Media Institutions as a Research Field

Three Phases of Norwegian Broadcasting Research

HALLVARD MOE & TRINE SYVERTSEN

Abstract

The article discusses the background and origins of research on media institutions as a field, and especially assesses the development and status of Norwegian research on broadcasting institutions. It is demonstrated how the field has developed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, through three key phases: the era of broadcasting monopolies; the "new media situation" in the 1980s and 1990s; and the era of convergence; globalization and commercialization from the late 1990s. A key purpose is to discuss the theoretical perspectives and implicit and explicit assumptions upon which the research is based. Further, the article points to shortcomings and gaps in our knowledge of how media institutions evolve and operate. In closing, it is suggested how the field may maintain its relevance in an era where the very concept of a "broadcasting institution" is becoming more blurred.

Key Words: media institutions, broadcasting, Norway, research overview

Introduction

Research on media institutions has expanded significantly over the past three decades. This article discusses the background and origins of the field, and especially assesses the development and status of *Norwegian research on broadcasting institutions*. We demonstrate how the field has developed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, through three key phases: the era of broadcasting monopolies; the "new media situation" in the 1980s and 1990s; and the era of convergence; globalization and commercialization from the late 1990s. A key purpose is to discuss the theoretical perspectives and implicit and explicit assumptions upon which the research is based. We further point to shortcomings and gaps in our knowledge of how media institutions evolve and operate. In closing, we suggest how the field may maintain its relevance in an era where the very concept of a "broadcasting institution" is becoming more blurred.

Institutions: Concepts and Research

In order to discuss research on broadcasting institutions it is necessary to clarify how we understand the concept of *institution*. Like all key terms in the social sciences, it possesses several meanings. By a traditional sociological account, an institution is defined through key characteristics such as the *presence of professions*, *formal procedures* and *permanence*. Hierarchies of employees master and maintain different aspects of an organization's affairs, functions and practices are established as formal rules of conduct,

and these hierarchies and rules are stable and lasting (Østerberg 1994: 85). Yet, it is important not to focus exclusively on the material and physical manifestations of institutions. They also represent immaterial aspects – norms, interpretations, values, discourses and ideas circulating within and around specific social practices (Eide 1999: 24).

Obviously, it is necessary to apply further demarcations when approaching institutions as concrete objects of research. An important division seems to lie between understanding institutions as *spheres* – encompassing a number of organizations and practices (the family, the arts) – and understanding institutions as *specific organizations* (The BBC, The Microsoft Corporation, The UN). This indicates two approaches within research on media institutions. When regarding institutions as spheres, we study authorities, practices and discourses common to the media industry at large: the cultural and democratic functions of the media, its legal and normative framework, journalistic norms and conventions, and so on. In terms of specific organizations, we look at media institutions in a more limited way: specific newspapers, media enterprises, advertising agencies, and broadcasting corporations.

In this article we essentially concentrate on the second meaning of the term: media institutions as specific media organizations or enterprises. This demarcation is necessary to provide a clear focus for discussion. But the limits are not absolute, here, as in other parts of media studies, different research fields overlap and converge. It is neither required nor possible to clearly separate specific organizations from the larger set of practices and discourses surrounding them.

The Origins of Media Institution Research

The body of research on media institutions dates back to the 1960s. As everyone familiar with the history of the field will recognize, media research in the social sciences was at that time mostly preoccupied with *effects,* and with how audiences used the media. Gradually, however, researchers began to investigate the chain of communication "backwards" – from *receiver* to *message* to *sender* – in the terminology of a basic linear communication model. This process did not entail a breach with the reception orientation per se – potential and actual "effects" were still seen as the most interesting aspect of the media – but it was considered valuable to investigate the organizational sources and "causes" of such effects (McQuail 1994: 185). This, then, is a first backdrop for the initiation of media institution research.

One example of how the effect orientation – even in the late 1970s – functioned as an overall justification and point of reference for research on institutions can be found in Helge Østbye's report on Norwegian broadcasting from 1977. The report is a comprehensive survey of the operation, organization and programme production of the Norwegian public broadcaster NRK, and deals with every aspect but effects. Nevertheless, in the preface, Østbye (1977: i) writes that "the disposition of the report builds on Lasswell's famous five-part question: Who Says what To whom In which channel And with what effect?"

The second reason why researchers in the 1960s and 1970s began to show an interest in "sender organizations" is more ideological. Critical researchers wanted to delve behind the media's self-legitimating discourses referring to freedom of speech, democracy, and social responsibility, and wanted to demonstrate that media institutions were part of society's ideological machinery of power. Earlier descriptions of the media's

norms and functions had, with some exceptions, been strongly pluralistic, and largely sustained the self-image of the (Western) press (see, for example Siebert et al. 1956). The new critical approach brought an interest in how media messages were produced, and the economic and political constraints that influenced production. Here too, the idea of effects was significant, but in a different manner than within classical audience research: the decisive question was to which degree media affected the individual's perception of reality in an ideological sense – the so-called "ideological effect" (Hall 1977; also Murdoch and Golding 1977; Allern 1992).

A third backdrop for the origin of media institution research can be found in studies of journalism. This research has its roots in the early 20th century, and did from the beginning apply an agency-oriented approach. The individual qualities of the journalist were regarded as the primary explanatory factor for media content, most succinctly expressed in the tradition of the journalist as "gatekeeper" (White 1950; see Eide 1992 for an overview). From the late 1970s, demands came for a more structural approach. In a much-quoted article Elliott (1977) points to "vast gaps" in our knowledge of how media messages were produced, how media organizations were organized and managed, and how journalists were recruited and socialized. At the time of writing, Elliott and others were undertaking analyses of these very processes. A number of studies on *news production* were published towards the end of the 1970s – studies still regarded as classics in the field (among others Epstein 1973; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Burns 1977; Schlesinger 1978; Golding and Elliott 1979). The mid-1980s brought several Norwegian contributions in this tradition (Siverts 1984; Klausen 1986; also Puijk 1990).

A fourth reason for the emergence of media institution research is simply the need for background and chronology. This has generated two modes of presentation useful for any media researcher: the collection of facts and the institutional history. Anyone venturing into a new field of research will recognize the importance of works establishing and summarizing the background and chronology of the phenomenon in question. When this information is hard to obtain, the researcher must engage in a fair share of detailed labour before even embarking on the actual analysis. Fortunately, there is a rather strong external demand for accounts of this nature. For instance, Norway got its first collected account of its media institutions as a result of a government-commissioned report on power in the 1970s (NOU 1982:30), the first history of the public broadcaster NRK was commissioned by the institution itself (Dahl 1975, 1978; Dahl and Bastiansen 1999) and the history of Norwegian journalism was written in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the Norwegian Press Association (Ottosen 1996). The history of "moving pictures in Norway" was made possible by a special grant from the Norwegian Research Council, who considered it an initiative of national importance (Dahl et al. (eds.) 1996).

Research on Norwegian Broadcasting Institutions

We turn now to a specific investigation into *Norwegian research on broadcasting institutions.* The purpose is to map the development of research on one kind of media institutions in one country, thereby attempting to say something about how this relates to the "roots" as well as to future challenges in field. The discussion will be characterized by our own interests in the field of broadcasting research; to some extent it is a description from "the inside" – with the subsequent lack of distance to the object in question. This limitation entails that the presented evaluations first and foremost should

be considered as points for further discussion, rather than an attempt to establish a final statement of the field's development.

The most obvious trait of research on radio and television institutions in Norway since the late 1970s is the substantial increase in its *mass* and *quality*. Works registered in Nordicom's databases (www.nordicom .gu.se) as research on broadcasting institutions in Norway up to the mid-1980s, are almost exclusively official documents, and short speeches and discussion papers from the NRK or other media organizations (there are important exceptions to this norm, of which a few have already been mentioned). From the late 1980s on, however, a small explosion takes place. Not only are more and more genuine research reports emerging between all the short lectures and proceedings – substantial contributions also come from within the growing student mass. In the autumn of 1986, the first master course in media studies is launched at the University of Bergen, and shortly afterwards a similar course is launched at the University of Oslo. From this point on term papers, master theses and a shortly also PhD dissertations make a considerable addition to the field.

When dividing the relevant research into phases or generations – as is common in overviews of this kind – it seems natural to make a division somewhere around the mid-1980s. Works produced prior to this point may be considered as "first generation". These are influenced by the tendencies emphasized above – first and foremost the desire to study the sender in the communication process, to present facts and institutional histories. This corresponds to other divisions within media research. Scannell and Cardiff (1991), for instance, talk of generations in research on broadcasting history: the first worked on background, chronology and context, while the next was more preoccupied with explaining the processes behind the produced content. Nevertheless, in relation to research on Norwegian radio and television institutions, establishing a generation gap of this kind is not entirely suitable. Not only has the research community changed over the past decades, so has also the object of study. The entire institutional organization of broadcasting in Norway has undergone great changes in the same period.

This primarily means that the need for "first generation research" does not end with the conclusion of the first surveys. On the contrary, the emergence of each new broadcasting institution, and every change in the institutional order, create a new void in the knowledge base. Furthermore, changes in one field often engender greater interest in that which was, or that which is in the process of disappearing. Within the field in question, this is distinctly expressed by a renewed interest in broadcasting history from the 1990s (see for instance Totland 1992; Eide 1993; Theisen 1993; Bastiansen 1995; Bastiansen and Syvertsen 1996; Dahl et al. 1996; Bakøy 2002; Hake 2006).

Consequently, all broadcasting research conducted in Norway over the past almost 30 years can in a certain sense be characterized as "first generation research". It is research that regardless of theoretical approach aims to document processes and institutional traits formerly unanalyzed. In order to categorize the research into phases, it is therefore more productive to separate on a thematic basis. A pragmatic labelling can for instance be established between three phases: first, works analyzing the state-owned broadcaster in the monopoly era; second, studies addressing the alterations brought on by the liberalization in the 1980s, and third, research focused on the fragmentation and convergence within the broadcasting sector apparent from the late 1990s. In the following we employ these three phases to identify differences in ambitions and perspectives between the various contributions. To a certain extent the phases represent three "generations" of research on broadcasting institutions in Norway, but the classification – as

will be demonstrated – is far from absolute. As such, it is more sensible to talk of several generations within each subfield of study. Also, as will become clear, the emergence of a new phase does not mean the end of interest in the themes of a former.

Phase I: Researching the NRK in the Monopoly Era

The research on the state-owned broadcaster in the monopoly era mainly comprises institutional history and collections of facts. Scientifically speaking, this research is characterized by great attention to detail and great ambition to present a complete picture. Ambitions are equally low in terms of theory and perspectives. The works often lack attention to a specific problem beyond providing an overview. A good example can again be found in Østbye's (1977) report, encompassing over 350 information-packed pages. The preface states that apart from serving its purpose as background for a government-commissioned investigation,

> [t]he author hopes that the report might serve a wider purpose. It contains quite a lot of information about Norwegian broadcasting. Even though most of this information is available elsewhere, there *may* be need for a collection of relatively well established facts about the NRK. Radio and television are important to many, and in my opinion the debate concerning this significant field of social life will benefit from the further dissemination of some information about the institution NRK (Østbye 1977: i).

The report is obviously useful for anyone with the slightest interest in broadcasting. Nevertheless, its intent is presented almost apologetically.

The three-volume work on the history of the NRK (Dahl 1975, 1978; Dahl and Bastiansen 1999) and the many studies upon which this presentation is based (see references above to master theses on the history of broadcasting), is another example. The presentation of the history of the NRK is an ambitious and comprehensive historical work, and it represents a substantial contribution to Norwegian media research. However, the intention is primarily to produce a presentation on which others can expand. In the preface to the third volume, which represents the culmination of more than 20 years' work across hundreds of pages, the authors offer the following modest manifesto:

> The intent of this presentation is to provide the first collective account of the history of Norwegian radio and television, and thereby establish the chronology of media development. To establish the actual chronology of things, and thereby discover the cause and effect of these events – and their chains of events or stages – has been a constant guiding principle. [...] Should this book provide nothing more than a chronological framework for further studies in radio and television, the object has nevertheless been obtained (Dahl and Bastiansen 1999: 10).

A modest theoretical level of ambition is no prerequisite, even for fact-based or historical presentations. The 1990s do bring accounts of broadcasting history with a more distinctive theoretical perspective, and a greater will to attach historical analysis to general research-traditions within film and media studies (see for instance Bakøy 2002). This could indicate a transition from first to second generation research within this particular area, but so far there are few Norwegian contributions to broadcasting history with such an approach. On the other hand, several recent works add to first generation historical studies, while incorporating also the post-monopoly era: Bastiansen and Dahl

(2003) provide one contribution in their general media history text book; Halse and Østbye (2003) offer another in the first one volume account of Norwegian broadcasting history.

Whatever the principal perspective, a distinct commonality can be identified in every analysis in this first phase. The relationship between the NRK and the state dominates over the broadcaster's relationship with all other clusters of power. Economic motives and market influence play a rather modest role, and to the extent that relations between commercial interests and the broadcaster are discussed, these are commonly described as more harmonious than the broadcasters' relation to the political sphere. For Østbye (1977), the relationships with industry are generally characterized by "cooperation", "mutual problems" and "good contact".

Phase II: Researching "The New Media Situation"

From the mid-1980s, deregulation, liberalization and the advent of multi channel television become central themes for media research in Norway, as elsewhere. A new generation of students and researchers are drawn to media departments, and for this generation, the changes in broadcasting become one of the major fields of interest. The trend can be compared to student's fascination with the Internet and multimedia in the late 1990s and mobile telephony in the 2000s. Just as the approaches to Internet and mobile telephones are numerable, so were approaches to broadcasting in the 1980s. A closer look of the research shows, however, that some perspectives and approaches were preferred more systematically than others.

The fascination with the new media situation first of all entails a renewed interest in the *driving forces* behind media development. Cultural and political interests are no longer the focal point. The research is more occupied with technology and the market. Policy-makers are described as powerless rather than powerful, and the relation between broadcasters and the industry looses its harmonic character. The market no longer consists of national radio factories and an innocent record industry. Instead, we are dealing with "international software producers", "global financial interests," and "transnational media and advertising empires".

While research on the first phase depended mostly on written sources and documents, research on the second phase is characterized by a high degree of methodological pluralism. It is not unusual to combine methods from the social sciences and humanities, and document analyses, interviews, observations, statistical methods, and textual analyses are all applied. Drawing on structural theories of technological development and market economy, as well as normative perspectives on the public sphere and democratization, several analyses during the 1980s and 1990s examine how traditional entrenchments fall and how new media is established (among others Helland 1988; Skogerbø 1988, 1996; Lundby and Futsæter 1993; Syvertsen 1986, 1992). Attention to the changing conditions of broadcasting also contributes to the emergence of *media policy* as an independent field of interest. Sources of inspiration are here a more pluralistic sociology focusing on agents and their conditions (see Østbye 1995; Syvertsen 2004: ch. 3)

Starting from analyses of "new" technology and economic and political change, the studies now establish a chain of events from which the next natural step is to examine actual broadcasting institutions. The focus is on how institutions respond to the new situation. Within the institutions most attention is still paid to high status genres – particularly news and current affairs or cultural programming. Other genres or non-pro-

gramming departments receive little attention. Interest still lie in media institutions as *content producers* (and thus potentially *effect producers*), and studies of media institutions as *businesses* are far apart. Also, organizational research in the classical sense is lacking. What little there is is typically produced outside media departments and within political science or other fields (for instance Jacobsen 1992).

Interestingly, neither researchers nor students initially showed interest in *new* media institutions. Some studies of the more idealistic attempts at local radio and television (Kristiansen 1984; Skogerbø 1988) notwithstanding, almost all studies in this early period focuses on how the former monopoly institution NRK adapts to the new situation. Particularly noticeable is the fact that neither researchers nor master students choose to study the establishment phases of the many emerging commercial radio and television companies. Symptomatically, not until the NRK founds a second television channel do we get the first study this kind – and then again from outside the traditional field of media studies (Wennes 1997).

When comprehensive accounts of the new institutions start to materialize, they do so from within the institutions themselves: Rynning's (1996) book on the commercial niche broadcaster TVNorge – in which he was a founding figure – is more a personal story than a work of media research. The history of 20 years of local television is "not meant to be a theoretical work in the sense that it is related to theories of media studies", according to the author – himself an active participant in the development (Stene 2004: 7). Other contributions came surprisingly late: the first thorough accounts of the second large television company in Norway – TV2 – were published after it had been in business for a decade (Enli et al. (eds.) 2002; Dahl and Høyer 2003). In their wake, there may be a tendency for researchers to choose the TV2 as a case more frequently, for example when studying the use of news promos (Almaas 2005) or the consequences of ownership for media pluralism (as TV2 acquired shares in the new radio channel Kanal24) (Messel 2005). Studies of smaller independent programme producers, however, remain almost non-existent (but see Rinde 1999).

This does not mean that the TV2 and the other new companies are entirely absent from earlier contributions. But, to the extent they are analyzed, it is primarily in comparison with the NRK. This applies to Helland's (1993) study of news production in the TV3 and the NRK, and the corresponding comparison of the NRK and the TV2 (Sand and Helland 1998). Knutsen's (2000) analysis of music programming on the NRK's third radio channel and its commercial counterpart P4, and Syvertsen's (1997) study of the NRK and the TV2's strategy and programming policy, are further examples. Enli (1998) and Thomsen (2004) both compare the NRK's radio channels with new entrants – analyzing the production of current affairs programs and sports programming, respectively. The latter, and Eileng's (2002) study of competition for television programme rights between the NRK and the TV2, follow an increased focus on sports and the media (see for example Dahlén and Helland (eds.) 2002; Dahlén et al. (eds.) 2004).

A comparative perspective is almost always productive, and all these works provide vital contributions to the apprehension of new media institutions seen from the "inside". However, the NRK's position – and the overwhelming amount of information available on the public broadcaster compared to new institutions – may constitute a problem: there is a certain risk that comparisons are conducted on the stipulations of the established institution. Just as case studies of the new entrants was lacking for a long period, comparisons between newcomers only emerge later. After the year 2000 we get analyses of how market demands influence programming on commercial broadcasters TV2,

TVNorge and TV3 (Karlsen 2000), comparisons of scheduling on TVNorge and TV3 (Lia 2003), and of the strategies of two commercial radio licensees (Enli and Sundet forthcoming), to mention a few.

Seeing the research on the "new media situation" as a whole, conspicuously few studies compare broadcasting institutions and other media, other cultural producers, or other forms of organizations. Implicitly, the media research community appears to assume that broadcasting institutions are radically different from all other organizations and cannot be examined by using theories from other areas of organization research. The focus on broadcasting as such means that the studies construct a solid knowledge base within the media institution field, but that the insights attain a form which makes them less applicable to other cultural or social research. If media research is to play a role outside its own discipline, it could be argued, studies cannot limit themselves to just compare the NRK with a commercial competitor. Comparative organizational studies of the NRK and the former telecom monopoly Telenor, or the NRK and the universities for that matter, could yield interesting findings, and locate media studies more firmly within a wider field of cultural and political sciences.

A Functionalist Perspective?

One of the central research questions concerning the new media situation emerging in the late 1980s is thus: *how has the NRK adapted to competition and new political and economic conditions*? Already the phrasing of this question indicates the overall perspective of this research: change as *adaptation* to external constraints. Most of the studies appear to build on a relatively linear chain of events where external forces – technological, political and economic – upset a stable media situation and produce some form of "crisis" within the established institutions. From this perspective, the task of researchers is to document the specific adaptation strategies on various levels, be it change in departmental identity and formats (Puijk 1990); ideology or programming policy (Syvertsen 1992, 1997); news production and news ideology (Helland and Sand 1998); channel identity and branding (Ytreberg and Orgeret 1997); production forms and textual strategies (Ytreberg 1999); or target audience orientation (Bachman 1999), to name a few examples. To some extent, the same approach presupposing *reaction* is found in the later analyses of the commercial institutions: for instance, they concentrate on how the market influences programming (Karlsen 2000), or aims at identifying the contradictions inherent in the National Assembly's decision to set up a second television channel (Dahl and Høyer 2003).

Once again it is important to emphasize that we are dealing with comprehensive and important analyses, out of which some the later arrivals can be said to constitute a second generation perspective drawing on new theoretical traditions. Yet, it is interesting to note that the perspective that "change comes from the outside" hardly is questioned in any of these studies. This makes the implicit meta-theoretical model, on which these theories rest, somewhat functionalist. Society is an organism, and structural changes trigger isolated parts within the organism to transform and adapt to the new reality.

The perspective is quite different from the one applied in the more historical and fact-oriented research on the monopoly era. In these descriptions, the attitude of the broadcasting institution is more pro-active. The public broadcaster emerges as an agent with a large potential for changing its operational framework. Kjekstad, author of a historical study on the introduction of television in Norway (1974), for instance, sees the NRK

as the single most important agent in initialising decisive political processes. Similarly, Dahl and Bastiansen (1999) applies a perspective where internal developments in the institution during the 1970s become crucial for explaining the subsequent deregulation. It is probably true that an approach which focuses on the actions of the single broadcaster may be more adequate in the monopoly era, than in subsequent periods. Still, it is interesting that a perspective in which for example the NRK's actions are seen as causes of subsequent events are virtually absent from later research.

Legitimacy and Public Service Broadcasting

A final feature separating research on the NRK before and after the monopoly era is the shift of focus from political power relations to the institution's own efforts to maintain political *legitimacy*. The dominant relationship between the public broadcaster and the state is still present, yet there is an increasing recognition that the NRK – and similar broadcasting institutions – must gain wider support in order to defend their privileges. Indeed, public broadcasters find themselves in a unique position where they have to compete for ratings in a market, and at the same time demonstrate that they are distinctly different from commercial operators.

The degree to which the NRK manages this balance becomes a main focal point in many studies. It can be found in analyses of organizational strategies of legitimacy and, as in Ytreberg's thesis (1999; also Ytreberg 2002a), in analyses of textual changes and of how "the sender organization" applies various forms of authority in its form of address. This body of research, however, demonstrates that the need for political legitimacy not only affects the state-owned broadcaster, but also new entrants in the market. This point is made in Helland's thesis (1993) – he argues that the desire to achieve political support was the key reason why the commercial broadcaster TV3 at all cared to establish a news service. Syvertsen's (1997) analysis of the TV2, and Enli and Sundet's (forthcoming) analysis of radio channels P4 and Kanal24, shows that a degree of political legitimacy is a necessity also for private institutions struggling to achieve favourable conditions in a market where political privileges still count.

Another effect of the interest in legitimating strategies is that the concept "public service broadcasting" increases in importance – to the extent that some regard it as the defining feature of the research field. Søndergaard (1996), for instance, uses "public service research" as a collective term for all Nordic research on institutional changes in broadcasting. While "public service" hardly is mentioned in research on the monopoly era, the term is virtually omnipresent in the research in this second phase (for an overview see Syvertsen 1990; Carlson (ed.) 1999). Indeed, it seems that the term "public service" is sometimes used to give research on specific national institutions an illusion of generalizability.

To assess the extent to which "public service broadcasting" in one country is similar or different from other countries, however, we need thorough comparative studies. These have been few and far between, both in Norway and internationally. Syvertsen (1992) and Fossum (1994) – analyzing public television in Norway and Great Britain, and public radio in Norway and Denmark respectively – are two Norwegian exceptions. The work of the Euromedia Group is an important ongoing international initiative, which for one thing provides basic data about national media systems (see for instance McQuail and Siune (eds.) 1998; Kelly et al. (eds.) 2004). However, there is a broad consensus about the lack of maturity in comparative media and communication research

in general (Livingstone 2003; Gurevitch and Blumler 2004). In this sense, research on Norwegian broadcasting institutions does not stand out: there is still a great deal of catching-up to do.

Phase III: Convergence, Globalization and Commercialization

From the second part of the 1990s, broadcasting institutions are again facing drastic changes. The changes are generally identified with the advent of digital technology – predicted to bring convergence of markets, services, networks and terminals. Related, and just as important, are the processes of globalization and a continued commercialization. The former – in which the media take a central role – affect all parts of broadcasting, from media politics through to the patterns of use. The latter development – following recurring re-regulation processes – means increased competition on new arenas, potentially leading to additional fragmentation of audiences. The transition marks the advent of a new phase for research on broadcasting institutions. Three main tendencies can be identified in early studies.

First, there is a tendency of increased attention to media economics. While economic perspectives have been prominent in press research, broadcasting organizations have rather been viewed as *cultural institutions* elevated above the material reality. New systems for ordering and financing programmes; an uncertain future for traditional license- and advertisement funding; competition over sports events and movies; the increased use of sponsorship, product placement and merchandising; "outsourcing" and "downsizing" in the traditional broadcasting institutions; and a constant drive towards profit maximization within the entire private broadcasting sector; all these examples demonstrate that media-economic perspectives cannot be avoided if we are to understand the changes in the field. Though few studies concentrate on media economics exclusively, the perspective is included in several emerging works, for instance on sponsoring (Slinde 2000; Skogerbø 2001), or in textbooks on the media industry (Roppen 2004: ch. 7).

A second tendency regards programme "packaging". In a media situation where the struggle for attention is increasing, institutions progressively need to brand their programmes and channels. This has kindled the interest of students and researchers, and also inspired analyses of a previously ignored side of programming (Ytreberg and Orgeret 1997; Maasø 2002). The differences, or lack thereof, between public service and purely commercial broadcasting are once again pointed to. Recent research indicates how different corporations each try to find their own niche in the struggle for survival (Press 2000; Karlsen 2000; Østby Sæther 2002; Lia 2000) and how major sports events are branded and presented on different channels (Andersen 2003).

Third, a new area of research materializes focusing on the impact of digitalization in a broad sense. Despite the novelty of the topic, the perspectives and approaches are familiar from the second phase: the main focus is yet again on the traditional broadcaster and how it adapts to threats and challenges from the outside (Syvertsen 2003). To the degree that other institutions are drawn in, it is in comparison with the NRK (for example Hansen and Husebø 2005). Some contributions do however signal a change in the object of study. Attention is no longer solely given to the traditionally high status programme producing divisions. Rather, new parts of the NRK as an institution are scrutinized: the organization and content of the public broadcaster's Internet services (Røn 1998; Sommerseth 1999; Rasmussen 2002: ch. 7; Puijk 2004; Moe forthcoming); the

implication of "interactivity" for its program planning, division of resources and target group definitions (Prebensen 2005); the institution's development of commercial activities in the periphery of broadcasting (Strømmen 1999); or its role in the development of digital television distribution and its expansion onto other media platforms (Moe 2003). These studies problematize the public broadcaster's balance between conflicting interests as it seeks to incorporate new activities and services to its range of offers. In addition, the studies further illustrate how analyzes of broadcasting institutions needs to expand beyond the field of broadcasting.

The End of Broadcasting?

Research from the first and second phase relates to clearly defined *broadcasting institutions* with clearly defined *broadcasting assignments*. The institutions have been analyzed as integrated organizations responsible for production, scheduling and distribution, and have been considered as unique institutions, hardly comparable to other media or corporations. In the third phase, researchers no longer see the NRK singularly as a broadcasting institution, but rather as a *cross-media institution* in a more general sense. This is not only in line with the NRK's understanding of itself – it can also be seen as an extension of a trend whereby media corporations are expanding into new business areas. Broadcasters are taking up publishing or Internet services, newspaper companies are buying television channels and former telecom monopolies are moving into film, Internet and television.

The picture is complicated further as the digitalization processes also challenges the very term broadcasting. While the threats of broadcastings' rapid dissolution surely are exaggerated, its traditional demarcation lines are becoming blurred, and it is getting increasingly difficult to determine what exactly constitutes a broadcasting institution. An independent production company makes radio or television programmes, the owner of a television channel may buy and compose the content into a schedule, while a satellite television company distributes packages of channels and content. They are obviously not broadcasting institutions in the traditional form, but together they make up the radio and television sector. While discussions of the prospects for broadcasting flourish elsewhere – mainly in the general literature on television – such perspectives are largely absent from actual analyses of institutions. Few explicitly question the status of the institution at hand.

The early examples from the third phase illustrate how a new research field emerges focusing on broadcasters' many new ventures into the Internet, specific target audience channels, games, and other interactive products. What are lacking thus far are analyses of new entrants to broadcasting from other media industries. Through subsidiaries, the former public telecom Telenor is the dominant actor in digital satellite, cable and terrestrial television distribution. It recently secured the attractive rights to national football (together with the commercial broadcaster TV2), and remains a market leader in potential broadband-based technologies. There are examples of studies incorporating Telenor – such as Nordal's (2004) analysis of the digitalization of the terrestrial television network – but there is a distinct need for more work in this direction. The same goes for research on production companies, requisition routines, and negotiations related to externally commissioned activities.

New Phase – Old Approaches?

The fact that media researchers tend to identify with and specialize in only one medium – rather than with institutional research as such – thus far renders the field bereft of knowledge of the differences and similarities between for instance editorial cultures in newspapers and broadcasting (but see Bastiansen and Dahl 2003; Bastiansen 2006). Now, broadcasting research needs not only to acquire insights from research on other media (press, film) and telecommunications – broadcasting research is also to a certain extent in need of merging with studies on multimedia and other "new" media. As attention is raised to how broadcasting converges with computer and telecom sectors, it is interesting to see if the corresponding research fields follow suit. Research on broadcasting institutions could be extended to include disciplines such as information science or informatics – potentially offering innovative approaches. There are some examples of relevant works in this cross-disciplinary field, which again concentrate on the NRK. They deal with, for instance, the institution as user and developer of web publishing tools and content (Sommer 2004), or analyze how new technology and time-constraints affect working conditions as the institution turns into a bi-medial publisher (Hilstad 2001; also Dahlberg 2001).

Again, we see many relevant studies conducted from outside the field of media studies. From the perspective of organizational research, for instance, Neby (2003) includes the public broadcaster as a case when analyzing the balance between political governance and institutional autonomy in relation to the principles of New Public Management. Correspondingly, Tønnessen (2003) compares human resources management and organizational cultures in the NRK and its Danish counterpart DR. Based on theories of innovation, Ruud et al. (2003) analyze the inner workings of the NRK's "new media" department from an economist's viewpoint.

Within the field of media studies, few works seem to incorporate such perspectives or theoretical approaches. While many studies continue to be characterized by methodological pluralism, there are few traces of innovative theoretical perspectives. Despite some examples of original frameworks utilized in the analyses – Nordal's (2004) use of system theory to understand changes to the broadcasting sector being one – theories of technological development and market economy still dominate. Thus, the spill-over effect between media studies and other fields seems minimal both ways. Different fields of research are clearly not converging to the degree that their objects of study appear to be. To echo our conclusion from the discussion of the second phase of media institution research: the need for media researchers to incorporate perspectives and combine approaches from different social sciences is still apparent.

Additionally, the influx of comparative works remains slim. We have argued for the benefits of comparisons – both of different broadcasters, and of broadcasters and other types of institutions. Following the latest transition of the broadcasting sector, the potential seems even greater. Diachronic comparisons of how an institution faced the changes in the 1980s and 1990s may provide interesting results, and broadcasting institutions' transformation into cross-media operators calls for synchronic comparisons. Last but not least, the internationalization of the media industries – closely connected with the advent of digital technology – demands that we lift our eyes and look beyond national borders. Both providers and users increasingly operate internationally. For example, all over Europe, commercial broadcasters are complaining to the European Commission about the regulation and practices of public broadcasters, effectively turning the Commission into a main media policy actor (Syvertsen 2004: ch. 8).

A purely national approach for understanding the actions of broadcasting institutions is rendered less and less sufficient. There are some isolated comparative contributions. Among them are analyses of the Internet activities of the public broadcasters in different countries (Rasmussen 2002; Moe forthcoming), discussions of the persistence of television channels based on empirical data from the program polices of the public broadcasters in the Scandinavian countries (Ytreberg 2002b), and comparisons of the Norwegian and Danish public broadcasters (Tønnessen 2003). Sundet (2004) also discusses the latter two institutions' roles in her study of the political debate about digital television distribution in Norway and Denmark. Nevertheless, the call made in the discussion of phase two bears repeating: there is a need for further comparative efforts.

Conclusion

In this article we have tried to identify common characteristics of research on broadcasting institutions. We have argued that research on media institutions should be viewed not only as history or "background" to other studies, but rather as a field in its own right. We have further argued that this field, which we have both contributed to, would benefit from theoretical and methodological development. Before summarizing our findings and recommendations for the field we delve briefly into the larger international research community to see if we can find parallel works – studies which summarize and discuss research on broadcasting institutions from other perspectives or in other countries. A survey of the British and Scandinavian publications yield little results. To the degree that we find media research overviews in these countries, they are either very general (Pietilä et al. 1990; Bondebjerg 2000; Bruhn Jensen 2000) or focusing on other fields than the one we are interested in (Blumler et al. 1990; Livingstone 2000).

Yet, although the literature is sparse, it appears that some common trends can be identified. To the degree that research overviews at all take an international perspective, Nordic contributions, at least, tend to view the Nordic or Scandinavian countries together (for instance Carlson 2005). This is reasonable to the extent that the media in Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway share important characteristics: crucial parts of the regulatory regimes have developed more or less in parallel, and the current challenges posed by convergence, globalization and commercialization apply to all. Research traditions and interests in all three countries seem to have been inspired by the same international trends, and thus we find similar observations to ours. When taking stock of Danish media research for example, Bondebjerg (2000) stresses the innovative character of studies that in our vocabulary would belong to phase II: studies that deliver novel sociological insights through a combination of institutional perspectives and analyses of programming. However, differences between the countries should not be ignored: due to the fact that most Danish media scholars' have a background in literary studies, for example, research on broadcasting institutions in Denmark, at least prior to the 2000s, tended to focus on textual analysis, according to Mortensen (2000). It would be interesting to scrutinize these and other historical discrepancies, and their prospective continued relevance, in order to find out to what degree different research foci actually bring out different insights.

Our discussion of three phases of Norwegian research on broadcasting institutions allows us to draw some tentative conclusions about the field's development, characteristics and future challenges. Apart from the immense volume of work that has been produced over the last decades, the most striking feature may be the consistency of the

research. The dramatic changes to the object of study could lead one to expect a similar shift in approaches, perspectives and interests. Concretely, the latest challenges to the organization of television and radio as broadcasting might lead to expectations of a dissolved field. This does not seem to be the case. On the contrary, much attention is still given to first generation historical studies, and most often the focus is still on how the NRK deals with changes in its external conditions. Also, the methodological and theoretical approaches employed from the 1980s continue to prevail. This continuity of course has its positive sides: we have argued that the recurring transitions of the sector necessitate constant new studies of this kind. Stability in terms of perspective may also render diachronic comparisons easier, and improve our understanding of long-term developments. Could we ask for more?

Yes. In a sense, there is an unrealized potential in the field. A potential provided by the high quality first generation research, the increasing interest shown by neighbouring disciplines from the social sciences, and the possible inspiration from other fields brought on by technological convergence. Our assessment has made evident the need for analyses of the new broadcasting actors, as well as further comparative efforts. By building on existing studies and "opening up" to new theoretical and methodological approaches, Norwegian broadcasting institution research can still prove its value for our understanding of the organization of television and radio.

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