

Public service media and exposure diversity

Public service media have traditionally played a leading role in the realisation of media diversity as one of the prime objectives of contemporary media policy. With the explicit inclusion of the promotion of diversity in their mandate, public service media are not only committed to diverse organisational structures and the supply of a diverse programme offer (internal diversity), they also set a standard for other, mostly commercial programme offers, thereby contributing to the overall diversity of supply in media markets (external diversity). For some time now, this mission has not been restricted to the broadcasting realm, but also extends to the new media markets.

Yet, in a time when the number of digitised programme outlets and types of media content offered to users is exploding, the viability of existing media diversity policies is no longer self-evident. Nor is the role of public service media in this regard. Existing diversity policies, of which public service media are a part, lean primarily on safeguarding a diversity of supply. A growing body of research, however, demonstrates that users, when confronted with the digital abundance, are exposed to less rather than more diversity. But without effective exposure to diverse media content, traditional media diversity policies become somewhat meaningless. Effective exposure to diverse media supply requires that users are assisted in making sense of the enormous amount of information on offer, that they have tools and strategies at hand to make smart and diversified choices, but also that obstacles to actual media access are removed. In such a situation, public service media are increasingly challenged by policy-makers as well as academics to re-invent themselves as an institution. Can it still be the task of public service media to add to the digital abundance, or to offer types of content that are almost certainly available elsewhere – providing users are able to find them? Or could their mission be shifting from providing diverse supply, to stimulating and enabling users to benefit from the diversity of media content offered elsewhere? If so, how should this mission be given form? And will the answers to these questions differ, depending on whether one adopts a European or a US perspective?

The goal of this workshop is to explore the potential role of public service media in promoting diverse exposure in times of information overload and new obstacles to information access. This invitation-only workshop will bring together eminent experts from different disciplines on both sides of the Atlantic to enter into an informed dialogue and to brainstorm on the future role for public service media. While the first three sessions will introduce preliminary ideas for the future role of public service media in stimulating diversity of exposure, the final session will be dedicated to exploring other ideas. In the spirit of “outside-the-box” thinking, participants are invited to contact the organisers in order to ‘pitch’ ideas for inclusion in the final session.

The number of participants is limited in order to leave ample time for in-depth discussion. It is planned to publish the ideas presented during the workshop as a special conference volume in book form or in a dedicated journal.



Preliminary programme

28 September 2012, Amsterdam

9.00 – 9.30 Reception and welcome

9.30 – 11.00

Presentation 1: How can exposure diversity be conceptualised as a public policy goal, and what is the possible contribution of public service media? (N. Helberger)

- Commentator 1 (N.N.)
- Commentator 2 (N.N.)

11.00 – 11.15 Coffee break

11.15 – 12.45

Presentation 2: The public service media's educational tasks and exposure diversity (T. McGonagle)

- Commentator 1 (N.N.)
- Commentator 2 (N.N.)

12.45 – 14.00 Lunch (at the workshop location)

14.00 – 15.30

Presentation 3: Arguments in favour of and against a 'public service navigator' (M. Burri)

- Commentator 1 (N.N.)
- Commentator 2 (N.N.)

15.30 – 16.00 Coffee break

16.00 – 17.30

Presentation 4: Brainstorm session

3-4 short "idea pitches" from participating experts (topics to be still determined) and discussion

17.30 Concluding round

19.00 Dinner (place to be announced)