

Public Service Media from a Nordic Horizon: Politics, Markets, Programming and Users. Nordic Public Service Media Map 2.¹, Ulla Carlsson (ed.)

This edited book is the second publication of the Nordicom (Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research) project entitled *Public Service Media from a Nordic Horizon: Politics, Markets, Programming and Users*. The project is a part of the globalization strategy of the Nordic ministers of culture called "The Creative North". In this book, edited by the director of Nordicom Ulla Carlsson, fourteen authors in nine chapters discuss various issues of public service media (PSM) in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. These issues include: contemporary challenges to public service broadcasting (PSB), institutional regulatory settings, financing models, transnational cooperative strategies, children's programming, cultural diversity issues and European Union regulation challenges.

In the introductory chapter Christian S. Nissen gives an overview of the specificities of the Nordic political and social context, and explains the international influences on PSM. All Nordic countries are affluent societies with well developed welfare states; there is political consensus about basic political issues; there is also a high level of cultural homogenization between the countries; and there is a high level of societal trust in democratic institutions. Non-interference in PSM editorial activity is a socially acknowledged norm, and the public service ideal and remit are broadly supported. Due to the fact that the media markets in individual countries are small, there is also a high level of programme exchange, as well as cooperation on co-productions. However, tackling specific global challenges is also an ongoing task for Nordic media policies and regulations, especially in the context of structural and content production aspects. A significant influence comes from the Anglo-Saxon media production and from the European Union regarding market competition and state aid rules. As the author concludes, general relationships and dependencies between politics and the media might be similar to other

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countries, but are probably more discrete and subtle in Nordic countries due to high levels of transparency and developed political culture (15).

Taisto Hujanen, Lennart Weibull and Eva Harrie analyze the PSM contents and audiences in the following chapter. They focus on the consequences of radio and television broadcasting privatization and the expansion of satellite and cable television networks starting from the 1990s. Although experiencing a slight drop in daily audience reach and share in this new structural context, public service companies have kept their focus on news, current affairs, and culture (25) and have reacted to increased audience competition by creating new specialized channels. Since domestic drama and children's programmes are often too expensive to produce for commercial broadcasters, they have remained the key public service programmes (28). In the context of radio there is a similar development with news and current affairs remaining the main programme orientations alongside drama, culture, and entertainment. The authors interpret this relative stability of audience shares and programme schemes as a result of high levels of trust the citizens have in the PSM and its role for the Nordic civil culture (44).

The ensuing chapter by Anker Brink Lund and Gregory Ferrell Lowe looks at the challenges facing PSBs in the Nordic countries, especially regarding their role in what are essentially small market populations. The authors argue that the PSB is an institution in a double sense: first, as an organization in the public sector; second, as an ethos and orientation towards certain values. The problem arises when increased competition threatens to trump its public service ethos (53). This is emphasized in small markets where the production costs are higher per capita, since there are fewer people to share the cost. The authors believe there are three possible directions for PSB to take in the multimedia and highly competitive market: commercializing, purifying or diversifying (67). However they also state that there are no safe routes in this context: "[i]f PSB companies strive too hard for breath, they risk being perceived as commercial and may lose their legitimacy. If they aim to be too narrow, however, they will be marginalized and lose their legitimacy for that reason. If PSB companies are quick to experiment with new technologies, they risk putting scarce resources on the wrong horse..." (70). The only certainty is that they must retain high quality programmes and services in all of the previous scenarios.

The next chapter by Hallvard Moe and Ole J. Mjøs focuses on the arm's length principle of the Nordic PSB regulation. This principle is set-up in different ways, particularly in relation to the running, supervision and funding of public broadcasters. The most vulnerable part, the authors claim, is the funding because the amount of the license fee, and its use, can be susceptible to political power. The independence of public broadcasting is therefore a matter of constant controversy which needs to be scrutinized at all times. The arm's length principle can be used as a guide and an ideal when assessing the regulation of media institutions (89).

The issue of public service financing is the topic of the ensuing chapter by Lars-Åke Engblom. Although traditionally based on license fees and ownership of radio and TV receiver, economic and technological changes are being felt in the PSM financing area as well. Financing systems in the Nordic countries are stable, but differ somewhat in their execution and setup across the countries. Denmark, Norway and Sweden are financed through a license fee, Iceland through a fixed tax since 2009, and Finland through a progressive tax since 2013. The Finish system is income-based, personal and earmarked tax, and has been in preparation since 2008. The new system was introduced because the citizens were disappointed with the digital switchover, and had refused to pay the license fee in protest. The author believes that the Finish case shows a certain alienation from the concept of public service (102). The Icelandic case of the introduction of fixed tax meant that the Finance Minister diverted a part of the PSB tax to public treasury. This meant a 20% drop in budget for the PSB and consequently staff cuts for the PSB organization. However, legal amendments have been announced in recent policy discussion which should abolish the possibility of diverting the collected tax to other areas except for the PSB and the fulfilment of its remit.

In the following chapter, Henrik Hartmann presents the work of Nordvision – a platform for working on co-productions, programme exchanges and general sharing of information and experiences in the region since 1959. This cooperation has recently been strengthened by the digitalization process and the creation of digital archives with a common distribution system between the countries. Co-production mainly involves children's programs, fiction, factual/culture programmes, education and investigative journalism.

Gunn Sara Enli and Elisabeth Staksrud give an overview of the children's programming in the public service broadcasters in the next chapter. The authors present different stages of the development of children's programming. The period between 1960 and 1980 was marked by clear pedagogical goals and a strong educational ethos. The following period between 1980 and 2000 was marked by entertainment and commercialisation due to the de-regulation of TV markets. The final phase between 2000 and 2010 is shaped by globalisation and the rise of specialized niche channels. The PSB's response was to focus on national culture and original productions - an aspect not covered by the commercial programmes. It also focuses on supporting democracy and the development of the public sphere by giving children the opportunities to reflect on current affairs. They have also focused their attention on the internet in order to provide appropriate content for children in the new media environment.

Cultural diversity is another important issue for the PSM, and is covered by Ingegerd Rydin in the following chapter. Although most offer some sort of programming for minorities and immigrants, the authors point out there is a general lack of data and research in this area. In the context of increased competition from commercial broadcasters, and the turn to national issues as a programming strategy for the PSM, minorities sometimes feel excluded from representation in Nordic societies. One possible strategy for diasporic groups in the contemporary, and global, media environment is the combination of diverse media products into a unique experience, where the PSB, internet media, and online communities are combined to create a personalized experience.

The final chapter by Henrik Selin looks at the European Union influences. He focuses closely on media distribution, media content, copyright in the information society, state aid regulation, and the EU 2020 digital agenda. Although the EU influence is significant, it also leaves a high degree of freedom to national regulators. The EU mostly gives recommendations, conclusions, resolutions or other forms of soft regulation in the media policy field. The author particularly emphasizes the fact that the definition of the public service remit, and its fulfilment, are left in the hands of national legislation. When it comes to structural issues of state aid, he concludes that the balance between the market and public interests is something that should be kept under close scrutiny at all times, regardless of EU influence.

This book is well organized and edited with a logical and easy-to-follow chapter sequence. In a succinct and clear way it provides an overview of the complexities of the public service media in contemporary Nordic societies. This is not an easy task since the book compares five countries with different institutional setups. Nonetheless, all of the countries face the same challenges of small media markets pressured by globalization, European legislation and technological changes. Apart from their stable socio-political systems, a further specificity of the Nordic countries is the high level of cooperation between the public service media, and stable political cultures where the public service ethos is perceived as its vital part.

Paško Bilic