PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA AND CHALLENGE OF CROSSING BORDERS: ASSESSING NEW MODELS

Minna Aslama Horowitz

ABSTRACT *This article addresses the need for new models of public service media. First, the article looks at the core factors, or borders, that frame the quest for new models: the digitalization, de-institutionalization, and globalization of communication. It then outlines some suggested models for public service. Finally, the models are assessed in terms of how they respond to some core challenges for public service media as a concept and as an institution.*

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INTRODUCTION: PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA BEYOND BORDERS

The role of public service in the media sector is in flux. This statement is hard to disagree with, even if some thinkers note that the crisis of public service broadcasting, and the need to find new models for it, has been an ongoing discourse for many decades (e.g. Cushion, 2012). As this special issue on the future of public service media highlights: the challenges of public service media's core mission and philosophy, as well as the practical realization of public service in the media ecosystem, are very real. Ingrid Volkmer (2015) argues in her recent commentary on the future of public service, as many before her have done, that the existing public service broadcasting model is increasingly under pressure in Europe, greatly due to the demands of digitalization. The analysis by Karin Voltmer (2013: 160), based on her research on transitional democracies, further indicates that old and emerging public service media institutions all around the world are threatened, both by commercial competitors and governmental pressures. They need to find new ways to ensure their independence and inclusivity.

Ingrid Volkmer (2015) further underlines a theoretical challenge, one that scholars in particular are responsible for, and which is echoed in Michael Tracey's essay in this issue. While pressures on public service institutions require strategic thinking by those institutions, we also need a conceptual re-modeling of public service. Volkmer (2015) notes that the most researched areas in this field – social media logic and public service, new journalistic practices, traditional public service values in the competitive environment, and public service in the media sector collaborating with other public sectors – are important angles, yet do not engage researchers and others in truly, multidisciplinary, and conceptual discussions of what public service could or should mean.

Contribution of this article is a small step in the direction of thinking about models for re-iterations of public service in the media sector. First, the article looks at the core factors, or borders, that frame the need to create new models for public service. It then outlines some suggested models for public service. Finally, the models are assessed in terms of how they respond to how they respond to some core challenges for existing public service media as a concept and as an institution.

CONTEXT: CROSSING BORDERS, SHARING CHALLENGES

The context of understanding public service in a new way seems to require crossing at least three conventional borders. There are three interrelated developments that have greatly defined the recent developments of what is conventionally called public service, that is, public service broadcasting (PSB) institutions. Digitalization may be the most obvious trend, indicating not only channel proliferation, but also the transition from radio and television broadcasting to the multimedia presence of public service media (PSM). For public service broadcasters in Europe, this first meant a battle of whether these organizations would be restricted, allowed, or even supported to exist online at all

(Syvertsen and Aslama, 2007). Later, most organizations embraced crossing the border from broadcaster to content-provider (Volkmer, 2015).

Digitalization is inherently related to the second boundary that requires re-thinking, that is, whether public service media can be said to exist outside of institutional borders. While the interest to understand and rework public media questions has traditionally happened by and/or with public media organizations, now there is an increasing amount of thinking and innovation at the structural level (industry landscape, policy-making) as well as at the individual, small-scale, grassroots level (a variety of civic journalism groups, not-for-profit media websites, and blogger collectives, as well as micro-media by individuals) (Horowitz and Clark, 2014). Some thinkers even argue that the dominant theory of public broadcasting, based on the early model of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), is becoming more and more obsolete. Not only are other media outlets performing many tasks of the public broadcasters, our globalizing world also challenges the traditionally nation-state-focused remit, and practices, of public service broadcasters. Evidently, many mobile and online services (especially social media ones) are by nature global policy questions. In addition, innovative content production practices, and approaches to participation, as well as access, travel across national borders (Bajomi-Lazar et al., 2012: 358-360).

The third border to cross, then, is indeed that of the nation-bound nature of public service. Since its birth in the 1920s, public service broadcasting (PSB) has been a quintessentially national project. PSB remits have often carried an explicit or implicit responsibility for promoting citizenship, as well as national culture. In some cases, they also marked cooperation and understanding. "Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation" is the motto of the BBC (Thompson, 2010). This sense of national, cultural and political understanding, and unity is also echoed in the agenda of UNESCO (2014). Yet, many PSM organizations offer content for global audiences, if not officially, then implicitly. While they might restrict access to streaming their programming from abroad, much of the national public service media content exists on accessible global platforms such as: broadcasters' home pages, Facebook and YouTube (Volkmer, 2015).

And, even if the practices of programming were not global, the challenges PSB/PSM institutions face seem to be. At the outset, it would seem that public service media organizations around the world do not share very much in common. Even in the Nordic countries, with relatively similar political, cultural, and economic conditions, media markets and, more specifically, the organization and remit of public service broadcasting, differ notably (e.g. Syvertsen et al., 2014). The very definition of what is public broadcasting also differs in different contexts, and there certainly exists a grey area between the definitions and practices of state and public media (Tambini, 2015). In some countries, the label of PSB can be used for something that does the opposite of the traditional, core mission of increasing diversity (Bajomi-Lazar, 2015).

While many national or regional differences continue to exist, a recent global look at challenges of public service (and state-administered media) by the so-called *Mapping*

Digital Media (MDM) research project of the Open Society Foundation (2009-2014)[1] highlights some significant similarities between public media institutions around the world. Comprising of 56 countries, the purpose of this research effort was to assess the global opportunities and risks that are created for media by the following developments: the switch-over from analogue broadcasting to digital broadcasting; growth of new media platforms as sources of news; and the convergence of traditional broadcasting with telecommunications. MDM has addressed broad PSM-relevant issues – from spectrum allocation to other legislative approaches, audience structures, and financial aspects of national media markets around the world, but it has also dedicated both special reports, as well as a designated section, in each report to the role of publicly owned media in each country in question.

Based on the country report, Damien Tambini (2015) has assessed the state of public service and state-administered media around the world. Unsurprisingly, his core finding is that those media take a varied and complex role around the world. He highlights some regional differences (Tambini, 2015: 1420) by noting that only in Europe do the institutions of independent PSM hold a strong position. He continues to point out that the norm of the mixed broadcasting system may be becoming more prevalent with the incorporation of state-administered broadcasters from Central and Eastern Europe into the conventional PSM model. But in the Middle East and North Africa, PSB independence faces numerous challenges.

Despite these fundamental differences, there are three clear unifying challenges. First, digitalization has drastically changed the role of the institutional public broadcaster/media organization. Second, audiences for state-administered and public service media are in decline everywhere. This crisis has resulted both in the innovation and reinvention of public service's mission and programming, as well as its decline. The third common global challenge Tambini identifies is the lack of an "open and transparent debate" (2015: 1421) and policy-making regarding public service media and its evolution.

SOME SUGGESTED MODELS – AN OVERVIEW

The above described context, albeit a simplified summary, highlights not only the complexity of the interrelated trends, but also the prevalence of core challenges, in their numerous variations, around the globe. The question at issue is about the mandate and role of public service, the technological, or distribution, and the organizational arrangement of public service in order to serve, and interact with audiences.

Given the challenges outlined above, and their occurrence in many countries and contexts, it is interesting that relatively few new revisionary models have so far been proposed to address the new context that public service media find themselves in. Here, the purpose is not to analyze policy discussions and revisions, in individual countries, or at the EU level, that pertain to the specifics of legal remits and funding. The aim is to map

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[1] See Mapping Digital Media, 2014.

some comprehensive new ideas about the ideal, and realization, of public service media in terms of its core mission. The following depicts a selection of such ideas proposed by public service media scholars in recent years.

First, Peter Bajomi-Lazar et al. (2012: 374-375) offer three institutional revisionist frames to the way PSM should be redesigned in the drastically changed media landscape. The Liberal Approach believes that the role of PSM is to correct market imperfections, i.e., to fill in the gaps in content and services that the free market – the commercial competitors – do not find profitable to offer. This approach is very much synonymous to the Market Failure Perspective (e.g., Berg et al., 2014) on PSM: The role of demand is emphasized and the purpose of PSM is to serve those underserved by the free market. The Radical Democratic Approach, in contrast, focuses on the distinctiveness of PSM in its mission to serve the public interest. This means that PSM should (continue to) offer news and journalism, music and culture, drama, children's programming, as well as events that bring the nation together. As a new, third, alternative, Bajomi-Lazar et al. (2012) propose an ecological mission for PSM in which public interest media could be reinterpreted, and serve as an ambassador for, ecological, sustainable life styles.

Very much in line with the ecological mission is the idea that PSM should be based on human rights treaties and legislation, and that it should in particular guard issues related to human rights, both in its content and as an organization (Boev and Bukovska, 2011). The treaties would function as legal benchmarks for assessing the core qualities of PSM that, in this model are: a high degree of participation of all interested parties; non-discrimination (including equality and inclusiveness); and the role of PSM as empowering rights holders to claim and exercise their rights. They also include an institutional component, namely accountability (the state should be accountable for its policy in support of PSM while PSM institutions should be fully accountable for their actions). A special feature of the model is that it includes a number of new stakeholders in the work of the PSM: not only the institution, the national government and regulator, but also audiences play a crucial role in creating and monitoring of PSM. In addition, international human rights bodies as well as communities of human rights activists/advocates are stakeholders here.

Mira Burri (2015), together with Patricia Aufderheide and Jessica Clark (2009), offer perhaps the most radical, networked models of public service media. Burri's (2015) premise is that a PSM institution does exist in a networked environment and should thus both create content of public value (e.g., quality journalism, but also other genres), as well as network and curate such content. In this vein, she proposes a model along the ideal of the Radical Democratic approach, but offers specific mandates for the era of networked communication. She notes that since television still matters, PSM could also mediate the transitions and interactions between legacy media (TV) and online forms. One distinct feature of PSM could be its role as a 'public memory,' and that PSM should utilize big data in evidence-based decision-making to better serve the public. Aufderheide and Clark (2009) go even further. They note that 'Public Media 2.0' will not be tied to an institution but can be both *de jure* and *de facto*: a commercial TV channel or a social media group may function as public media equally well as an official institution. Public media, thus, should

be citizen-, or user-centric. Consequently, public media can differ for citizens depending on specific issues, and/or, local, national or international contexts.

DISCUSSION: HOW THE MODELS WORK

How do the challenges and proposed models meet? The following matrix briefly sums up the core challenges for PSM as identified in this article, and highlights how these alternative models reflect these challenges. The first issue is that of digitalization: what kind of bridge does the model build for public service to transition from broadcasting to the multi-media era, or, at the very least, what is the relationship between the model and the digital media landscape? The second issue reflects on the organizational solutions of the model. How does institutional public service *de jure* fare in the model? Are there other players? How is the sustainability, a global concern for most public service and state-administered media (Tambini, 2015) addressed institutionally in the model? Finally, the last issue relates to the relationship to audiences, including the global media ecosystem that many audience members of today's PSM navigate. According to each model, who is public service media addressing and serving?

Table 1. **Matrix of selected alternative models of PSM**

Digitalization – technology		
Democratic approach	Liberal approach	Sustainable approach
Must be present in all platforms	Challenged ("distorts the market")	Possibly – not explicitly mentioned
Human rights approach	Institutional-networked approach	Non-institutional networked approach
Possibly: could also support new communication rights, including access	New tech. key; mediator between legacy and new tech	Founded on new tech
Organization – role and remit, sustainability		
Democratic approach	Liberal approach	Sustainable approach
Independent (in theory); sustainability is threatened in most contexts (debates on public funding)	Independent but "filling the gap" mandate might be limited due to political agendas	Independent (in theory)
Human rights approach	Institutional-networked approach	Non-institutional networked approach
Independent – multi-stakeholder approach would spread power over governance	Independent – multi-stakeholder approach would spread power over governance; take international governance into account	Independent – a network is harder to control

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Audiences – reach, relationship; national or global		
Democratic approach	Liberal approach	Sustainable approach
Serves everyone, nation-based	Serves the underserved	Focuses on the ecosystem, holistic
Human rights approach	Institutional-networked approach	Non-institutional networked approach
Focused on the individual = rights-based. Multiple stakeholders, international	Serves everyone	Serves individuals and communities: local – national – global – issue-oriented

Following the summary presented in Table 1, the Radical Democratic Approach replicates the original ideal of a universal, full service public service broadcaster that unifies as well as supports the needs of minorities. Its challenge seems to be the extent of the resources needed for such effort. This is precisely the debate that many mature PSB nations have engaged in in the past decade, in which the Liberal Approach of limited public service has been offered as a solution. The well-known argument goes: proliferation of content equals a decreasing need for full service by public broadcasters, especially in new platforms. The argumentation against the Democratic Approach has been especially heated in contexts where newspapers are competing with their online content with PSM online news. The Sustainable Approach would offer PSM a very focused public interest remit. At the same time, it seems to replicate a very paternalistic approach to audiences in advocating issues and content focused on sustainability. This model has no specific solutions in terms of a digital presence, or in terms of the financial sustainability of the service.

The Human Rights Approach, then, might have some leverage as an additional remit to PSM (Horowitz and Nieminen 2015, forthcoming) since its mission is, to an extent global, and has some international legislative backing, and since it matches the rights-based discourse around the Internet and so-called Digital Rights. Consequently, this approach might gain some traction with multiple stakeholders and provide a global-local connection. Yet, again, the question is how the sustainability of such PSM, as a human rights advocate, could be envisioned and secured.

The Institutional-Networked Approach seems as a viable alternative to mature public media institutions that could extend their role into curating. In addition, many of the old PSBs naturally fit the role of preserving the national memory, in that they have dominated the media landscapes in the respective countries and already possess large archives of national memory in an audiovisual form. But how would their mission look in the era of abundant multi-platform content? And again, how would they be positioned and funded in terms of their relationships to commercial, or other content, and the government? What memories would be deemed legitimate?

Patricia Aufderheide and Jessica Clark (2009), with their Public Media 2.0 model, provide a true alternative in terms of the local-global dimension, as well as sustainability. Their idea is that the citizen-user is the one to decide what kind of content she needs – locally, nationally and globally issue-wise. These users will search for, demand, and find suitable content to serve their different needs. No one institution needs to be responsible for everything. At the same time, this model requires a robust media ecosystem as well as a high level of media literacy. In addition, it does not address the sustainability of its nodes. If the social media platform you use for acquiring regional news and participating in related debates shuts down, what then?

Finally, the models of public service media depicted above have very different starting points in terms of one of the core borders to cross, namely, the possible global dimension of public service media. Two of the three institutional models depicted by Peter Bajomi-Lazar et al. (2012) replicate very much the mass media era's views on national PSB institutions, with justification more suitable to the web 2.0 era. The third one, in emphasizing sustainability, clearly takes a more global approach, as does the idea of PSM realizing communication rights and advocating human rights. The strength of the latter point is that many international and regional agreements and declarations on human rights can work in tandem to PSM's goal of supporting greater communication rights (Boev and Bukovska, 2011). Mira Burri (2015) is cautious of a "one-size-fits-all," approach and recognizes contextuality of some PSM's circumstances, but also highlights the global governance issues of the Internet era, from which PSM organizations are not exempt. Patricia Aufderheide and Jessica Clark (2009) embrace the idea through a local – global continuum by focusing on the needs of the media user, rather than the institution. Another question is, how these models might serve in solving some of the core challenges for PSM: issues that are both universal and yet, most often, very specific.

CONCLUSION: A QUEST FOR ALTERNATIVES FOR FUTURE PSM

This article has provided only a brief, overview of the issues public service broadcasters need to tackle today in order to ensure their future. The future may hold great promise because of a great legacy: while PSB organizations are in a very different situation than in the mass media era, they still remain prominent in many parts of the globe. For instance, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) has 76 active members in 56 European countries[2] as well as 36 associate members in 21 other countries,[3] most of which are public service media organizations. The Public Media Alliance, the largest association of public service broadcasters, has members in 54 countries around the world (Public Media Alliance, 2015).

The main argument here is, obviously, that new models need to be further conceptualized, in order to secure a future for PSM in its variations. There might be a set of new contextual factors defining the future of PSM, but as Karol Jakubowicz (2014: 213-

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[2] "Active membership is for broadcasting organizations whose states fall within the European Broadcasting Area, as defined by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), or otherwise those who are members of the Council of Europe." (EBU, 2015a)

[3] See EBU, 2015b.

214) reminds us, historical developments have always shaped models for public service broadcasting. In the mass media era, there have existed three main models of the creation of PSB or the transformation of state broadcasting to PSM, as applying to different country contexts. The paternalistic model has been based on the idea of public enlightenment, giving PSM a normative role (as in the classic BBC model of public broadcasting). The democratic and emancipatory model emerged when state broadcasting organizations were transformed into PSB in the 1970s and 1980s, when state broadcasting became obsolete as a state monopoly (a development in some European as well as non-European countries). Finally, the systemic approach where PSB has been considered part and parcel of political change, such as the transition to democracy in many former Communist countries in Eastern European. At this juncture in history, these models now need revision, whether in their countries of origin or as models for emerging PSMs.

However, it can be predicted that the process will not be easy, if judged by the fight for the PSM to exist in the past decade: mature PSB organizations are fiercely challenged as being disruptive to competition with commercial operators in the digital era; governments wish to spend less on public goods and services; and in some cases, they also aim at tightening control on communication and media content. Media audiences are offered, and they also create, ever more content, yet that may not automatically lead to a diversity of exposure, but may result in "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011). In addition, the Internet and mobile communications have re-ignited discussions on freedom of expression, access to information, and communication technologies, as well as intellectual property rights, privacy, surveillance and the right to be forgotten – all of which are global issues for any multi-platform media, including PSM.

Looking into the future of public service in the field of media and communication, it is essential for those advocating for the existence of PSM to rethink how to build new models that are accessible and inclusive, contextually sensitive, technologically and financially viable, institutionally independent – and globally meaningful. Any new models of public service media clearly need to respond to some of the main concerns and challenges outlined by the MDM studies. Based on the above analysis, however, it seems that there are no brilliant alternatives to the existing PSM organizations that could solve the severe problems of independence, sustainability, audience engagement, and (costly) multi-platform presence. In addition, as noted by Damien Tambini (2015), there is relatively little discussion about this state of affairs, let alone global consultations on the matter. The models depicted above, alternative as they may be, still very much rely on the core institutional model established in the West. More models from outside of the mature, resource-rich PSM countries need to be researched as they may provide new insights to the global challenges.

In addition, the traditional model of PSB may just have been glorified and it might be hard to let the ideal, and the institutions go, especially as there is no one clear alternative. It also seems that plenty of scholarship is dedicated to legitimizing PSM institutions, and analyzing related policies, rather than examining in which tasks different PSM institutions possibly failed, and what can be learned from these failures.

So, apart from more systematic gathering of ideas and inspiration for new models – what could the next steps be? The least we, as scholars, can do is to react and respond to the fact that globally, debates about public media are not open and diverse. Perhaps we need to, as Silvio Waisboard (2015: 187-193) suggests in his article about internationalizing media studies, work in several frontiers. First, we need to analyze neglected issues. In this article, we have established that we know very little about existing alternatives, public media *de facto*, whether in the global North or South. Similarly, drawing from non-Western theorization of globalization and the media might help in reframing the public service media of the future. The discussion also needs to bring in more understanding of the needs by different PSM stakeholders (see, e.g., Horowitz and Clark, 2014). Related to this, in terms of how media research could contribute to the practice of media development, an under-researcher issue concerns the capacity-building needs – in terms of policy-making, journalism practices, organizational management, and so on. These are just some of the areas that have not been addressed in detail within the public media research community.

Another strategy (Waisboard, 2015) would be to conduct more comparative research. The MDM project gave an overview of 56 countries, but the section on public service media was one of many. Clearly more regional and global comparisons can shed light on new models and the needs of different contexts. Third, we need to analyze trans-border, global questions. The MDM research as well as the network questionnaire depicted in this article has given some indication of possible trans-border issues for public media. This needs to be systematically researched further. In addition to these strategies, it just might be that we, as public media scholars, too, need to be brutally honest about the successes and failures – in remit, content, policies, technological solutions, and funding models – if we wish to further develop these models, or create new ones.

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NADILAŽENJE GRANICA JAVNOG MEDIJSKOG SERVISA: VREDNOVANJE NOVIH MODELA

Minna Aslama Horowitz

SAŽETAK *Ovaj rad ističe potrebu za novim modelima javnog medijskog servisa. Prvo se u radu daje pregled ključnih faktora, odnosno granica koje uokviruju potragu za novim modelima, a to su: digitalizacija, deinstitucionalizacija i globalizacija komunikacije. Potom se sažeto opisuju pojedini predloženi modeli javnog medijskog servisa. Na kraju rada ti su modeli vrednovani s obzirom na to kako odgovaraju na potrebu nužnog nadilaženja starih granica postojećeg javnog medijskog servisa.*

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