

Gregory Ferrell Lowe (Ed.), **The Public in Public Service Media: RIPE@2009**, Göteborg, Sweden: Nordicom, 2010, 276 pp., 26€ (paperback).

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In the past 10 years, RIPE (Re-Visionary Interpretations of the Public Enterprise), a network of scholars and media practitioners, has promoted discussion and research concerning the challenges that public service broadcasting has been facing in the 21st century. Crucial to the RIPE initiative is the debate on the role of public service media (PSM), their current predicaments, and future challenges. **The Public in Public Service Media** collects and reviews empirical research on public participation in PSM while trying to explain and theorize the dependency of public social media companies on participatory practices. Particularly, the book stresses how the longevity of PSM firms in the global media market relies on their capacity to establish a strong interactive relationship with their fee-payers.



Starting from the widespread perception of public service media companies as declining institutions, this volume tackles questions regarding the complex and delicate position of public service media vis-à-vis the public. Like other RIPE publications (Lowe & Bardoel, 2008; Lowe & Jauert, 2005; Lowe & Steemers, 2012), this book deals with issues concerning the challenge of safeguarding the ethos of PSM and their fundamental elements of “quality” broadcasting, namely educational values and social responsibility, in the age of economic downturns, globalization, changing media policies, and rising digitalization. In addition, it shows the necessity of conducting audience research as the only powerful tool to grasp the role of new media technologies in assessing the shifting identity of users and consumers.

In the introduction to the volume, Gregory Ferrell Lowe discards the traditional expression “public service broadcasting” (PSB) in favor of “public service media,” a more up-to-date definition of the contemporary broadcasting experience, which, among others, includes digitalization and convergence as factors involved in the shaping of new participatory practices. The notion of “public” addressed by the various contributors of this book is not separated from the notion of audience or citizenship. The public here is not rigorously associated with the public sphere, and it is less embedded in democratic participation. There is no apparent intention of conceptualizing the public as an independent entity from the audience. Lowe avoids dichotomies and his position remains open to broader connotations of the meaning of publics (pp. 19–20). Both John Hartley (2002, pp. 11–12) and Sonia Livingstone (2005) have discussed different meanings of public and audience. They noted that the study of publics and audiences are indeed intertwined, and it is often difficult and pointless to draw a clear line between the two terms as the ways in which audiences and publics engage with media are frequently very similar. However,

Livingstone insists on "seeking to understand how publics not only do but also should act, for the benefit of democratic society" (p. 35).

While previous studies of audience engagement with the media adopted monothematic frameworks, such as gender (Ang, 1985), class (Morley, 1980), ethnicity (Gillespie, 1995), and cultural specificity (Takahashi, 2010), this collection of essays uses a pluralistic approach that draws a comprehensive picture of media participation. The book is divided in two sections. The first one, "Trends and Theorization," comprises six chapters and focuses on theorizing potential ways of enhancing public participation. The second part, "Audience and Accountability," gathers eight pieces of empirical research on participatory practices, quality assessment, management strategies and programming, production, and funding issues.

Opening section 1 is Josef Trappel's essay. In it, he points out that although PSM are suffering the effects of commercialization and deregulatory policies, they still hold a pivotal position in relation to the needs of citizens and their participation in public and democratic life. Trappel argues that by adopting digital technologies, developing new ways of interacting with the public, and changing journalistic practices, PSM "might experience a revival as providers of information relevant for contemporary societies" (p. 49).

The next contribution, written by Richard Collins, advocates the necessity of utilizing online platforms, notably Web 2.0 technologies, to foster active participation and improve standards of journalistic conduct. The Internet enables citizens to take part in debates on online platforms; it can build relationships of trust, create dialogue between users and PSM institutions, and enhance pluralism in the supply of content.

Chapter 3 brings public participation and emerging journalistic practices to the fore of the discussion. In this chapter, Eeva Mäntymäki analyzes contemporary journalism in public service broadcasting and individuates new opportunities in providing information. Public service broadcasters indeed have the opportunity to make use of recent innovations in digital media and integrate public participation with professional journalism while still maintaining the principles of universality and responsible public service.

In chapter 4, Minna Aslama examines diversity as a fundamental element of public participation in the media. The diversity of participation is of crucial importance for the future of PSM (p. 97). Public service media companies, she argues, need to pay more attention to the patterns of participation among users, rethinking their audiences as active participants rather than passive consumers, and target markets.

Benjamin Julien Hartmann (chapter 5) provides two examples, a public radio broadcasting service in Germany and YLE (the national public Finnish broadcasting company) to demonstrate how PSM are trying to include "sociating" functions in the broadcasting environment. The aim of these processes is to involve more members of the public, to facilitate the participation of consumer groups or tribes, and to develop loyalty to PSM companies.

In chapter 6, Charles Brown and Peter Goodwin argue that public service broadcasting in the U.K. has recently started to change the broadcasting value chain. The public service mission of universality, education, and entertainment remains unchanged, but the BBC's new focus on media consumption and the implementation of Web 2.0 and software applications, such as iPlayer, signal a new approach to broadcasting. This chapter provides an assessment of this change and how it is influencing participation in digital broadcasting and online services.

Chapter 7 opens the second section of the volume. Uwe Hasebrink analyzes how media users combine various types of media to personalize and compose their media repertoire. This repertoire-oriented approach provides a more thorough depiction of the roles of audiences, their activities, and their relationship with media. Hasebrink suggests that any PSM company should make better use of scholarly audience research, and of its conceptualizations of the public to identify user expectations (p. 148).

In the following chapter, Andra Leurdijk and Matthijs Leendertse focus on case studies from Germany, the U.K, and the Netherlands and trace new ways of "following" the audience. This essay highlights the ways in which PSB has responded to digital innovations and has adopted services such as online on-demand TV, Web 2.0, or time-shifted TV to accommodate the audience's need for more flexible TV-watching experiences. Moreover, digital services have affected the ways in which people exercise self-expression, leave comments, rate television programs, and reuse content.

Lizzie Jackson begins her essay (chapter 9) by noting how the Internet has expanded the opportunities for audiences to engage with public service media. Jackson examines the BBC in Europe and the NPR in the U.S. and demonstrates that PSM are engaging more than ever in dialogic interactions with users through online participation, but they still act as mediators rather than facilitators of dialogue between the broadcaster and the participant. She states that it is imperative for broadcasting services to facilitate the participatory practices and to foster reciprocity between the firms and the public (p. 185).

Chapter 10 explores how the notion of quality is changing in PSB. Irene Costera Meijer attempts an assessment of quality in contemporary PSM from the point of view of both audiences and practitioners. Her interviews with TV makers and audiences in the Netherlands have shown that there is not much consideration for the viewers' experience in television programming. Although media practitioners and audiences hold similar points of view in defining what quality television is on basic terms, many TV makers do not have a clear idea of what audiences would like to see on television.

Hans J. Kleinsteuber (chapter 11) discusses the problematic role of broadcasting councils in Germany and their shortcomings in guaranteeing the accountability and functioning of PSM. Kleinsteuber offers possible solutions for a renovation of these institutional bodies, which are strongly influenced by politics and scarcely accessible to citizens.

The essay that follows Kleinsteuber's is by Alessandro D'Arma, Gunn Sara Enli, and Jeanette Steemers. They compare three different public service broadcasting organizations—NRK in Norway, RAI in Italy, and BBC in the UK—and their challenges in offering quality entertainment for children. Public service broadcasting in these three countries aims at expanding the opportunities for enjoying television on digital

television or online through audiovisual and interactive material; however the originality of the offerings depends largely on funding. Thus, the variety of programs and quality of the service is different for each organization, depending on their source of revenue.

In chapter 13, Maria Norbäck discusses collaborative financing and co-production in Sweden and explores PSB in relation to external funding. Looking at the example of SVT, the public television broadcasting channel in Sweden, she examines the issues related to the increasingly pressing necessity of relying on commercial production houses for public service programming. Collaborations with independent commercial companies can stimulate creativity and competitiveness yet also present issues for control over property rights management and content creation.

The last chapter is by Alan G. Stavitsky and Michael W. Huntsberger and gives an account of PSB radio in the United States. Public radio stations such as OPB in Oregon, WFMU in New Jersey, and WWOZ in New Orleans have access to little public funding. These stations are able to survive by remaining meaningful to their listeners and by developing a relationship of interdependence with online communities. In so doing, they have managed to establish a network of sponsors and contributors.

The book is well-designed and structured. The majority of the essays are simple in language and therefore easy to read but require some knowledge of public service media to be fully understood. Clearly, it is meant for media practitioners and researchers in the field of broadcasting, but can also be useful to scholars and post-graduate students in media, cultural, and critical studies. Although chapters 8, 9, 10, and 12 can arguably be read at an undergraduate level, it seems hard to recommend this book for undergraduate study, as the essays are marked by a complex analytical framework that entails familiarity with research on PSM. Furthermore, notes and references in the text are kept to a minimum, which on the one hand facilitates fruition, but on the other hand it may become confusing for those who are not experts of PSM and who would benefit from a more informative approach. Ultimately, as in previous edited RIPE volumes, the discussion is confined to European and North American contexts, leaving public participation in PSM in non-Western areas completely untouched. This, however, does not detract from interpreting the interaction between the public and public service media in a more general and global way.

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