed several limitations.

The first limitation concerns the procedure of grant competition. At the moment, only two members of the expert council represent various groups of society: the representative from the Child Foundation and the representative

from St. Petersburg State University. All other members are officials from organisations affiliated with the executive branch of power or from other state-owned organisations. Therefore, the disproportional representation by state actors sitting on the council highlights the restrictions on public accountability and affects the selection process.

The second limitation has to do with the unclear and vague definition of what constitutes significant public content used in official documentation (the Decree and additional documents). It states that projects should represent “public and state interests”, while state interests in fact often replace public interests. Since the Decree predefines certain topics that are a priority for long-term public and state development, these topics predominate among the projects receiving support. On the one hand, the expert council assesses the projects according to this framework. Yet, on the other hand, media outlets themselves suggest topics that are “safe” and have more of a chance of being supported. Such self-censorship is especially relevant for regional media outlets, for which these grants are a significant – if not a crucial – source of financing.

As an illustration of this two-sided framing of issues, let us look more closely at the category of underprivileged groups of people. Five subcategories define which underprivileged groups should be represented in media. For instance, all the projects in the subcategory, motherhood and large families, represent two groups – traditional families with two or more kids, and families with adopted kids. Only one project (out of 44 in this subcategory) focused on another underprivileged group – pregnant women or women with kids living in difficult conditions. Since a focus on motherhood and large families is mentioned as a priority of long-term state development, media outlets replicate this predefined topic for their projects. As a result, other significant public issues related to motherhood and families, such as rates of employment among mothers or teenager mothers, are not represented at all.

Another case of the two-sided framing of issues concerns the attempts by journalists to react to the current political agenda and even anticipate it. For instance, projects about the Chechen Republic were visible only at the time of military conflict there; however, there are still many other issues of social interest and problems in the republic that deserve attention.

A lack of problematisation is the third limitation of the grant system. Topic analysis demonstrates that the majority of the projects represent different kinds of success stories about Russia (gifted kids, scientific achievements, contemporary heroes, artistic achievements, etc.), rather than investigate various significant public problems. In fact, the majority of grant projects represent either topics that are problematic “by default” (like drug addiction, alcohol consumption, or terrorism) or topics that are assigned as problematic by the state, for instance, migration issues or the adoption of kids. Projects focusing on problem-based, controversial, or uneasy topics are much less represented.

## Conclusions

This chapter investigates how public-oriented content can be produced and distributed within a hybrid media model, and it takes the grants system as a case study to analyse and evaluate this process. With respect to the example of a Russian statist-commercialised media model, we explore how public service function occurs in a media model that never made any allowances for PSB institutions. The state implements a paternalistic policy to support the production and distribution of public-oriented media content through direct subsidies, state informational contracts, and state grants. However, to what extent do these projects give a voice to the voiceless in public media discourses on different groups of people?

Our analysis of state grants as the most transparent form of state support revealed the limitations of public accountability in the competition process, an overlap of public interest with state interest in the grant projects and a lack of problematising those projects receiving support. The grant system, initially aimed at expanding the variety of topics covered in the media and improving “market failure” regarding the underrepresentation of significant public content, in many cases works as a mechanism for promoting a state agenda.

This chapter moves beyond the context of PSB institutions that easily fit into Western (European) media models and discusses instead how public-oriented topics can be addressed outside PSB or in media systems in non-democratic regimes. The current crisis affecting PSB in many European countries requires a reconsideration of the values underpinning PSB as well as a reassembling of the mechanisms of public-oriented content production and distribution. Further discussion of how and through what externalities public interest and public value can be achieved by mass media in non-democratic and authoritarian regimes will contribute to an exploration of the additional risks, as well as opportunities, for universal public service beyond institutionalised PSB media organisations.

## Notes

1. The authors who we cite in this chapter use the notions of media system and media model synonymously. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), a media system (of a country) can be characterised by a certain model. We will use model in this text as a specific type of a (Russian media) “system”.
2. Television channels with nationwide coverage. Beginning in January 2019, analogue broadcasting was replaced by digital broadcasting; therefore, 20 television channels are now available to the majority of the country’s population free of charge.
3. <http://vgtrk.com/#page/221>
4. <https://otr-online.ru/o-telekanale/>
5. The former name of the Ministry for Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation (<https://minsvyaz.ru/en/>)
6. As of 2016, state-owned media outlets are no longer allowed to apply for state grants.

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## Chapter 10

# Public service media in the era of information disorder

## *Collaboration as a solution for achieving universalism*

Minna Aslama Horowitz & Gregory Ferrell Lowe

### Abstract

Viral false information, siloed information habits, and growing distrust in the media are amongst today's most alarming challenges to digital media markets. These phenomena impact trust in media at all societal levels – global, regional, national, and local. They are enabled by economic, sociocultural, and technological transformations that have destabilised media systems and involve commercial, governmental, and civic stakeholders. The consequences significantly impact the lives of ordinary citizens. In today's context, the ability of public service media organisations to fulfill a mandated universalism mission and counter these trends requires a new approach that prioritises and operationalises collaborative efforts.

**Keywords:** multi-stakeholder, propaganda, media capture, collaboration, information disorder, trust in journalism, universalism mission

### Introduction: Familiar concerns in new times

Decreasing trust in the media and increasing false content are challenges that have been at the centre of public debate and academic research in recent years. Efforts to combat “fake news” account for a significant amount of research, as well as international policy reports and responses.<sup>1</sup> The concerns are familiar because disinformation, propaganda, and fake news have a long history (Ananny, 2018). But today's digital platforms combined with the lack of clarity about rules and requirements for their owners and users have created a context that is eroding trust in media, in journalism especially. New strategies and techniques for producing and distributing propaganda, combined with lack of editorial accountability, coincide with the development of online opinion-leaders as human “influencers”, viral marketing through online sharing, and automated content creation and distribution (Nedeva et al., 2018).

Combatting the multiple and complex challenges that have culminated in a proliferation of disinformation and growing distrust in the media provides

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Horowitz, M. A., & Lowe, G. F. (2020). Public service media in the era of information disorder: Collaboration as a solution for achieving universalism. In P. Savage, M. Medina, & G. F. Lowe (Eds.), *Universalism in public service media* (pp. 175–190). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

a timely case for discussing what continues to matter in public service media (PSM), what is new that also matters greatly, and opportunities for renewing relevance and heightening beneficial impact. Rooted in the heritage of public service broadcasting (PSB), PSM's mandate includes the historic PSB principle of universalism. Ensuring the availability of and access to content and services for everyone in a national context remains a core feature of the legacy mandate for public media as a public service.

Regrettably, this principle is not faring well in today's context of globalised giants, fragmented audiences, unregulated platforms, and viral disinformation. Although the defining characteristics of PSB were not initially geared to counter a commercial media system suffering from political interference and characterised by "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011), as Per Jauert and Gregory Ferrell Lowe (2005) noted, this has become an increasingly important part of discussions about the PSM remit.

This chapter contributes to debates about the contemporary relevance and value of PSM. We first offer a framework for understanding the proliferation of disinformation that is co-related with growing distrust in the media, here situated in relation to the universalism mission. We then discuss why and how today's complex and complicated context provides new opportunities to increase collaboration with other stakeholders in order to address the problems, especially including audiences and co-creators. Although we focus attention on Europe, the problems of fake news and declining trust in media are not confined to these countries. Their manifestations – as well as configurations of PSM – vary country by country.<sup>2</sup> A focus on these issues in countries where PSM institutions are "mature" institutions is especially helpful to illustrate dilemmas in accomplishing the historic and always problematic universalism mission today. Our analysis is based on a policy brief that was produced for the Council of Europe (CoE) and a related white paper (Horowitz, 2018) authored for the Central European University's Center for Media, Data and Society.

### The context: An era of multiple challenges

Problems in today's media environment are not easily categorised. From the perspective of both societies and individuals, we are experiencing a shift in our relationship with knowledge. The historically respected notions of objectivity and truth are no longer prominent in public debates about media, and even the legitimacy of such notions is called into question by phrases such as "truthiness" and "alternative facts". This is indicative of a cultural shift that signals growing distrust for elites and institutions of all types – political, religious, journalistic, and scientific. At the same time, the economic conditions for media of communication have become increasingly market-based and -dependent, and cor-

respondingly marked by escalating competition for both attention and revenue. Technological advances have facilitated more choice but have also contributed to increasing fragmentation amongst publics as media audiences. New patterns for accessing information are based on the use of algorithms, micro-segmenting, and the pursuit of viral content-sharing in media (McNair, 2018).

For journalistic institutions, the erosion of trust has much to do with disruption caused by the emergence of digital markets. A 2018 report published by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU, 2018b) highlights several especially pertinent reasons. Amongst these reasons are local and national news producers being forced to compete with Internet giants for advertising revenue and attention. The resources of these global competitors greatly exceed those of even the wealthiest local providers. The need to compete is equated with a shift in priorities for commercial providers that increasingly involves blurring the line between opinions and facts, and higher accommodation of advertisers' preferences. This development is encouraging a prioritisation of negative news and a focus on simple narratives that cannot do justice to complex issues.

Another challenge hinges on the reality that many of these phenomena are both global and national. On the one hand, we live in an "attention economy" (Wu, 2016) under conditions that have been described as "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2015, 2019). Search engines and social media platforms generate revenue by selling predictions that are based on enormous, cumulative amounts of data the parent companies collect. On the other hand, we are also challenged by the problem of "media capture" (Schiffrin, 2018), which happens when governments take over media outlets or unduly influence content. This problem is becoming acute in social media, as the 2019 Freedom House report on Internet freedom makes clear (Shahbaz & Funk, n.d.). Governments are increasingly harnessing social media as a highly effective tool for disseminating propaganda. The report notes that instead of serving as a platform for civic discussion, social media are now used to spread misinformation and to monitor citizens.

False news, disinformation, and misleading propaganda are a real concern. The 2018 Reuters Institute *Digital News Report* surveyed 37 countries (Newman et al., 2018) and found that more than half of all surveyed news audiences agreed or strongly agreed that they are concerned about not being able to distinguish between what is real and fake on the Internet. A Eurobarometer report from March 2018 found that nearly 40 per cent of the EU population comes across fake news either every day or almost every day, and more than 80 per cent of respondents considered fake news as a problem in their country and for democracy more generally, both at home and abroad.

Disinformation is at the heart of every explanation for declining trust in news amongst citizens, and for news media overall. The EBU recently completed a study on trust in the media (EBU, 2019b) that combines data from a series of Eurobarometer surveys with the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report*. They

found that 44 per cent of Europeans generally trust the news, which means that more than half do not. More than half trust whatever news sources they personally use. Unfortunately, news shared on Facebook and Twitter tend to be primary or significant sources for many news consumers. Overall, young people tend to trust news less than older generations. At the same time, search engines and social media are less trusted sources for news than legacy media for more or less everyone in Europe, even more amongst younger than older generations (Shearer & Matsu, 2018).

### The concept: Information disorder

Academic and applied analyses have grappled with the challenges from various perspectives. In recent years, near countless research projects and policy documents have been produced that focus on different dimensions.<sup>3</sup> A study by the European Commission Joint Research Centre (Martens et al., 2018) summarises the different approaches. A narrow approach focuses on recognising verifiably false information, which is fairly easy to identify and can be countered by, for example, hiring fact-checkers, tagging suspicious postings, and removing false news posts. A broader approach focuses on identifying deliberate attempts to distort news in order to promote preferred ideologies, cause confusion, foment polarisation, and in some cases produce disinformation to earn money without necessarily intending to cause harm. While some efforts are politically motivated, others are commercially motivated as evident in click-bait practices and the intentional filtering of news to attract targeted audiences. This approach is more difficult to study empirically, and to verify. It pertains to economic models for funding news markets and there is wide variation in the quality of news.

As serious as this is, the challenge is even broader than the issue of quality because it goes to the deeper concern about trustworthy news. In this chapter, we use the term “information disorder” to characterise a panoply of pertinent issues, challenges, and questions that are widespread and have serious implications for society and democracy. The term was first employed in a report for the CoE (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) targeted to researchers and policy-makers, and positioned as an “information disorder framework”. The proposed model includes: 1) types of information disorder based on intent, ranging from unintentional false content to disinformation (i.e., false or manipulated content and context, or a broader social use) with an intent to harm; 2) phases of information disorder (creation, production, and distribution); and 3) its elements, meaning the agents (i.e., who created the message and why?), the message (i.e., what was the content?), and the interpretation (i.e., how was it interpreted?).

This framework is useful for steering discussion about universalism in PSM today because it highlights contextual features that are necessarily involved with

efforts to combat information disorder in market-driven or politically contested communication environments. The framework highlights ways in which PSM can help to distinguish between types of false information; to offer a guaranteed chain in creation, production, and distribution; and to supply content that addresses audiences as citizens instead of targeted audience micro-segments.

### Information disorder and the universalism mission today

The challenges under discussion are relevant to the principle of universalism, which has been a foundational ideal for PSB from the start – especially important in Europe. Normative characteristics assigned to PSM by key stakeholders demonstrate considerable uniformity. The EBU, the Public Media Alliance (PMA), the CoE, and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have all observed that universality in access and content is a cornerstone of the public service mission in broadcasting and beyond (CoE, 2004; EBU, 2012).

This is the ideal. In practice, PSM organisations vary in how much relevance and impact they have in their respective societies and are enormously varied in institutional arrangements, reach, and budgets (Radu, 2017). From the start, PSB development was a national project with significant differences in reach and impact. For instance, in the Nordic countries and the UK, public media services have long dominated their respective audiovisual markets, while in Portugal and Italy, PSM companies have minor market shares for both television and radio services (Radu, 2018). As for institutional configurations, in Europe these vary from the global presence of the multi-channel, multi-platform, multi-project British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (often considered a benchmark model for PSB, but in fact a comparative outlier), to the multiplicity of independent organisations defined by political-religious history that comprise the public broadcasting system in the Netherlands, to the newly established (as public broadcasters rather than state organs) PSB organisations in the Balkan region (KAS, 2019; Psychogiopoulou et al, 2017).

At the same time, issues addressed in the framework of information disorder are all components of what PSB has aimed for in advocating the ideal of universalism: a comprehensive, trustworthy chain of content production that is accessible for all, that can be trusted, and that unifies rather than segments citizens. The core ideals that have legitimated PSB speak to societal ambitions of ensuring progress in social development, respecting rationality as a prerequisite for a healthy democratic process, and the need for a relatively high degree of autonomy to be at arm's length from both political and commercial pressures.

The purpose of PSB is articulated in principles that require the institution to care for the information, education, and entertainment needs of a host society,

even if the approach to accomplishing this was admittedly paternal. Hannu Nieminen (2014) views PSB as part of the components of the European tradition of an “epistemic commons”, keyed to an ideal that knowledge and culture are a shared domain and relatively free of restrictions. The importance of civic education and universal literacy are at the heart of this idea, and mass media are facilitative. In his view, the epistemic commons is in danger partly due to challenges under discussion here. Indeed, the multitude of threats to democratic communication, including violations of privacy by the Internet giants (Zuboff, 2019), persistent digital divides (International Telecommunications Union, 2018), and the problem of exploitation and inequity created by algorithms (Eubanks, 2018). This impacts people’s abilities to be well informed, to engage in debates about issues of shared importance, and to act as responsible citizens in a democracy.

Information disorder is adding a new dimension that is relevant to the idea of universal multi-platform access. A study of Yle (Finland), France Télévisions and Radio France (France), ARD and ZDF (Germany), Rai (Italy), Polskie Radio (Poland), and the BBC (the UK) indicates that PSM organisations are struggling with a set of characteristic tensions between their strategic priorities, remit, and organisational imperatives, and those that are characteristic for commercial platform companies. Although PSM organisations continue to see social media as an important opportunity for increasing their reach, especially amongst young people and other hard-to-reach audiences, they are becoming wary of these platforms due to a growing chorus of blame and concerns about their culpability in facilitating information disorder (Sehl et al., 2018). This is of pressing concern because although global trust in the media is at an all-time low, research has found a remarkably strong and stable degree of trust in legacy media – and particularly notable for mature public broadcasters even as trust is generally evaporating for online platforms and social media (Newman et al., 2019).

In addition, the traditional universalism mission for PSB is challenged by specific – and controversial – developments such as personalisation. For instance, can automated solutions deliver the kinds of diversity that manual decisions about programming deliver? Does the coding an algorithm employs embody the ideals of guaranteeing the inclusion of minority voices and a diversity of voices, or prioritise issues relevant to public interest? Intertwined issues include concerns about creating filter bubbles and intruding on privacy in PSM’s involvement with the wider transformations in datafication and personalisation. PSM organisations are involved in developing algorithms to make their content findable via recommendation systems, and some are developing their own recommendation systems to ensure more exposure and personalised services for their users (Sørensen & Hutchinson, 2018). PSM companies are engaged in projects to develop digital personalisation that vary by type of engagement

and can result in tools that could threaten rather than strengthen their missions, including the pursuit of universality (Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018).

## A role for PSM today

In policy-making circles, PSM is frequently mentioned, and sometimes emphasised, for its importance as part of the solution toolkit for combatting false news and information. For instance, the *Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and 'Fake News' Disinformation and Propaganda*, published in March 2017 by Special Rapporteurs, is comprised of several intergovernmental bodies and suggests that PSM has an important role (OSCE, 2017). The CoE holds a similar view (Horowitz, 2018), as does a recent report by the European Commission multi-stakeholder high level expert group (HLEG) (European Commission, 2018). These expert organisations recognise the need for a robust and diverse media ecosystem and acknowledge the beneficial role of PSM in ensuring that. In addition, the CoE has on many occasions recognised the democracy-enhancing influence of PSM. Recently, Resolution 2255 highlighted the importance of PSM in combating disinformation and propaganda today (CoE, 2019).

Unfortunately, PSM is not strongly supported in most of the world, and is taking hard hits even in Europe where the legacy of PSB is comparatively strong. The decline is especially worrisome in central and southern Europe where PSB has struggled to emerge from the constraints of a state media heritage. A comprehensive overview of the situation in south eastern Europe (KAS, 2019) characterised the PSM dilemma as a “pillar of democracy on shaky ground”. Many countries in central Europe are in the same general situation.

Even in countries with mature public service traditions, including Austria, Denmark, and Switzerland, PSM is weakened by political and commercial opposition to the ethos, ideals, and practice of public service in media. The reasons are mainly self-serving and advanced by interest groups with commercial and political underpinnings, although usually framed as concerns over a higher-ground issue related to safeguarding public funding (Wilson, forthcoming). In fairness, one should also acknowledge sceptical voices warning against putting too much trust in established PSM companies, such as the BBC, due to their dependency on and connections with power elites that may limit the degree of independence needed to address a “crisis of journalism” (Freedman, 2019). This problem has greater pertinence yet in much of the world where the connection between political power and media is direct, especially where broadcasters have struggled with making the transition from captured state organs to independent public service providers.

One unifying trend across Europe is a growing preference for abandoning the licence fee system of financing and instead pay for PSM with taxpayer-

generated funding. While that might make sense on paper, in practice it has already encouraged more and higher degrees of state intervention with chilling effects on editorial independence, and has also weakened possibilities for investing in research and development that is needed to counter challenges posed by information disorder (Dragomir, 2018; Gjerding Nielson, 2018). This is not to discount limited evidence that PSM may also be manipulated to spread content that borders on disinformation (Nolan & Walker, 2018).

Due to persistent and often high commercial pressure within media markets, even in countries with well-established PSM organisations – especially Denmark, Finland, and Sweden – there has been harsh criticism from commercial competitors, which charge PSM with allegedly creating market distortion, especially in the digital news market (Newman et al., 2018). The trends indicate shrinking political support for PSM, as observed by the Council of Europe in 2017, that demonstrates growing threats to the independence of public broadcasters and regulators, including direct political interference in editorial practice, lack of legislative safeguards against political bias, and concerns about the appointment, composition, and dismissal of regulators and managers. These problems are aggravated by insufficient and declining funding (CoE, 2017).

Policy is one thing; performance is another. Do audiences think PSM is a remedy to false news, and is PSM distrusted as well? Recent EBU studies (2019a, 2019b) demonstrate the centrality of PSM in Europe as a trusted source for content and as a pillar of a healthy functioning democratic system. According to a survey by the 2018 Reuters Institute *Digital News Report* (Newman et al. 2018), most respondents globally think the responsibility for information disorder rests with both new media platforms and legacy media operators as publishers. Similar views emerge from the Eurobarometer (2018) on fake news. In the view of those respondents, journalists, national authorities, and the press and broadcasting management should be made responsible for stopping the spread of false news and disinformation.

Nonetheless, a study on PSM news audiences in the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, and the UK (Schulz et al., 2019) indicates that even in mature public service contexts, PSM news does not matter universally to all citizens. In the digital era, the reach of public service news is still largely via broadcast channels, and those who access news through online services tend to be the same people who also watch broadcast news on television. These “faithful” audiences consist largely of educated older people who are avid news consumers. Younger audiences and those who are less educated tend to rely (if “rely” is an accurate term here) on news distributed via social media, and PSM news organisations struggle to reach these populations.

Thus, the evidence indicates ambivalent sentiments about public broadcasters and their multi-media reiterations in different (all commercial) platforms. The lack of universal relevance for PSM news services and the still strongly



national basis of PSM pose serious challenges to the potential for achieving even approximate universalism in an internationalised media environment.

### New universalist solutions through collaboration

Given the complexity of the information disorder, it would be irrational to expect any one entity to offer a universal remedy for the situation. Thus, collaborations have been at the heart of policy efforts and plans in recent years. For instance, the European Commission HLEG included the participation of public service broadcasters via the EBU (European Commission, 2018), and in late April 2018, the EBU published its own position paper, titled *'Fake News' and the Information Disorder*, that advocates for a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach to solving the problem (EBU, 2018c). PSM organisations have developed innovative solutions that are seldom acknowledged, on the basis of collaborating with other organisations – ranging from civil society organisations to universities, technology companies, and even their commercial competitors. PSM institutions and their partners are providing sustainable and universally meaningful solutions to the problem of information disorder.

From a conceptual perspective, this is not a new development. For some time now, scholars have observed that public services in media are delivered by varied sources. Some are certainly from PSM organisations as legally mandated institutions – that is, public service from the *de jure* perspective (in law). But there are also many public services in media that are not provided on the basis of institutionally designed and mandated operations – the *de facto* perspective (Bajomi-Lazar et al., 2012; Clark & Horowitz, 2014; Horowitz, 2015). The potential value of collaboration has been envisioned beyond media-related organisations and groups, extending from the level of individual programmes to the level of policy-making practices (Wauters & Raats, 2018). A variety of motivations encourage PSM to collaborate with a variety of partners, some more strategic than others (Raats, 2019). There is evidence that collaboration can affect appropriate and effective solutions for addressing information disorder and pave a way forward for accomplishing a renewed universalism mission today.

A relevant proposition concerning collaboration to promote individual rights and PSM's role in that was voiced in the white paper, *Public Service Media and Human Rights*, from the CoE (CoE, 2011; Horowitz & Nieminen, 2016). In their view, PSM should be premised on treaties and legislation that mean to guarantee human rights, and in particular to safeguard human rights in content and services as an organisation. A special feature of this model is the inclusion of several stakeholders in accomplishing this mission via PSM. These institutions, national governments and regulators, and audiences each have important roles in developing and monitoring PSM in practice.

Another broad and concrete initiative is the European Public Open Spaces (EPOS) project that conceptualises open public spaces in the digital networked public sphere. EPOS wants to create networked public spaces that are free of state and market interference and with a Europe-wide scope. Drawing on the traditional PSM remit, EPOS seeks to provide access to information, education, and culture, but also to festivals, universities, civic education, and peer-to-peer curation in the production of knowledge and software. One central aim is to provide a space for civic deliberation (EPOS, n.d.). A technological counterpart to EPOS is the Public Media Stack initiative that plans to co-create a sustainable ecosystem of ethical, independent applications of technologies to support public media projects without exploiting the data, content, or relationships that are critical to being and performing PSM (Storythings, 2019).

At a more practical level, numerous collaborations are already addressing the problem of misinformation in efforts to provide “universally” vetted content on the basis of effective and comprehensive fact-checking. This is perhaps the most visible response by PSM to disinformation and misinformation. In this pursuit, PSM organisations have engaged in various collaborative fact-checking efforts. For example, ZDF of Germany has chosen to work with Truly Media, a collaborative platform developed by the German PSM organisation dedicated to media development, Deutsche Welle, and a Greek technology company. Sometimes collaborations happen with (otherwise) competitors. In Austria, for example, ORF joined with a variety of partners in the Austrian Press Agency to raise awareness across news providers and platforms (Körber, 2017). Other public broadcasting companies, such as Germany’s BR and Italy’s RAI, have used the browser extension FactFox to enhance services, which is a product that supports managing and responding to user comments.

In Norway, Faktisk, an independent fact-checking organisation, was created in 2017 by a consortium of media companies that included the public broadcaster NRK (Mantzaris, 2017). Similarly, the Swedish public service television (SVT) and radio (SR) partnered with the two largest daily newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*, in a collaborative fact-checking project there. The stakeholders conducted a joint training programme for journalists, and the participants collaborated on a fact-checking method that is based on the guidelines from the International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) (Funke, 2018).

Perhaps the best-known multi-stakeholder collaboration is First Draft, hosted at Harvard University. The project has over 40 members that include commercial and PSM firms from around the world (e.g., ABC of Australia, ARD, Deutsche Welle, and ZDF of Germany, BBC News, France Télévisions, as well as Eurovision), not-for-profit journalism organisations such as Global Voices and ProPublica, and platforms from Facebook to Twitter (First Draft, 2020). In addition to its collaborative fact-checking efforts (most notably around the French elections in a project called CrossCheck), and its contributions to

analyses of information disorder as a complex phenomenon (including the aforementioned report for research and policy, commissioned by the CoE), a recent contribution is the free online course for journalists and the general public for learning to identify misinformation (Rinehart, 2018).

Efforts by the EBU<sup>4</sup> are, by nature of the organisation, highly collaborative. They have ranged from core activities such as the Eurovision News Exchange (EBU, n.d.), to business innovation involving big data (EBU, 2018a), to journalism training and toolkits, to focused workshops and annual events, to supporting research, and to policy advocacy to support the provision of quality media to counter disinformation (Lovell, 2018). In 2017, the EBU created a cooperative system of verification for user-generated content that functions on a networked basis with various members' newsrooms and other quality news partners collaborating in a decentralised (i.e., distributed) fact-checking process (Bowler, 2019). In addition, the EBU is a partner in the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) with Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Agence France Presse (AFP), and the Global Editors Network (GEN). JTI is designed to promote journalism through adherence to an agreed set of trust and transparency standards that are being developed and will be implemented collaboratively (Goodman, 2018).

### A renewed opportunity for public service media

The case of information disorder in relation to PSB, and especially to PSM, highlights factors that are at the heart of the universalism mission, both in terms of relevance and impact. There is clearly a need to rethink the foundational principle of universality in light of new opportunities to engage in collaborations at the national and global levels in today's media landscape. There are policy implications that can strengthen PSM. Assessed through the lens of the information disorder framework, PSM offers an antidote to most types of false content, whether motivated commercially or politically. PSM can guarantee a professionally vetted and ethically informed practice in the creation and production of media services, as well as universal distribution of trustworthy content and services. It can also provide citizens with tools for understanding information disorder and interpreting media to ascertain agency and determine the trustworthiness of content. Each of the described initiatives target some of these aspects, reflecting renewed need of the universalism mission for PSM in the era of information disorder.

PSB and PSM are, as institutions, part of media policy toolkits for countering market-driven challenges such as the concentration of ownership, overheated competition and diminishing content diversity, and inequalities of access to media (Bajomi-Lazar, 2017). Information disorder, scholars argue, is the result

of a complex storm of combined commercialisation, globalisation, and political interference (see Martens et al. 2018). The original premises of PSB emphasise a still ideal construct – it is non-commercial, nationally local, and at an arm’s length independent from the self-interested influences of markets and governments. Today, that construct is highly pertinent to what is needed to effectively combat problems caused by our contemporary information disorder. The historic ethos of PSB needs updating in concept and practice, but the cornerstone principles are needed more than ever. As Daphne Wolter, a media policy expert at the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, posits:

In these frantic times, there is a need for trusted content like never before. Albeit a great challenge, this is also an opportunity for shaping the content profile of public service media. Where public discourse derails repeatedly, public service media must guarantee that it remains democratic and cannot be controlled by any party, thereby preventing the emergence of media segregation. (KAS, 2019: 7)

Emily Bell, Director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, argues:

Existing political systems and public service broadcasters need to be free to imagine the kinds of information ecosystems that they’d want at the nation/state level and then real freedom to experiment with and find new paths to deliver that. And also to think about themselves oriented in a world where it could well be that large-scale technology platforms — designed, built, operated in America — will be taking over much of what your information ecosystem looks like over the next decade. (Hofseth, 2018: para. 26)

There is a precondition. As noted earlier in the EBU research on media and democracy (EBU, 2019b), this requires safeguarding a relatively stable political situation and citizen’s rights to active participation in political life, which coincide with a robust PSM system. The study on PSM news audiences (Schulz et al., 2019) shows that public service news does reach people everywhere on the political spectrum. So, while the traditional mission of PSB should endure, strategies and tactics need to accommodate a far more complex and complicated media-society environment.

Regaining trust in journalism and educating publics about disinformation is a reasonable amendment to the mandates and remits for PSM. Their accomplishments will depend to a great extent on the ability of PSM institutions to work in partnership with other stakeholders, including media companies, cultural institutions, and civil society organisations, an example specifically pertinent to the case of disinformation. As has been highlighted by numerous fact-checking initiatives which showcase the ability of many (resourced and mature) PSM organisations to effectively respond to viral disinformation, this chapter clarifies and amplifies the role of PSM as a cornerstone partner in col-

laborations to solve global and local challenges in the abundant and chaotic context of information disorder.

Although the problems are global, the national context is the theatre of operations for misinformation, disinformation, and false news that is intended to undermine democracies and destabilise social relations. PSM is ideally positioned to combat this within and across national contexts. Policy-makers need to recognise the necessity and practical value of preserving a mixed media ecosystem, which is obvious to a unique degree in Europe and is instrumental for ensuring that a plurality of media and content co-exist and compete. A review of international standards and PSM concluded that, “If PSM are to realize their full potential in the future, then renewed attention needs to be given to these foundational principles established in the past” (Psychogiopoulou et al., 2017: 1949).

A renewed practice and revitalised concept of universalism will have instrumental importance in countering information disorder. This can be accomplished with a proven foundation of ideals and principles that legitimate the public service approach and social responsibility model of media provision. The ethos of public service in media is an essential part of the solution to the problem of information disorder, and not part of its cause.

## Notes

1. These questions are addressed, for example, in the EBU’s annual and ongoing *Trust in Media* reports, the Knight Foundation’s *Trust, Media, and Democracy* projects in the US, and The Reuters Institute’s annual and ongoing *Digital News Reports* (see also, e.g., Hanitzsch et al., 2018). The fluid and many-sided question of how to understand fake news has been addressed by scholars and policy-makers alike, and there is also already a vast amount of studies on the spread and impact of fake news (for overviews, see, e.g., Horowitz, 2018, 2019).
2. For example, fake news and disinformation in Eastern Europe (<https://en.ejo.ch/specialist-journalism/fake-news-and-disinformation-in-eastern-europe>).
3. For example, a rich resource for research and activities on misinformation and fake news by different stakeholders is the Open Access, crowd-sourced repository, Misinformation Research – Public Bibliography, initiated by the Director of Research at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Professor Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HdOvjfNJAfQqKKNKUwoltA3B-gZcXdmTm6amaZFYqjY/edit?usp=sharing>).
4. The EBU coordinates the efforts of its members in digital and media literacy initiatives (<https://www.ebu.ch/fr/contents/news/2012/03/empowering-citizenship-through-m.html>).

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## Chapter 11

# Personalised universalism in the age of algorithms

Jannick Kirk Sørensen

### Abstract

In this chapter, I address a complex relationship in linking the principles of universalism and personalisation as a tension of considerable importance in contemporary media use. The paradoxical aspects of this relationship are especially evident when treated in the light of ideal types and praxis in legacy public service broadcasting (PSB) and digital public service media (PSM). The relationship is viewed from five angles, culminating in discussion about the materiality produced by shifting technologies in the digital environment and its bearing on the ideological concept of public service in media. The author introduces a new orientation for PSM: personalised enlightenment.

**Keywords:** digital platforms, enlightenment mission, universalism mission, recommender systems, collaborative filtering, global media

### Introduction: Broadcasting and personal communication

Broadcasting is one of the twentieth century's most influential forms of mass communication and was initially a failed invention. Early attempts to harness the "wireless telegraph" for private (mainly business) communication failed due to the physical properties of radio waves. Lacking encryption, everybody could listen to a conversation (Lewis, 1991) and that inherently ruled out private communication. Radio technology was better suited for a public purpose. In this iteration, it grew rapidly and became a worldwide phenomenon of mass communication. Less than ten years from its application as a mass medium, European countries systematised public service broadcasting (PSB) as the preferred orientation. In the context of growing threats from communism in the East and fascism in the West, governments believed radio was too valuable to be "given away" to commercial exploitation –due to broadcasting's potential for both contributing to social development and misuse that could harm societies. The development of radio went differently in the US – but not entirely,

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Sørensen, J. K. (2020). Personalised universalism in the age of algorithms. In P. Savage, M. Medina, & G. F. Lowe (Eds.), *Universalism in public service media* (pp. 191–205). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

because there, too, the idea of public service was fundamental to the legitimacy of broadcasting (see Barnouw, 1966; Flichy, 1995; Lewis, 1991).

The much-celebrated ideal of universalism is embedded in the notion of broadcasting, which has been generally understood as a ubiquitous coverage of transmitted signals across the breadth of a national territory. This notion can be understood as a side effect of early radio technology that depended exclusively on amplitude modulation (AM radio) and therefore had a large “footprint”, combined with governmental desires to regulate a medium that nearly everyone believed to be powerful in its potential to influence the public for good or ill. Today, broadcasting is no longer as dominant. Moreover, the early interest to harness radio waves for private communication has been operationalised with advances in encryption technologies. Mobile phones, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, 4G, and 5G all make use of radio waves, but not for broadcasting.

A private, encrypted, client-server configuration has become the dominant mode of distance communication in the Internet era. Even broadcasting and other mass media content is increasingly distributed via the Internet on platforms that provide personalised and on-demand services. What does this mean for the celebrated concept of universalism that has been fundamental to the legitimacy of PSB? In particular, can the universalism principle be maintained as a core value proposition for public service media (PSM) in the light of this increasingly sweeping “return” to individual communication?

In the mass media era when broadcasting was a dominant medium, universalism of coverage was mandated for transmission media that are characterised by one-way communication flows. Programming choices and scheduling practice reflected norms that mattered to an elite who decided what would be appropriate for “the masses” (Tracey, 1998). The PSB mission of advancing enlightenment had a nearly religious importance as a quasi-evangelistic concept of one voice speaking truth to the masses (Scannell, 2005). A convincing case has been made that the religious convictions of the first director general of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), John Reith, had an important contributing role in shaping the universalism ideal as fundamental to broadcasting (see especially *The Reith Diaries* by Stuart, 1975). Paddy Scannell (2005) alluded to that tradition in arguing for PSB as a generous form of dissemination that does not calculate the profitability or concern itself overmuch with the effect of speaking truth.

Partly because of his commitment to the universalism mission in broadcasting, Reith was not fond of the idea that the BBC might transmit more than one radio channel. Pressure from listeners with different music preferences and other demands eventually led to segmented radio programming, arguably the first deviation from universalism in broadcasting (Scannell, 1989; see also Jauert & Lowe, 2005). Scholarly literature on scheduling strategies and the development of channel portfolios demonstrate the changing identity of PSB

in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Lowe & Hujanen, 2003; Søndergaard, 1994; Steemers, 2003; Ytreberg, 2000; also see Lassen's chapter in this collection).

With on-demand services, and particularly personalised recommendation systems, the functional impact of scheduling and profiling as means for achieving universalism is fading. The decline marks a co-related decrease in the agenda-setting role of PSM (compared to PSB). Today, agenda-setting is part of the dark matter of algorithmic recommendation systems, a realm where even programmers and data scientists can't always explain why a specific piece of content is recommended to a specific user. I will assess this dystopian narrative using case studies of PSM implementations of recommender systems to ask whether the personalisation of media actually threatens the universalism mission of PSM.

### Deconstructing (public national) universalism

Universalism was interdependent with broadcasting, which features an allocution structure of communication (i.e., a one-way flow) that prioritises equity in communicative intentions. There is some opportunity for feedback, but it is weak and not very direct. Examples include the involvement of listeners, viewers, and users via phone-ins to talk programmes, workshop studios for citizens to produce radio programmes, and uploading user-generated content and comments online. But the basic communicative configuration is a one-way flow from a centralised source to mass audiences – even if self-selected and not necessarily all at the same time, but rather over some period of time due to on-demand affordances.

The utility of universalism has been weakened in parallel with the growth of digital platforms and channels. As a result, the normative framework that legitimates universalism as a public service mission has been eroded, although the principle of universalism remains one of PSM's most basic value propositions – albeit only in national contexts. More or less universally, PSM is still required to pursue the historic PSB mission of promoting national cultures and facilitating national democratic and political communication. The universalism of PSM is localised to each nation rather than universalised to the global media ecology. A governmental logic defines the boundaries of PSM universalism. Apart from a few genres such as drama co-productions and the retransmission of music, much of the programming and content of PSM is centred on the national as the priority purview for cultural and political construction.

While PSM remains a largely national project – or series of projects – media systems are no longer that. Media corporations, markets, and systems are increasingly global. This accounts for a tension between the normative basis for PSM and the operational realities of its enactment. Examining European

initiatives to personalise PSB web pages, Sørensen (2011) observed this tension as a contradiction between the concepts of PSB and personalisation; where the former ideally speaks to the unity of citizens within a nation, the latter seeks to serve individuals and as consumers. This tension begs the question of whether PSM organisations might be ignoring (or even betraying) their remits when offering personalised services? As we shall see, the answer depends on how one constructs the focal concepts of universalism and personalisation, from a theoretical standpoint and in describing PSM praxis.

In simple terms, if national public universalism is understood as “every citizen receiving the same information”, then the customer sovereignty proposition of on-demand personalisation is not perhaps appropriate for PSM. If the algorithm only reflects the customer’s desires as an obedient servant, butler, or agent, then PSB’s historic role as an agenda-setter and source of enlightenment is undermined. Everyone is free to live in a personal “filter bubble” (Pariser, 2011). In this perspective, recommender systems pose a threat to democracy (Sunstein, 2007). Subsequently, it has been suggested that policies and software systems need to ensure diversity of citizen exposure to media content (Burri, 2015; Helberger, 2012; Schmidt et al., 2018; Sørensen & Schmidt, 2016). That hints at a degree of paternalism that is problematic today, and was never all that popular earlier. But it also points to the dilemma involved with ensuring universalism as a matter of no small importance for democracy in practice. We will return to this.

As Bozdag and van den Hoven (2015) pointed out, objections to the idea that algorithms are anti-democratic depend on the type of democracy one is contemplating. The liberal type is concerned that information and opinions have equal chances for exposure and influence in a “marketplace of ideas”. Deliberative or participatory types of democracy are more concerned that all opinions can be heard, and to the extent possible, that they are heard by all. Whichever type, there is a shared sense of societal unease in what is perceived as relocating decision-making power from human agency to technical algorithms. Some of this concern is certainly overblown, but the issue is highly relevant to considerations of universalism in PSM.

If universalism is understood as a prerequisite for deliberative democracy, then one argument against personalisation and the growing importance of algorithms to facilitate that is that all the opinions that matter won’t be heard and therefore cannot be considered by all citizens. This is more than a little naïvely optimistic, given that all opinions were never heard or considered even in the monopoly era, but concerns about voice and empowerment have continuing pertinence. If, however, universalism is understood in the light of representative democracy, then the concern is mainly about the accessibility of services and information for all citizens. Thus, while one perspective on democracy prioritises a diversity of sources and voices, the other prioritises accessibility

of contents and services. Both care about universalism, but not necessarily in the same sense or with the same prioritisation.

Concerns about personalisation increasingly centre on three issues: privacy problems related to collection and ownership of user profile information (Sørensen & Van den Bulck, 2018; Sørensen & Kosta, 2019), the opaqueness of algorithms (Bucher, 2018; Zarsky, 2016), and the fear that personalised media recommendations would lead to bias and filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2007). While legitimate concerns, it has been difficult to prove that algorithms for news recommendations create filter bubbles because the evidence suggests human editors are slightly more biased in practice (Möller et al., 2018). Moreover, the assumption that recommender systems perfectly echo a user's personal interests and desires may be wrong. It is actually rather difficult to produce relevant recommendations for new users because data is sparse and only accumulates over time with use. Even for loyal users, after a period of use, the relevancy of recommendations may decline as they become too predictable (called over-fitting). In both cases, or at both ends of the use curve, the balance between relevancy and diversity is difficult (Castells et al., 2015). This balance is important in an editorial context, and equally in the context of e-commerce. There is considerable commercial potential in exposing users to adjacent content that will be new to them rather than always only linking to the same things. By extending the user's circle of interests, the media service can grow enjoyment (via discovery) and loyalty.

### Public service media's personalisation dilemma

Since the end of PSB monopolies, these organisations have kept an eye on methods used by private media to optimise audience contact and satisfaction (Søndergaard, 1994). In recent years, PSM companies have been inspired by the implementation of personalisation in private media (Bodó, 2019; Kunert & Thurman, 2019; Thurman & Schifferes, 2012) to launch initiatives of the same kind in developing and improving personalisation (Sørensen & Hutchinson, 2018; Sørensen, 2013; Van den Bulck & Moe, 2017). This creates editorial and policy dilemmas for PSM (Sørensen, 2018, 2019). Should the algorithm apply the same selection criteria as the programming policies for broadcast scheduling which prioritise diverse programming and fair representation of different viewpoints? Is it even possible to apply broadcast criteria to on-demand content (Sørensen & Schmidt, 2016)? How should oversight of algorithms be handled to ensure the quality control that is expected of the PSM content and service offer? How best to explain the rationale and criteria behind the recommendations that users receive? Can PSM replicate the human-centred meaning and logic that is embedded in programming and scheduling in the mathematical

logic of algorithms? How to maintain PSM's distinctive "tone of voice", which has much to do with credibility as well as brand identity, when recommended content is not determined by human agency? Should user behaviour data collected by a PSM recommender system be looped into the editorial process as indicators of met or unmet demands, or of market potential? Finally, can a contracted technology provider be trusted to do this right, or is it strategically wiser to build up in-house expertise?

Sørensen (2019) presents a case study of how nine European PSM companies implemented algorithmic recommendation. Pöchhacker and colleagues (2018) present a study of personalisation at Bayerische Rundfunk (BR) in Germany. Both studies indicate that while noted dilemmas are the same across PSM organisations, the approaches taken by various companies differ but always reflect organisational values and cultures. There are also indications of hesitance and uncertainty. Regarding the former, an example is the approach to ensuring diversity in recommendations. While diversity in Germany and Sweden is a central requirement for their recommender systems, in Denmark and several other countries, this receives less attention. Another example hinges on the question of whether it is better to control the technology internally or to outsource algorithmic personalisation? If outsourcing, the only options are to contract the service from commercial providers. This, too, is addressed differently across organisations. Finally, a sign of PSM's hesitance about personalisation is evident in the position of algorithmic recommendations on the screen, which are typically placed in less noticeable locations on the webpage and means users are less often and less directly exposed to them.

Although understandings of personalisation – and interest in this – varies across PSM organisations, managers in every company are challenged by an emerging tension between universalism as ensuring content exposure to everyone, and individualism as algorithmically selected content. This tension goes to the heart of a core value proposition of PSM as guarantors of societal coherence. It also reflects a professional tension within PSM organisations between professionals who are responsible for creating meaning by producing programmes and others who are responsible for optimising the potential for exposure – that is, data scientists, data curators, and marketing departments.

Editors are situated between the two communities and are responsible for safeguarding the truth, accuracy, and fairness of all output, and thereby taking care of the public image of PSM in context. Importantly, in many implementations of PSM recommender systems, the editors have hands-on control of the algorithm. This happens through keyword tagging of content, curating lists and categories of content, and creating rules that govern the system. Unrefined user-based recommendations can be overruled by editorial decisions.

In general, the personalised recommendations of PSM content emphasises continuity by providing a centrally curated universalism that is understood

from a heritage rooted in broadcast channel curation. This has so far eclipsed the promise of optimised exposure and increased customer loyalty that are potential benefits of implementing algorithmic recommender systems. Provocatively put, PSM organisations present users with the same content, only with slightly different sequences and prioritisation schemas. In the PSM context, then, recommender systems are a nudging tool to encourage more viewing of the institution’s output, rather than a tool that supports the user as a “customer king” choosing from a broad array of options (Schipper, 2002).

## Globalised technological universalism

The personalisation concept is a fundamental and instrumental feature of the global e-commerce industry. The first large-scale application of algorithmic recommendation is generally attributed to Amazon. Their business model depended on expanding and improving customer exposure to the variety of books available in its online inventory. The operational format is the familiar “other users also bought” collaborative filtering algorithm (Bobadilla et al., 2013; Borchers et al., 1998). This became the core asset for online shopping on the Amazon platform. As the breadth and depth of products expanded far beyond virtual bookshelves, findability and inventory management also depended on algorithms (Linden et al., 2003). Thus, recommender systems were developed as a practical answer to the problem of efficiently handling extreme product heterogeneity.

Algorithms analyse data to identify patterns in consumer behaviour that are presumed to indicate one’s personal interests. Those interests are compared with larger patterns of interest among other consumers with similar tastes or needs. The algorithm brings order, establishes hierarchy, and creates coherence among the nearly uncountable volume of items for sale via Amazon. The algorithms used for this and other Internet services are attempts at “bringing order to the web” as Google founders Page and Brin titled their paper on the Google web search engine (Page et al., 1998). In this light, it is interesting that algorithmic filtering and structuring are being applied by PSM which, according to its core value proposition, should already offer a properly structured and well-ordered filtering of the world’s complexities presented in content. One could get the idea that PSM organisations do not trust their own organising principles.

The ubiquitous dissemination of smart phones, tablets, and computers has encouraged a new dimension of universalism, here described as globalised technical universalism. A paradigm of universally applied technical standards now dominate how audio, video, images, and texts are distributed and displayed on different devices. The language of coding and principles of interface design have become universal, and thus the contents and services offered on popular

platforms can only be universally accessed if they adhere to the general coding and design requirements that pertain to a platform.

This equally applies to every user due to the requirement to have a personal username, password, and profile in order to log in to most platforms. Even the algorithms that recommend content have become universal. A few very popular methods are increasingly common, especially content-based filtering (Lops et al., 2011) and collaborative filtering (Sarwar et al., 2001). These technologies are embedded in nearly every current recommender system. In technical terms, then, universalism has never been so widespread.

### Different perspectives on the purpose of public broadcasting

In scholarly discussions about PSM, the point of departure is typically addressed in one of two ways. One way is informed by the materiality of practice to indicate how these institutions act and react in political, economic, and technological contexts. This is a practical perspective that prioritises PSM in competitive environments. Alternatively, discussions of PSM centre on normative ideals about the roles and functions these institutions have in facilitating democratic communication, deliberation, and participation among citizens. From this perspective, PSM is idealised as an institution that is supposed to be a central hub for societal deliberations that are needed to produce and reproduce societal coherence. The focus of discussion is on the degrees to which PSM organisations achieve the ideals in practice.

In recent years, the latter perspective has been less privileged, prompting concerns about the “death of public service broadcasting” (see Søndergaard, 1999; Tracey, 1998). There is little evidence that this description is valid given the manifest capabilities for renewal that established PSB firms have demonstrated since the mid-1980s. Bolin (2004) suggested that the transformative power of PSB – its ability to morph – has ensured its institutional survival. That ability implies that PSM is less driven by doctrine and dogma than many might prefer, and more driven by practical interests in organisational sustainability under evolving and variable societal, political, and economic conditions. This, in turn, would suggest a market-based understanding of PSM is more characteristic than historic interests in normative prescriptions – that certainly has implications for discussions of universalism.

In the early days of broadcasting, all governments needed to regulate radio frequencies, but they approached it in different ways. Generally, universalism was a corollary of monopoly environments. At first, the right to transmit was typically granted to one broadcasting organisation only. That company was required to ensure the signals would be geographically accessible to everyone residing within a national territory. As monopolies, these companies were also



expected to provide programming with universal appeal to general publics that were de facto mass audiences (Van den Bulck & Moe, 2017). A cornerstone of the public service mission in the first decades of practice was to contribute to societal cohesion by facilitating education and enlightenment. All of this is well documented in *The Reith Diaries* (Stuart, 1975).

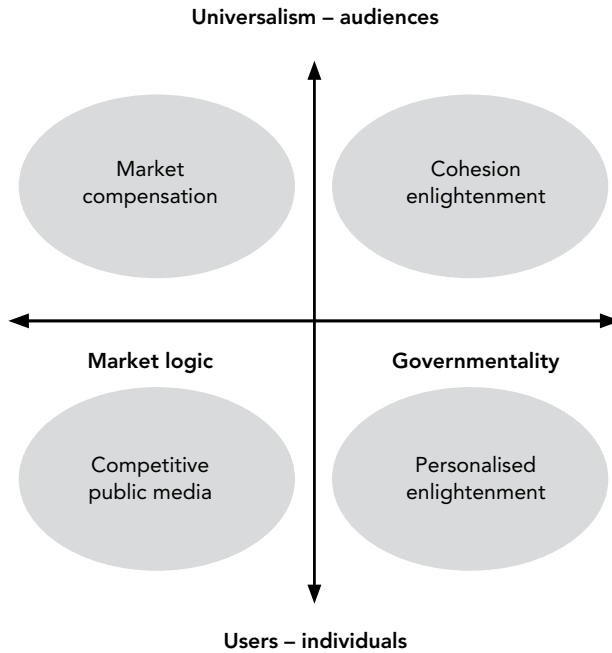
With the introduction of private commercial radio in the 1980s, and later television in the 1990s, concerns were raised about PSB causing market distortion and its presumed role in remedying market failure, pushing aside concerns about cohesion (Henten, 2000; Noam, 1991). Compensating for flaws in market dynamics and showing competitiveness became a core question of operational importance for PSB management in the context of dual-system growth, that is, systems comprised of a public service sector and a private commercial sector competing in media markets (Nissen, 2006). Much of central importance in the decades since the 1980s has to do with deciding the appropriate balance between the two sectors. With personalisation technologies being applied more or less universally in today's global social media platforms and services, it is time to revisit classic arguments for public service as such in media provision. As Nissen (2006: 69) observed, "influencing the listener's or viewer's choices, and thus media consumption pattern, is the very reason why public media were established and why their existence has been upheld even in times of abundant media supply".

The history of shifting arguments for and against PSM has been well treated in a large body of scholarship in the field of political economy. At one end of an axis of argumentation is the market-compensation perspective that suggests PSM is a remedy for market failure but distorts the competitive possibilities for commercial media. Here, the focus is often on arguments that suggest PSM should only fill the non-profitable gaps in a commercial market. At the other end of the axis, discussion prioritises the importance of social cohesion to emphasise PSM's role as a mediator in democratic processes, and (more rarely) in mediating periods of national crisis. Here, economic arguments do not hold true, because the logic is less about economic concerns and rests primarily on the self-interested need for sustainability of nation-states. These arguments can be well explained with Foucault's concept of governmentality (Foucault & Pasquino, 1991).

In Figure 1, the economic-organisational arrangements of PSM can be presented as one axis that is anchored by market logic at one end and governmentality at the other. A bisecting axis is anchored by universalism of audiences at one end and users as individuals at the other. The point of departure is grounded by Hasebrink and Domeyars's (2010) typology that discerns four layers of an individual's information needs: 1) undirected information needs; 2) thematic interests; 3) group-identity related information needs; and 4) specific personal information needs. Their typology is focused on the individual whose needs can

be addressed by various platforms, including mass media and social media. Each can address various layers of information need. This perspective encourages looking at the objective of PSM from a perspective other than the traditional focus on PSM as institutions. That is helpful when the role and potential of personalisation technologies are examined in the PSM context.

**Figure 1.** Four purposes of public service media and public service broadcasting



*Comment:* Figure from Sørensen (2011), adapted for use in this chapter.

Personalised recommender systems are often presented as tools to create a more personally relevant selection of content. According to software developers and computer scientists (Hongguang et al., 2005; Ricci et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2015; Zimmerman et al., 2004), 1) the purpose is to satisfy the information needs and desires of the user as a “customer-king”, and 2) to protect the user from information overflow (Franck, 1998; Mitchell, 2005; Simon, 1971).

Whether recommender systems actually deliver on these propositions – and whether information overflow actually exists – deserves critical consideration that will have to wait for another opportunity. Here, we note that personalisation technologies claim to work in the interests of the individual. While at first glance a centralised agenda-setting function seems to clash with the individuals’ search for and use of media content, recent scholarship (Schmidt et al., 2018) remind us that the same person can have different roles when using media. At

the same time, a user can be 1) a consumer searching for personal gratification; 2) a person with individual rights (e.g., not being discriminated against); and 3) a citizen belonging to a democratic society (e.g., being well-informed about the society). Our model encompasses users as citizens with needs and rights, and consumers with personal, group-identity-related or thematic information interests.

The intersection of the two axes suggests four types of objectives, purposes, or roles for PSM. In the upper-left quadrant, where market logic intersects with the classical idea of universalism, a primary objective of PSM is to provide market-failure compensation. The programming and services should fill unprofitable gaps in media markets, but nothing else. Programming is defined by normative ideas that prescribe what belongs to a nation's culture and public life. PSM should take care of those concerns and stay away from anything that would "distort" competition for commercial media. Moving to the upper-right quadrant, the objective of PSM is defined by a commonwealth interest in societal cohesion and growing enlightenment, which ignores the economic logic of markets. The programming of monopoly PSB conformed largely to this type of "cohesion-enlightenment" PSB.

In the lower left quadrant, we have "competitive public media". Here the objective is to demonstrate competitiveness while maintaining a distinctive orientation and tone that aims to persistently achieve a public service practice in programming. This is not so easy, because aesthetics and topics will have similarities with commercial media because production methods and strategies are shaped by competition. A quantifiable popularity is important for programme selection and scheduling, and publishing strategies are optimised accordingly. In the era of broadcasting, public service obligations were addressed by scheduling popular content to "lead" viewers into weightier public service fare. At the same time, as noted earlier, PSB niche channels were launched to satisfy the interests of targeted segments with thematic content. In today's world of digital on-demand media, methods and tools are borrowed from commercial practice in personalised algorithmic recommender systems. Most PSM operators today are engaged in competitive public media.

In the fourth quadrant, where governmentality and individual users meet, there are no obvious examples yet. This suggests that new forms of PSM are possible, which I have earlier described as "personalised enlightenment" (Sørensen, 2011: 304). In principle, one could expect to find enlightening and educational content that is tailored to fit individual needs and address the wider shared interests of society. The danger, of course, is that it might become a technologically updated version of the paternalistic orientation.

This would be compatible with ideals related to empowerment and agency that fuel de-liberalistic democratic PSM practice, it is possible that personalised enlightenment could be developed in appropriate ways. This would both require

and facilitate liberating the concept of universalism from the strict confines of the classical public sphere construct and simultaneously avoiding a paternalistic state perspective. The path forward would be a clear and persistent focus on the need to ensure that all citizens have ample opportunities to be equally well informed about topics of mutual importance. One must be careful not to erode appreciated individual freedoms and the right to form and express personal opinions (Helberger, 2012). That being accepted, there is the possibility for a “diversity diet” (Sørensen & Schmidt, 2016) as a mandate for PSM. Although admittedly complicated and unlikely to satisfy proponents of a radical degree of liberal media market “freedom”, as algorithms increasingly take over the role of curation in content selection, the opportunity to address this in practice is quite doable. If understood as exposure diversity, universalism in the twenty-first century digital media ecology might be largely about curating for enlightenment.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the relation between two apparently incompatible concepts – universalism and personalisation. These concepts seem incompatible in normative terms because the former insists on such an all-encompassing totality that the individual is at risk of disappearing into the undifferentiated masses, while the latter insists on a supremacy of the individual so that everything other than custom-made products would be unsatisfactory.

In fact, universalism has never been that in practice, but only an earnest effort in the context of PSM’s role in serving a national cultural sphere that has become increasingly narrowed by these organisations’ need to stand out as recognisable brands with clear competitive profiles. Moreover, the very idea of a national culture has been both criticised and embraced, the latter in largely mythical terms. The pursuit of national universalism remains important, but is under severe pressure from a much stronger and quite popular phenomenon of global universalism as the result of limited number of international media and technology companies that advance and adhere to an increasingly global set of digital technical standards. These standards now include algorithmic personalisation technologies.

Perhaps ironically, personalisation technologies do not necessarily deliver the promised protection against information overload or guarantee the promised degree of customer sovereignty. In practice, they serve as technical tools for creating, managing and predicting audiences in much the same way as scheduling did in the broadcast era. In short, they serve the publishers’ interests as much, or more, than users’ interests.

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## Chapter 12

# Datafication, fluidity, and organisational change

### *Towards a universal PSM 3.0*

Lizzie Jackson

#### Abstract

This chapter reviews a range of the organisational structures necessary to deliver datafied, fully nuanced content to audiences. These structures can be found in high technology clusters worldwide, and with them, the delivery of digital content to a mass, group, or individual to suit personal preferences is possible via a wide range of platforms. Such fluidity of delivery is likely to increase the universal appeal of public service media (PSM) content and thereby raise the potential for a well-informed national (and international) citizenry. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's response to the increasing datafication of media by significant commercial firms, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, was to adopt a mobile-first policy in its Hamilton newsroom, a neighbouring urban community to Toronto. Although the transition was found to be highly disruptive for producers and publics alike, local audiences substantially increased, including younger audiences.

**Keywords:** datafication, fluidity, recombination, high technologies, clusters, public service media, universality

### Introducing datafication to assist universality<sup>1</sup>

This chapter reviews a range of organisational structures found in high technology clusters in North America and Europe for the production and distribution of content in large data flows via networked computing. Such datafication can enable the nuanced delivery of digital content to a mass, group, or individual via a wide range of platforms to suit individual preferences. Datafication can enable public service media (PSM) to deliver what Jakubowicz has previously imagined as “public service media 3.0”. This is PSM able to operate at national and international levels, to reflect multiculturalism and multimediality, able to offer universal access, and being technologically neutral (Jakubowicz, 2010). Such production requires creatives, technologists, audience analysts, and data scientists

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Jackson, L. (2020). Datafication, fluidity, and organisational change: Towards a universal PSM 3.0. In P. Savage, M. Medina, & G. F. Lowe (Eds.), *Universalism in public service media* (pp. 207–222). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

to work collaboratively – an approach not widely found in contemporary PSM.

Datafication offers opportunities to strengthen one of the core principles of PSM – universalism: “PSM must provide a range of programmes that inform, inspire, entertain and appeal to the diverse interests of the young and the old, the higher and less educated, across the community” (Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018: 877). Without delivery systems that can reach increasingly diverse publics in a more fluid way, the potential to support the development of an informed citizenry will remain low.

Firms, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, are able to exploit datafication. At a deep backend technological level (concerned with servers, applications, and databases) these companies are adopting new file standards to enable the recombinatory delivery of different kinds of media files to different frontend devices, where users interact directly. For example, Netflix swiftly adopted Interoperable Mastering Format (IMF) in 2018, a file standard developed that same year by the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE) working with the UK’s Digital Production Partnership (DPP). The DPP was created by the broadcast and film industry in the UK to encourage experimentation with emerging technologies. The IMF format enables the repackaging of content for different play-outs, audiences, platforms, and languages. For example, the same film can be automatically repackaged with a commentary in Hindi for India, or in Mandarin for China. An airline version of a programme can be automatically rendered alongside one for a tablet computer or mobile phone. IMF therefore enables the automatic reassembly of linear content for different platforms including any associated data such as commentary, or alternate or additional material – images, music, and text:

The IMF framework is based on the Digital Cinema standard of component based elements in a standard container with assets being mapped together via metadata instructions. By using this standard, Netflix is able to hold a single set of core assets and the unique elements needed to make those assets relevant in a local territory. (Netflix Tech Blog, 2016)

The potential reduction in production costs is obvious, but also personal preferences can be accommodated by the technology when coupled with a registration system, thereby potentially increasing universal appeal. Netflix was able to adopt the new file standard swiftly because they are fully datafied. They are adept at data management and have the right tools and data-literate employees. Such orientations and capacities are inherent in high technology firms, therefore this is of interest when considering the potential benefit for PSM evolution towards datafication.

To assist in the visualisation of what PSM 3.0 adaptation might actually look like an analysis and findings is provided on the typical activities undertaken by high technology firms in one particular situation: Toronto-based high

technology clusters. In a four-year international study, I and Michał Głowacki collected data in 2015–2019 from ten city-based high-technology clusters in North America and Europe (Jackson & Głowacki, 2019).

The methodology involved 150 in-depth interviews with personnel from high technology firms and local PSM organisations in conjunction with photographs from “observational walkabouts” in offices and neighbourhoods, and analysis of grey literature (company reports and city strategies).<sup>2</sup>

The case study explored in more detail here are the operations in the Toronto area of Canada of the CBC. CBC’s experiment with a “mobile first – river of content” is possibly one of the first large-scale PSM experiments into datafication (personal interview with CBC senior manager, Toronto, 2016). In this case, the CBC newsroom entirely replaced their previous orientation of media-type (television and radio) presentation to a mixed-media data-flow approach. News stories were now selected on both merit and suitability for consumption via mobile phones and other digital devices.

### Theorising PSM 3.0

Karol Jakubowicz’s thinking on a new model for PSM emerged a decade ago. His analysis of European public service broadcasting (PSB) underlined the need for a new conceptualisation and the reforming of operations connected with the PSM universalist mission, which he argues has

encompassed two main periods: the time up until the 1980s, before it faced commercial competition (PSB 1.0) and the period of great upheavals and change since then (PSB 2.0). [Public service broadcasting] (PSB) also needed to find its bearings in a multi-channel broadcasting landscape, leading to ‘a significant level of commercialisation, where differences with commercial television are, in general, relatively small’ (León, 2007: 98). Now is the time for PSB 3.0 – the twenty-first-century version that we would probably invent if we were to create PSB today, necessarily very different from the one we have inherited. (Jakubowicz, 2010: 9)

Jakubowicz imagined PSM 3.0 as being able to operate at national and international levels. It would also reflect multiculturalism and multimodality, reach a level of universal appeal, be technologically neutral, teach the new digital literacies, and engage a participatory public for the greater good. PSM would act as an umbrella for “a broad network of public and civic institutions and groups” (Jakubowicz, 2010: 9). More recently, Mira Burri (2015: viii) argues for the reframing of “PSM as producer, PSM as navigator, PSM as memory institution”. Key to such transformation is the process of datafication, that is, turning content, and any related information and communication, into data.

For Davenport (2014: 10) datafication is the act of making sense of data for “decision support, executive support, online analytical processing, business intelligence, analytics”. Floridi (2014) terms adaptation to datafication the “fourth industrial revolution” and Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) the “second machine age”. For Manovich datafication enables a logic of “permanent extendability” and “permanent innovation” (Manovich, 2013: 156). The flexibility of computer coding and data flows offers the imagining and development of new forms of linked content, conversations, games, or immersive experiences that can be expressed as recombinatory media and communications ecosystems. Through the work of these theorists we can conclude the production and maintenance of datafied media and communications requires an agile, fluid, approach that is alien to most producers accustomed to working in a linear way within television and radio.

For Arie de Geus (1999) firms with longevity are those who are continually learning and adapting, what he terms a “living company”. The business strategy firm McKinsey also identifies a modern organisation as being a “living organism” (Aghina et al., 2018: para.15). Kung (2008: 128) notes strategies for media firms that involve technology are “challenging because that environment is never static. Rather like all complex systems it is in a constant state of flux”. Analysis of the collaborative organisational models found in high technology clusters, explored further on in this chapter, provide insights into fluid, non-linear, data-driven production. These models raise questions of whether PSM can adapt to such data-driven forms and, if so, how will this benefit the PSM mission to provide universal appeal and access? Also, what enables cross-cultural and cross-sector innovation, such as that between content producers and data-scientists, to succeed?

## Datafication and media production

For media producers any digital content becomes a data file. That data can then be tracked, monitored, and optimised, leading to new opportunities (Elliott, 2013). For production purposes such remediation of digital content (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) offers opportunities to improve access, appeal, or visibility. Recombination can also be seen in audiences’ fluid swarming and media snacking of “spreadable media” identified by Jenkins and colleagues (2013). Manovich terms such adjustments to the structure of digital media “digital compositing”. Computer code and content-as-data can be rearranged to produce new creative forms such as immersive media (Manovich, 2001, 2013).

Overall, we are living a “medialife” that is “constant communication and conversation” (Deuze, 2012: 3). Reconceptualising media and communications as recombinatory ecologies or eco-systems is becoming more logical. The concept of fluidity as a theoretical framework is therefore a useful lens for the analysis of modern management and production cultures in a contemporary

media ecology context. The idea that a certain level of organisational adaptivity is required to operate in such advanced datafied production environments is worthy of exploration. Greater organisational fluidity and agile production methods ensures a higher ability to respond to changing market conditions and audience preferences. Appropriately nuanced content and communications are more likely to ensure universal appeal, and the use of appropriate platforms will offer universal access.

For firms in high technology clusters the researchers found faster decision-making, collaboration with a wider range of skilled creatives, and greater autonomy for project-based production teams was strongly evident. To be clear, fluid production does not exclude moments of stasis, for example, the staged releases commonly found in digital making (version 1.0, version 2.0, etc.). A web page also offers structure within which flows of media updates can reside. Agile project management uses “sprints” of activity. Each sprint is interspersed with in-depth reviews, and these moments of stasis allow for adjustment. The concept of *levels of appropriate fluidity* can therefore assist us to see what is happening in combinatory media ecosystems.

### Public service media and universal appeal

Adapting to a networked media landscape has been slow and challenging for PSM (Lowe & Steemers, 2012; Głowacki & Jaskiernia, 2017). The next challenge is datafication which requires a more large-scale, holistic, adaptation across the organisation. Petros Iosifidis (2010: 16) commented that “PSB has so far failed to respond, in its organisation, management structures and relations with civil society, to the rise of networked, non-hierarchical forms of multi-stakeholder governance and social relations”.

For C. S. Nissen (2014) two cultures have long been observable in PSM; a management culture and a production culture. Nissen’s analysis of production culture also evidenced a marked distinction between television and radio producers, with television often seen as a career promotion from an older, less wealthy medium. From the late 1990s PSM organisations began to open “new media” departments, introducing a third culture imported by digitally able workers hired from commercial firms. A fourth phase of cultural adaptation is now suggested as data analysts and scientists become part of contemporary media and communications.

Datafication could assist PSMs to achieve universal appeal and greater potential to deliver an educated citizenry by increasing the visibility, availability, access, and personalisation of quality media selections. To be clear, universality firstly “refers to *universal appeal*. PSM must provide a range of programmes that inform, inspire, entertain and appeal to the diverse interests of the young and the

old, the higher and less educated, across the community [emphasis original]” (Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018: 877). Further “PSM must cater to every specific taste, even outside the mainstream” (Van den Bulck & Moe, 2018: 877). Interoperable Marketing Format (IMF) has been suggested as one high-end technology standard adopted by Netflix that is proving able to deliver recombinatory content selections to different publics via a wide range of platforms. Hence, overall, an audience-centric position has to be taken in tandem with such high technology.

The dependency on PSM achieving datafication is partly financial, partly strategic, and partly policy-related. But it is also about being able to engage with other production cultures such as those evident in high-technology firms. This indicates the need for increased knowledge exchange mechanisms and an enhanced ability to sustain partnerships with datafied firms. At the same time, PSM organisations have strong – seemingly insurmountable – internal resistance to change. The barriers to adaptation are therefore cultural, financial, technological, and regulatory. Alongside this is the need to increase the speed of innovation and exploration – that is for PSM to be more entrepreneurial. Developing new ventures or engaging with new ideas is not incompatible with the PSM mission. It is argued PSM could evolve more swiftly through increased engagement with local high-technology clusters.

### Investigating high-technology clusters

Historically, studies on industry clusters have produced analysis of the fabric of such aggregations, notably Porter (1998), but have not attempted to look at the internal culture of the firms within each cluster. Studies of media clusters have taken the same approach (Karlsson & Picard, 2011). Komorowski identifies seven types of aggregation within clusters, one of which is pooling. For Komorowski (2019: 56) pooling is “the organization of interaction between firms through, for example, the provision of networking events, the facilitation of education and training, the image-strengthening of its members or direct services”. In 2015, the National Science Centre (NCN) in Poland funded a four-year international project: *Organisational Culture of Public Service Media in the Digital Mediascapes: People, Values and Processes* (Głowacki & Jackson, 2019). The project is the first to look at the internal organisational culture of high-technology clusters in North America and Europe.

The rationale for the study was the challenging national conditions facing the Polish PSM organisations Telewizja Polska (TVP) and Polskie Radio (PR). Both are currently operating within an exceptionally challenging political environment, largely orchestrated by the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) government. In 2016 they fired the Polish PSM senior management team in order to have more control.

## Toronto's high-technology clusters

The third-largest technology sector in North America is in Toronto, in Canada's most populated province, Ontario. The Toronto high-technology cluster is in fact several linked clusters each with a slightly different nuance. They include firms and organisations involved in health, financial services, information technology, media, and creative industries. This is augmented by smaller firms in a range of other sectors. The clusters in Toronto encompass 14,000 technology companies and 65 business incubators. According to Canadian federal government sources small- to medium-sized businesses (firms with fewer than 250 employees) comprise 98 per cent of the activity. The typical size of most high-technology firms is very small (less than five employees). Only 1.8 per cent of businesses are considered medium-sized, and only 0.3 per cent are large-sized companies (Government of Canada, 2016). The small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are an important source of innovation due to their ability to “start up” and test the viability of new services in a cyclical fashion. According to the World Bank (2020, n.p.): “SMEs account for the majority of businesses worldwide and are important contributors to job creation and global economic development. They represent about 90% of businesses and more than 50% of employment worldwide”.

For the analysis of the Toronto high-technology cluster, the focus is the enterprise incentives supported by the Toronto municipal government and the Ontario provincial government (most of the departments are based within the City of Toronto). Both levels of government put in place policies and programmes to encourage SME growth, which has also resulted in the development of an enterprise corridor, located in centres from Toronto to Waterloo (100 kilometres to the west of Toronto, with the city of Hamilton in between). The Toronto-Waterloo enterprise corridor, it is argued, helped create a suitable climate to assist PSM change, specifically in the case of the CBC.

Toronto's high-technology clusters contain different forms of co-working spaces designed to amplify entrepreneurialism and cross-sector, cross-skill collaboration. This is achieved through training, socialisation (in cafes, chill-out spaces, and associated social media), and targeted knowledge-exchange sessions. These sites of pooling (Komorowski, 2019) range from grassroots co-working spaces to those run by incorporated public-private consortia run by universities, private businesses, and the government. We also found several large international co-working franchises such as WeWork and Techstars in the Toronto setting that also provide co-working spaces across North America and Europe.

To illustrate the significance of the co-working model, in a pre-Covid-19 world, the MaRS complex in downtown Toronto aggregates around 500 government, industrial, educational, and community firms under its public-private partnership structure (MaRS, 2018b). Academic partners include the

University of Toronto, York University Toronto, Ryerson University, and the Ontario College of Art and Design. Corporate partners include American Express, IBM, Microsoft Ventures, Rogers, and Siemens. The Ontario provincial government and the Canadian federal government support this MaRS Discovery District.

MaRS describes itself as “a curated community of entrepreneurs, investors, corporates, academics and government partners” (MaRS, 2018b: para. 1). They claim their aggregated organisations employ over 12,800 people in small, medium, and large high-technology businesses – in a series of linked glass-sided buildings resembling the headquarters of a global corporation. MaRS claims to have raised over CAD 4.8 billion in capital investment (from 2008–2017) and generated over CAD 3.1 billion in revenue (2008–2017):

We bring together educators, researchers, social scientists, entrepreneurs and business experts under one roof. Founded by civic leaders, we have a mission that is equal parts public and private – an entrepreneurial venture designed to bridge the gap between what people need and what governments can provide (MaRS, 2018a: para. 2).

Our research found several co-working spaces developing specifically for the media and creative industries within the cities in this study. A cross-city finding from the project is that there are few mechanisms for PSM to engage with SMEs. Co-working and the close collaboration found between high-technology firms is significantly different from PSM’s model of commissioning content from creative outlets. The lack of ongoing innovation-oriented partnership working between high technology SMEs and PSM is a missed opportunity. Interviews with personnel across the sectors illustrate a very strong commitment in the SME population to the development of services in the public good.<sup>3</sup>

In Toronto the CBC’s adaptation to datafication has been challenging, situated as it is within the CBC’s community media offerings centring on the cities neighbouring Toronto. Experiments began in 2012 with a “radio with digital components” approach in the Kitchener-Waterloo area of Ontario (personal interview with senior manager, CBC Toronto, 2016). In 2014, local web pages were launched in Hamilton, Ontario, cutting the morning drive-time radio news show to fund development. The audience response was highly negative as the chosen media was inappropriate for their consumption preferences and there was little consultation. In 2016, a further experiment was conducted in London, Ontario; a digital-only, mobile-first approach to news stories.

The newsroom was reorganised, and television and radio replaced with a media-neutral approach. The best stories led, regardless of whether they were audio or video, and they were delivered first to mobile phones: “We changed our operating methods, the philosophy” (personal interview with senior manager, CBC Toronto, 2016).



Content is now delivered from CBC's Ontario newsrooms as a "river of data". This has resulted, according to the CBC, in a 70 per cent increase in consumption: "We're now seeing a threefold or triple digit increase in the volume of daily visits to mobile" (personal interview with senior manager, CBC Toronto, 2016). There is still, however, a cultural orientation within CBC towards departmentalism; other CBC personnel refer to digital services as something apart from television and radio. Digital and social media were still framed as being "new" in some instances:

We're writing our journalistic policies right now to accommodate a computer-to-computer sort of approach. [...] We're trying to figure how it fits into the workflow and how we translate this information into stories that resonate with people. (personal interview with senior director of digital media, CBC Toronto, 2016)

The presence of high technology companies in Toronto and wider Ontario undoubtedly have an influence on CBC, not least because they have the advantage of being less regulated. Over the last few years, Netflix has established a solid customer base, and they are not at all constrained by the Canadian 1991 *Broadcasting Act*, unlike CBC.

A key issue holding back datafication, identified by Professor Charles Davis of Ryerson University in Toronto during an interview in 2016, is that film and television companies are strong in product innovation and project management, but "they're much weaker in all the customer-facing parts of the fit, like marketing and targeting customers, and distribution and business models".

## Discussion: Organisational change

The project seeks to identify those structures, practices, and values observable in successful high-technology firms that might be useful for PSM organisational and cultural adaptation. Given that results showed observable differences between PSM organisations and other technology businesses, six paired concepts derived from them might improve SME-PSM exchange (Głowacki & Jackson, 2019).

### *Aggregation versus isolation*

High-technology clusters aggregate firms where symbiotic action is beneficial to advance business through innovation. Public-private partnerships were highly evident, largely as jointly-operated incubation or acceleration facilities, such as co-working spaces, where universities and commercial firms wish to increase bidirectional knowledge flow.

The PSM organisations in the study were found to be more likely to partner with cultural and educational institutions rather than firms in high-technology clusters, probably because they have a similar non-commercial orientation. The PSM outlets were much more internally focused. PSM staff had a far lower awareness of the need for change. Change was associated with change management practices rather than adopting a continuous – but varying – level of organisational fluidity. There is also evidence of a residual culture of entitlement within PSM organisations, which amplifies isolationism.

### *Entrepreneurialism versus islands of innovation*

Successful high technology enterprises (particularly the smaller firms) embed entrepreneurialism within the organisational culture. Most firms interviewed were mission-led, working for the common good or tackling global issues goals such as the circular economy, health and wellness, or climate change. This is highly compatible with PSM values.

A far lower level of entrepreneurialism was evident in PSM with active individuals isolated in small research and development departments – several of the smaller PSMs had no such department. These interviewees felt they were working in “islands of innovation”. Small experiments were often not taken forward due to a lack of in-house incubation or acceleration programmes.

### *Agility versus rigidity*

High-technology firms have more fluid organisational structures relying instead on trust relationships developed through community of practice programmes such as training, networking, and events. These firms orientate towards processes supporting continuous change. Decision-making is swift within teams who have higher levels of autonomy, increasing the ability to pivot in response to external technological, cultural, and societal changes.

The rigid departmentalised structures of PSM make decision-making much slower than in high technology firms. Content and technology departments are often separated and they have low autonomy. There was evidence that the common PSM practice of “referring upwards” during decision-making either inhibits progress or it can be used to slow down unpopular development.

### *Advanced versus emerging pro-social workplaces*

There was strong evidence that social science is being used to design collaborative workspaces in high-technology firms and co-working spaces to support knowledge exchange and relationship building. Trust relationships are developed in kitchens, project spaces, communication booths, roof gardens, chill-out spaces, and reading or discussion corners.

Several PSM organisations in the study had adapted their offices to provide pro-social spaces; however, this appeared to be a form of “dressing”, as the underlying processes to support the incubation of any resulting project were not universally evident.

### *Communities of practice versus contractual frameworks*

Co-working spaces aggregate pools of SMEs who start up and are then often acquired by larger firms (Google’s business model). In the case of each cluster, these pools of SMEs are where most of the innovation lies. Each co-working space we visited across North America and Europe considered the community manager to be the most critical employee. These skilled individuals run the networking evenings, bagel breakfasts, Friday beers, and after work parties, and it is the community manager who often selects which SMEs have desk space. Trust relationships are seeded in these face-to-face interactions. On new projects, face-to-face engagement is prioritised. When production is going well, one interviewee commented, project management and communication can move online. This enables projects to be facilitated and managed in the Cloud or on dedicated servers to which all parties have access. In a post-Covid-19 industrial environment, good virtual working is likely to significantly rise in importance.

PSM organisations have no role equivalent to a community manager. The PSM-independent production company relationship is overseen by a commissioning editor.

### *Technology-oriented neighbourhoods versus corporate headquarters*

High-technology clusters are almost exclusively found in city regeneration areas. In the case of Toronto this is due to proactive stimulation by Toronto City Hall, aiming to grow business-growth corridors or districts. This held true across all the cities, and these initiatives almost always also included encouraging an active relationship with a university science or technology department.

Although around 30 per cent of the PSM organisations in this study are operating in close proximity to a high-technology cluster there was very little formal interaction. Other PSM organisations were further afield, located in corporate headquarters outside of the city centre, or situated closer to the city’s cultural and civic districts. The location – and in several cases, also the external appearance of the PSM – was clearly signaling early twentieth-century industrial and societal orientations. Several of the larger PSM organisations in the study are addressing this, notably MediaCityUK which has the BBC, Salford University, and several large cultural institutions and commercial producers as co-located partners. MediaHub Brussels launched in June 2018, this is a collaboration that includes three universities (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Université Libre de

Bruxelles, and Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles) plus independent production companies and local government. There are longer-term aspirations to create a media district, *Mediapark.brussels*, also referred to as Brussels Media City, on a 41,000 square-metre site outside the capital. VRT, the Flemish PSM, aims to open facilities there. These media clusters are more likely to change PSM's organisational culture by reducing isolationism and increasing the potential for collaboration with high-technology firms.

## Conclusions on universality through datafication and fluidity

The question this chapter asks through its collection of current academic work is how to ensure the universal appeal of PSM content in a media landscape that is increasingly characterised by the ubiquity of datafied platforms. Datafication enables selections of content to be delivered to individual users, groups, and mass audiences when they want it and how they want it, increasing potential access and appeal. PSM has, however, been slow to adapt, partly due to the departmentalism and rigidity evident in its organisational structures and production processes.

The results of the Canadian element of this large international study suggest relationships with a wider creative sector, particularly high-technology firms, are highly likely to benefit PSM. Co-working spaces may offer a vehicle for SME–PSM knowledge exchange, but it is only one model – further research would be useful going forward. SMEs working in high-technology sectors are – like PSM – interested in developing platforms and services in the public good. The dependency for PSM is being able to operate with sufficient fluidity, to understand data flows and data management, and lastly, to adopt an increased audience-centric orientation.

For the CBC the radical solution was to move towards the previously explained mobile-first, media-neutral strategy:

We have a concept of the news river, where everything that goes into mobile goes into the news river... The programmes are clients of the news river, so they take stuff out, do their own business, add their own dimension, and put it back in the river for people downstream. (personal interview with senior manager, CBC Toronto, 2016)

We concluded there is a distinct difference in organisational culture between high-technology clusters and PSM largely relating to PSM's orientation to datafication and close-partnership working. The lack of advanced datafication in PSM results in a correspondingly reduced ability to nuance content for delivery to increasingly diverse publics via constantly changing receiving devices. This in

turn reduces public access, hence also universal appeal. These deficiencies have very serious implications when considering universal access for – and appeal to – young audiences who preference mobile phones. Overall, PSM organisations have a lower ability to adapt to external market conditions and reduced opportunities to support the development of an informed citizenry.

### Towards PSM 3.0

At the beginning of this chapter the questions under review were whether PSM can adapt to data-driven media forms, and if so, how will this benefit the PSM mission to provide universal access and appeal for increasingly diverse publics? Also, what enables cross-cultural and cross-sector innovation to succeed? Through the investigations it's become clear the most critical element is whether PSM can adapt to datafication. Streaming, social media, and other forms of recombinatory content (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) require high cognizance and practical ability with databases, data analytics, and data management. Thus, returning to the questions in our research we can attempt answers as follows.

#### *How will datafication benefit the PSM mission to provide universal access and appeal?*

Organisations that are datafied can more easily produce recombinatory content. Datafication also enables the nuancing of content to different audiences at different times on different devices, which could support PSM's mission of providing universality. Accessibility could also be increased alongside stronger potential to support an informed citizenry.

#### *Can PSM adapt to data driven media forms?*

Encouragingly, PSM is already experimenting with data-driven media. The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), the Japanese PSM, has developed early warning systems such as tsunami alerts that aggregate available geolocated data to pinpoint safe and unsafe areas, to assist the public. The European Broadcasting Union's two-year MediaRoad project (2017–2019) encouraged PSMs to engage with SMEs involved in emerging technologies by running Sandbox Workshops. In this study, the example of CBC and its mobile-first data strategy for local content in the cities of Hamilton and London, Ontario, has been successfully expanded to all their newsroom content. Their audience figures for mobile have risen dramatically (by 70%) as a result. This is significant as young audiences rely on mobile phones for news. CBC now refers to news content as being a

river of data of different kinds (visual, audio, and text). The material can be recombined to suit different communities, regions, or time zones.

*What enables cross-cultural and cross-sector innovation to succeed?*

The co-working model typically found in high-technology clusters enables a wider range of creatives to work together in trust relationships. These enable agile production teams to work together more quickly, to work virtually online, and to deliver projects faster due to fewer decisions being required as a consequence of having more autonomy. “Living” companies such as high-technology SMEs benefit from continuous knowledge exchange or pooling. Larger companies can benefit from these sites of acceleration and incubation by partnering with SMEs. Organisational structures facilitating public-private partnerships would be highly useful to accelerate innovation in the PSM project.

Finally, returning to Jakubowicz’s imagining of PSM 3.0, one would look towards a PSM organisation that is: 1) able to operate at national and international levels providing a public sphere reflecting multiculturalism and multimediality; 2) able to offer universal access; 3) able to teach the new digital literacies and engage a participatory public for the greater good; and, 4) able to act as an umbrella for “a broad network of public and civic institutions and groups” (Jakubowicz, 2010: 18).

To achieve Jakubowicz’s imagining of PSM 3.0 substantial new production and management literacies have to be achieved. Organisational structures have to be adapted and – perhaps more significantly, as suggested in the Toronto research related to the CBC and SME cultures – offer new collaborations with a much wider constituency. These relationships will need to be both forged and sustained.

## Notes

1. This chapter presents findings from an international study, *Organisational Culture of Public Service Media in the Digital Mediascapes: People, Values and Processes*, which was funded by the National Science Center (NCN) (project website: [www.creativemediacusters.com](http://www.creativemediacusters.com)).
2. The other comparative cities were: Austin (US), Boston/Cambridge (US), Brussels (Belgium), Copenhagen (Denmark), Detroit (US), London (UK), Tallinn (Estonia), Toronto (Canada), Vienna (Austria), and Warsaw (Poland). The PSM organisations considered were: National Public Radio (NPR) station KUT in Austin; Public Radio Exchange (PRX) in Boston; Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie (VRT) in Belgium; Danmarks Radio (DR) in Denmark; public radio station WDET and Detroit Public TV in the US; the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the UK; Eesti Rahvusringhääling (ERR) in Estonia; the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in Canada; Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF) in Austria; and Polskie Radio (PR) and Telewizja Polska (TVP) in Poland. The project was funded by the National Science Centre of Poland (NCN).
3. The European Broadcasting Union’s MediaRoad project (2017–2019) sought to address this lack of interaction between SMEs and PSM organisations by offering a “sandbox” for collaborative technical experimentation (MediaRoad, 2017). The project, supported by a Horizon 2020 European grant, also offered the opportunity for the development of policy.

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Since the start of telephony and later in broadcasting, the pursuit of *universal service* has legitimated the ownership and operation of media as a public trust. Until the 1980s, this principle was the bedrock for the broadcasting mission and is still a mandated requirement for public media companies today. But in practice, the universalism ideal was largely abandoned in the 1980s as media deregulation promised more competition, innovation, and vigorous economic growth. Some of this came true, but at a worrisome cost. Growing distrust in media today is partly rooted in the illusion that more media in more platforms would inevitably ensure better media in all platforms. There is now more of everything on offer except social responsibility. This collection interrogates the historic universalism mission in public service broadcasting and explores its contemporary relevance for public service media. Taking a critical perspective on media policy and performance, the volume contributes to a much-needed contemporary reassessment that clarifies the importance of universalism for equity in access and provision, trustworthy content, and inclusive participation in the context of advancing digitalisation and globalisation. The collection situates universalism as an aspirational quest and inspirational pursuit. Researchers and policy makers will find the collection valuable for conceptualisation and strategic managers will find it helpful as a principled basis in the pursuit of improved reach and value.

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